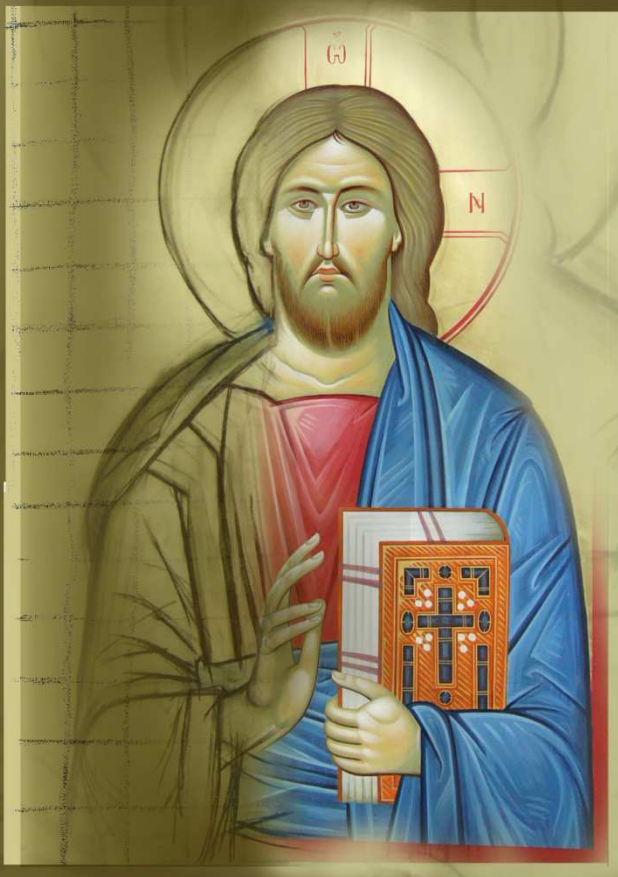


# ARE YOU SAVED?



*The Orthodox Christian  
Process of Salvation*

BARBARA PAPPAS

# ***ARE YOU SAVED?***

## *More praise for Are You Saved? ...*

“*Are You Saved?* is a provoking and stimulating Orthodox perspective on the message of salvation. We encourage its use as an impetus for discussion in Bible studies, retreats, and wherever *two or three are gathered in His Name.*”

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“... a wonderful contribution, not only for Orthodox Christians but for non-Orthodox as well ... relates theologically sound teachings in a way that is not theological sounding ...”

- Rev. George S. Nicozisin, St. Louis, MO



# ***ARE YOU SAVED?***

## **The Orthodox Christian Process of Salvation**

by

**BARBARA PAPPAS**

**Introduction by  
Metropolitan Nikitas [Lulias]**

Cover art and iconography by the hand of  
Fr. Anthony Salzman:

The Nativity; The Four Evangelists;  
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*to  
Dad and Peter  
in loving memory*

*And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those  
who labor among you ... and to esteem them very  
highly in love for their work's sake.*

*1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*

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A work about salvation would not be complete without an acknowledgment of the synergistic role of the Theotokos, Mother of God. She accepted God's will for her life without concern for the heartache it would bring to her days on earth. We marvel at her strength and love.

Metropolitan Iakovos of Chicago, Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver, Rev. William S. Chiganos, Rev. Dr. Stanley S. Harakas and the late Rev. George Nicozisin read the original manuscript of this work and offered valuable suggestions. Carolyn Skoirchet and Nola Vandarakis edited it critically yet lovingly; Ann Lampros was generous with her expertise in formatting and publishing, and Linda Hardy with the tedious technical updating of several new editions.

For this Sixth Edition, Chapter Four, *If Only*, is completely new and significant new material has been added throughout the text, particularly Chapter Three, with regard to the Divine Mysteries. It has also been enhanced with an "Introduction" by Metropolitan Nikitas, which adds meaningfully to its instructive and inspirational value, and with the penetratingly beautiful iconography of Fr. Anthony Salzman and Fr. Luke Dingman, which illustrates the role of this gift to the Church. It reflects, without words, the theology of the text.

As is my wont, I asked people from different walks of life to read this new material. Each graciously complied with encouragement, comments, or questions, all of which helped to polish and clarify that which I hope to convey. For this, my gratitude to Met. Isaiah, Fr. Bill Chiganos, Dr. Perry Hamalis, and my daughters Dheanna, Michele and Laina; for her very gracious, efficient and perpetually cheerful assistance, Presvytera Ruth Uhl; for the very special perspective of the younger generation, my grandsons Justin and Michael; and for being my sounding board and partner in all, my husband, George.

May God continue to shower His blessings on all these, His Servants, as well as on those behind the scenes, who, though integral to the ongoing success of this outreach, choose to remain anonymous.



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## FOREWORD – AYS GLOBAL OUTREACH

The release of the sixth edition of *Are You Saved?* marks the beginning of a new mission for the book. In fact, it marks the beginning of a new evangelistic effort, our “AYS Global Outreach,” which seeks to expand the already-significant impact of the book.

Our new website, [www.orthodoxareyousaved.org](http://www.orthodoxareyousaved.org), features an expanding number of translations of *Are You Saved?* into global languages. At the website, seekers from around the world can download these at no cost. The free translations are made possible in-part by generous donors, but, *most importantly, by you, the purchasers of the English-language editions, whether in soft cover or as an eBook*. All profits from English-language book sales go directly to paying for more translations and enhancing the reach of this new web-based mission effort.

The website also features a wealth of information about the Orthodox process of salvation and the Church itself, including history, basic theology, virtual tours of Orthodox churches around the world, and links to help you find parishes and monasteries near you where you can go to learn more about the ancient and original Way of Salvation.

These tools are prayerfully offered to help everyone come to appreciate the beauty inherent within Eastern Orthodoxy, the second-largest group of Christian congregants in the world.

AYS Global Outreach is a non-profit, all-volunteer venture. Your partnership and your prayers are vital to the success of this new effort! Please join us!

To learn more, visit us at [www.orthodoxareyousaved.org](http://www.orthodoxareyousaved.org). You can also email us at [info@orthodoxareyousaved.org](mailto:info@orthodoxareyousaved.org).

# INTRODUCTION

TO THE SIXTH EDITION

Since my college days, I have come across those people who stop me as I walk and ask me that simple, yet most difficult, question - "Are you saved?" This experience is not limited to me, or to those who walk across university campuses. I dare to say that many have experienced this. People are stopped, asked, and challenged, and many of them cannot respond, as they have never had to think about it. Perhaps this is so because they live carelessly in the world, as the Fathers of the Church describe when they speak of our indifference to Christian life. Some individuals may feel that because of Holy Baptism, they have already earned a place in the Kingdom and that their names have been written in the Book of Life. We tend to forget that the gate of salvation is a narrow one and that the path that leads to the Kingdom requires sacrifice, commitment, and struggle.

While our personal participation in the process of salvation and our confession of Christ as Lord are necessary, we are saved because of the redeeming sacrifice on the Cross by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. His sacrifice was part of God's plan for reuniting His children with Him. But it is not only that sacrifice on the Cross; it is the personal confession of Jesus Christ, as Savior, by each person that is part of the formula of salvation. This is so often taken lightly by many, as a feeling of entitlement because of Holy Baptism may cloud the spiritual mind.

In our Orthodox theology, there is a deeper, richer understanding to this complex matter, unlike the simple theology embraced by some other Christian communities. The path to salvation is anchored in the past, lived in the present, and aspired to in the future. Barbara Pappas wonderfully explains this to the reader, as he/she devours this text. She brings to mind the words of Proverbs: *Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck* (Proverbs 1:8). Barbara instructs us and teaches us in a gentle and beautiful manner.

Too often in our lives, we spend time searching for answers to things that are meaningless and unnecessary. The book, *Are You Saved?*, on the contrary is the opposite. It gives a better understanding and meaning to the critical questions touching upon eternal life. Reading such a text is necessary so we have a proper understanding of salvation. There are those who try to define Christianity in their own way and upon their own terms, so their personal lifestyle and definitions of sin might be accommodated. Mrs. Pappas writes and expresses herself in a very objective manner, so the true measure of things is kept in place. Barbara follows the path of others who are true to our religious tradition, as she draws not only from the verses of Scripture, but also from the lines of the writings of the Fathers of the Church.

I am reminded of the words of a 15<sup>th</sup> century Serbian ruler regarding *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by St. John Climacus: "I, Despot George, the devout ruler of Serbia, feel a deep concern for this book called the Ladder and read it zealously, for it contains profitable and godly discourses." I feel the very same about *Are you Saved?*. This amazing text is filled with worthwhile and godly words and it behooves every Orthodox Christian to drink of the rich and refreshing waters it offers the thirsting soul. David said that his soul was like parched land and that He thirsted. Christians also thirst for the living waters of salvation that flow from the Savior, as He told us in His dialogue with St. Fotini, the Samaritan woman.

Barbara Pappas has beautifully woven the words of Scripture with various patristic texts in an amazing tapestry of theological lines and wisdom. In so doing, she fulfills the directives of the Book of Proverbs: *My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and your heart to understanding ... then shall you understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God* (Proverbs 2: 1-2,5). And as the author of the same Book of Scripture says elsewhere: *My son, do not forsake my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments: for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare will they give you* (Proverbs 3:1). Through her words, we are guided as to how to walk the path to salvation.

While the Fathers of the Church stood tall in their preaching and defense of the Truth, they were also clothed in the garments of humility and love. Barbara also reflects these qualities and characteristics. Barbara never sought glory and honor; rather, she has always done what the Saints have taught us – to lead people to Christ and to find salvation in His name. This way, we are assured and know that we are saved in Christ Jesus.

Metropolitan Nikitas [Lulias]  
Director, Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute  
Berkeley, California

# INTRODUCTION

## TO PREVIOUS EDITIONS

Thankfully, an ever-increasing number of our Orthodox faithful, young and old alike continue to discuss openly a subject that for a long time had been avoided. Questions such as ‘Are you saved?, What is meant by salvation?, What must I do to be saved?’ are asked in Church Schools, Bible study groups and prayer circles. I view this growing interest and unrest as a sign of spiritual growth. “All of creation groans” to know the truth.

Most have associated such talk with Protestantism and the “born-again” Christian. Until relatively recently, most of our faithful avoided such discussions because of a lack of knowledge about the subject of salvation. This topic is not new to our faith. A study of ecclesiastical history and the various battles waged by the Fathers of the early Church reveals that the question of “being saved” was just as relevant in the times of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa and others as it is today.

This study will help everyone who reads it to have a working knowledge of salvation through Jesus Christ and to be able to discuss it with those around them. It is not an attempt to provide easy answers for this all-important topic. Rather, it is a labor of love by a teacher of the faith who has dealt with it personally and who has been called upon by her peers and her students to provide answers and guidelines. This is not the final manual on the subject but a window through which the restless soul may be led to the harbor of truth and understanding concerning salvation.

The author of this work, Barbara Pappas, was motivated to prepare this work because she is concerned for the salvation not only of her own soul but also those of her brethren. Dostoyevsky’s Starets Zossima, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, comes closer to the truth when he says that we are, each of us, “responsible for everyone and everything.” Barbara Pappas has served for many years as a Church School teacher, the Curriculum Director for the Holy Apostles Church School in Westchester, Illinois, a member of the Religious Education Commission of the

Metropolis of Chicago, and teaches adult Bible Study at Holy Apostles. She has worked with teachers, parents and youngsters of all ages. Drawing upon these experiences, she put together the following careful and prayerful study. All who have come in contact with her have benefited from her radiant love for the Church, her unshakable faith in Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah, her deep understanding of the Orthodox faith and her insatiable desire to share God's revealed truths with others. It is a privilege and a distinct pleasure to call her one of the faithful servants in Christ's Church.

We reiterate our gratitude for the unstinting support of this work offered by the late Archbishop Iakovos of North and South America when it was first introduced, as well as to our Beloved Metropolitan Iakovos of Chicago, Metropolitan Isaiah of Denver and other leading churchmen who have also endorsed it from the beginning and continue to stand behind it.

I recommend this book to everyone who thirsts for knowledge and truth. I believe it is a welcome and useful tool for personal study, for Sunday School discussions and for prayer and Bible study groups. Read it in its entirety, then return to the sections that interest you most. It has much to offer for your enrichment and understanding of our timeless and precious Orthodox faith.

Reverend William S. Chiganos  
Chairman, Religious Education Commission  
Greek Orthodox Metropolis of Chicago





*ARE YOU SAVED?*

## *The First Step: Believe*

# ICON OF THE NATIVITY



*We must "Believe" that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, whose birth on earth as man fulfilled all prophecies and promises of the Old Testament. He defeated Satan and provided The Way into God's Eternal Kingdom.*

What shall we bring to You, O Christ, Who for our sakes was born on earth as man? Every creature made by You offers You thanks. The angels offer a hymn; the heavens, a star; the wise men, gifts; the shepherds, amazement; the earth, its cave; and we, the Virgin Mother. O pre-eternal God, have mercy upon us.

From Eve of Nativity Vespers

By three stars, one on the front of her head-covering and one on each shoulder, Orthodox iconography reflects the fact that Mary remained a virgin before, during and after she conceived Christ, in fulfillment of prophecy. He took on flesh to save us from the wiles of the Devil, depicted in the lower left corner of the icon of the Nativity in the guise of a shepherd trying to put doubts in Joseph's mind as to who the Child's father might be. The blackness of the cave in which Christ was born symbolizes the evil of the world into which He came and to which He brought the light of truth.

Come, let us greatly rejoice in the Lord as we sing of this present mystery. The wall which divided God from man has been destroyed. The flaming sword withdraws from Eden's gate; the cherubim withdraw from the Tree of Life, and I, who had been cast out through my disobedience, now feast on the delights of paradise: For today the Father's perfect Image, marked with the stamp of His eternity, has taken the form of a servant. Without undergoing change, He is born from an unwedded mother; He was true God, and He remains the same, but through His love for mankind, He has become what He never was: true man! Come, O faithful, let us cry to Him: O God, born of a virgin, have mercy on us!

From Eve of Nativity Vespers,  
*The Services of Christmas,*  
*Orthodox Church in America*

“If the desire of the Heavenly Kingdom burns in your soul like a lighted torch, be sure your soul will quickly become its heir,’ Abba Iperechus tells us.

Archimandrite Chrysostomos,  
*The Ancient Fathers of the Desert*

## Chapter One

# GOD'S DIVINE PLAN

### ARE YOU SAVED?

What is the Orthodox response to this most important question? The Bible provides the basis for the answer we seek but scripture can be misinterpreted. The historic Church addressed this problem by preserving, for all generations, the eternal truths received from Christ and the Apostles. The vehicles used for this sacred task are the writings of early Church Fathers, decisions of Councils (which refuted heresies), Liturgics, Hymnology, and Iconography. As in any quest for theological truth, our guide is the consensus found in these treasures.

The Old Testament records that in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and everything visible and invisible. Then He looked around at what He had done and *saw that it was good* (Gen 1:25). Out of the great love that He embodies, for God is love, He wanted to share what He had created. But He did not want to surround Himself with robots—creatures who could respond to Him only as programmed. Because only beings like Himself could fully appreciate the wonders of that which He had to give, He created man and woman *in His image*, which includes free will. He gave them dominion over the earth and every living thing.<sup>1</sup> All He asked in return was their love—a phenomenon made possible by free will—the only thing that was truly theirs to give.

The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man [and the woman] He had formed (Gen 2:8, 22). It was perfect. God walked with them. He talked with them.<sup>2</sup> They were surrounded by wonder, beauty, and every good thing to eat and the potential to grow in the likeness of and into full fellowship with their Creator gave meaningful purpose to their lives.<sup>3</sup> Along the way they had the blessing of satisfying work to do—tending of the garden—unhampered by the toil and tedium

that can make life and work frustrating. There was no disease for man, animal or plant; no old age and death to contemplate; nothing to mar the serenity of their lives. To complete the perfect growing conditions for all living things, God provided a continual mist that came up from the earth and all was in perfect harmony.

Surely Adam and Eve must have professed great love for their gracious benefactor, but words are not enough. True love requires choice. So God gave Adam and Eve freedom to do as they pleased—with one exception. As a way to demonstrate their love and to strengthen them through self-discipline, He told them not to eat of *the tree of knowledge of good and evil* (Gen 2:17). Then He *allowed* Satan to tempt them.

The results were disastrous. Adam and Eve failed to keep the one commandment they had been given, succumbing instead to the same form of greed and pride that had caused Satan's fall from Heaven.<sup>4</sup> In the hearts that should have been filled with love and gratitude for all God had made possible for them, there grew instead an overwhelming desire to be as He was, without limitation. Rejecting the constant struggle that obedience and gradual growth in God's image would entail, they opted rather to try to take His place through disobedience—to unseat Him from His throne—which is impossible.

The Tree of Knowledge was not forbidden because God grudged it to man...It would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the Tree was, according to my theory, contemplation, which is safe only for those who have reached maturity, not for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy; just as neither is solid food good for those who are yet tender and have need of milk.

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS<sup>5</sup>

The consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve was eviction from Eden, which would lead, ultimately, to death, as they had been warned. Death is tragic but now became necessary, and—at its core—is actually another manifestation of God's love. To choose to disobey Him is to corrupt the divine image in which we were created (Gk.: *hamartáno*, to sin; literally 'to miss the

mark'). If Adam and Eve had been allowed access to the Tree of Life in their fallen state, they would live forever, with corruption multiplying all the while; Eden would no longer be Paradise. So God clothed them in *tunics of skin* (Gen 3:21), the mortality that would put limits on the havoc their disobedience had initiated.<sup>6</sup> Then He sent them out of the Garden and placed Cherubim and a flaming sword at the gate, so they could not get back in.

The tree of life that was planted by God in paradise prefigured [Christ's] honorable cross, for since death came by a tree, it was necessary for life and the Resurrection to be bestowed by a tree.

JOHN OF DAMASCUS<sup>7</sup>

From then on, the first man and woman had to fend for themselves. No longer in the protected environment of Eden, they would have to toil for their food and battle the thorns and thistles of life: potential problems with the weather, the animals (who, in the Garden, had been their friends), one another, and everything else the Devil could put in their paths (Gen 3:17-19). They would struggle with aging, illness, injury, and unleashed evil. In this setting, death, looming on the horizon, would cast a shadow on the joys of life but would also set boundaries to the effects of the fallen world. Personal suffering and the opportunity to cause others to suffer would be contained by the fragility of life and the limits of time. Since we are descendants of Adam and Eve, we are inheritors of the worldly conditions brought about by their "original sin" and eviction from paradise.<sup>8</sup>

For the most part, God does not deliberately choose people to whom to "give" specific challenges, problems, illnesses, handicaps, losses, negative experiences and the like in their lives on earth; that would violate their free will. He does, sometimes, set aside certain people for particular roles, as He selected the maiden Mary to give birth to Christ, but only with her consent (Lk 1:38). Likewise, most of the adversities of life are not personal attacks by Satan but rather the inevitable effects of life outside of Eden, where he has reign (Jn 12:31; Eph 2:2-3).

As hard as it may be to understand and accept, God allows (does not cause) suffering in our lives because He cherishes



each of us. Adversity brings into focus the purpose for life and the elements of it that are of most importance. Like purifying fire, tribulations can awaken some who would otherwise be indifferent to the need for God; they can induce others to examine the condition of their souls and correct the errors of their ways before it is too late.

To those who turn to God in good times and in bad, His divine eternal plan of salvation through Jesus Christ offers the antidote to life's struggles: direction, comfort, consolation, strength to endure, understanding of purpose, blessedness, and deep inner joy, no matter what is happening around them. The resultant witness of faith under fire has always turned people to God, as the lives of the Saints illustrate.

For those who, however, blame God and turn away from Him when things go wrong, Satan has had his way. The vicissitudes of life can make us bitter or better—the choice is ours.

The joy of life is that it offers the opportunity to return to the blessed state Adam and Eve lost for all of us. Salvation is the return to assurance of eternal life with God in the idyllic state that surrounds Him. Our earthly life is a precious gift in that it is our one and only chance to avail ourselves of this deliverance. God's promise to us, however, is not the original Garden but Heaven itself where, in His very presence,<sup>9</sup> there will be no more temptation and no more capacity for or possibility of sin. The time of testing and separating of those who love God from those who do not will have ended. To waste this opportunity for salvation is to consign ourselves to the agony of profound regret.<sup>10</sup> But regret that comes after death is too late. It becomes the worm that does not die, the unquenchable fire that burns eternally within (Mk 9:43-48).

## **GOD'S PROMISES**

Before God evicted Adam and Eve from Eden, He offered them the comfort of the first prophecy,<sup>11</sup> revealing His Fatherly, ever-abiding love for and confidence in man, despite man's sinfulness. God promised to send His Son, Jesus Christ (the Seed of the Woman, the Theotokos and ever virgin Mary, through the Holy Spirit), Who would redeem man from the effects of that

which, with Satan's prodding, he had done to himself. Christ would battle the Devil, the originator of sin and father of lies.<sup>12</sup> Satan would be a constant annoyance to Christ, but in spite of all his efforts, would succeed only in bruising Christ's heel (with Crucifixion). In the end, Christ would be victorious with a fatal blow to Satan's head (through His Resurrection). This promised divine Redeemer would come *in the fullness of time* (Gal 4:4), after God had given man a chance to recognize his need for a Savior.

To convince man of this great need, God set in motion His Divine Plan. It contained three major elements,<sup>13</sup> each of which brought those who were willing further along the road to salvation. First He established the ORAL COVENANT, through Abraham, under which Abraham's people would be God's people, if they would obey Him.<sup>14</sup> The sign of this covenant was circumcision; its purpose was to demonstrate the necessity for God's people to be different—set apart from the rest of the world—and to establish a nation (Israel) and a family from that nation (the family of David) through which salvation (Jesus Christ) would come. However, instead of obeying God, most of Abraham's people turned away from Him; instead of bringing the pagans to God, they joined the pagans.

The history of the Old Testament is that of elections linked to successive falls. Through these, God saves a "remnant" whose patient waiting purifies ... until the supreme purity of the Virgin is capable of giving birth to the Savior of humanity.<sup>15</sup>

In time, when man was ready, God took the next step, establishing the WRITTEN COVENANT, the "Law," through Moses. The purpose of this "Mosaic" Law was to define sin by outlining perfection, that which was required to return to the presence of God. This experience would show man that he could never earn salvation on his own.<sup>16</sup> Adam and Eve had one commandment to keep; now there were ten.<sup>17</sup> In addition, there were 613 laws,<sup>18</sup> each of which had to be kept precisely— to break one was to break them all.<sup>19</sup> Each transgression had to be followed by a related offering or sacrifice to establish the fact that sin (defined under this covenant as the breaking of the Law) required atonement.

Man was caught in a never-ending cycle: he would inevitably break a law, bring the required offering, and go out and break another. This futile repetition continued until—finally—Jesus Christ offered Himself as the last living sacrifice on behalf of all mankind.<sup>20</sup>

God told the Israelites to build an ark to house the tablets upon which He had written the Ten Commandments and a Tabernacle (later replaced by the Temple) to house the ark. The ark was to be kept in the sacred area called the Most Holy Place, where God was present among His people.<sup>21</sup> Only the High Priest could enter this Holy of Holies, and then only once a year, on the Day of Atonement, to offer sacrificial blood, which prefigured the redemptive Blood that Christ would offer, and to beg forgiveness for the sins of the people.<sup>22</sup> The Most Holy Place was separated by a veil from the area called the Holy Place,<sup>23</sup> where Old Testament priests offered the sacrifices of the people to God daily in accordance with the Law. The veil between the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place symbolized the fact that because of disobedience man had created a barrier between himself and God.<sup>24</sup>

God allowed His people to feel the hopelessness of trying to save themselves through the Law, but He never allowed them to fall into despair. Throughout Old Testament times, He continually gave them signs and prophecies about the coming of the Messiah, Who would deliver them from their terrible predicament.

**MAN'S NEED FOR A SAVIOR.** Scripture records that Enoch and Elijah were taken directly into Heaven because they pleased God.<sup>25</sup> St. John Chrysostom relates that Elijah was perfect, not in the complete sense that Christ was but in relation to his time in history.<sup>26</sup> Though we are all called to be perfect,<sup>27</sup> the rest of us probably fall far short of that mark.

We therefore need a Savior, a Mediator to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. When man had been given sufficient time to understand this fact, God kept the promise of Genesis. He sent His Son, Who, in His two natures, truly God and truly man, bridged the gap between Heaven and earth<sup>28</sup> and became the ladder of Jacob's dream, the instrument by which we can climb to Heaven.<sup>29</sup>

Our Lord lived a perfect life, satisfying the condition of obedience God expects from those who want to dwell with Him eternally. He thus fulfilled the Law and legalistically earned salvation. Throughout Christ's ministry, His enemies tried to have Him killed,<sup>30</sup> but He thwarted their efforts until the time was right.<sup>31</sup> Satan salivated at the prospect of the death of the Son of God, but it is clear that Christ was in control. At the time set by God, Christ surrendered His life willingly, for that is what He had come to do.<sup>32</sup> But by engineering Christ's death, Satan overstepped his bounds and fell into a divine trap.

On the hook of His divinity, the humanity of Christ is the bait; the Devil throws himself on the prey, but the hook pierces him—he cannot swallow God...  
GREGORY OF NYSSA<sup>33</sup>

Christ passed through death, but it could not hold Him because He was sinless! Thus through God's overriding power, He resurrected—foiling Satan and overcoming death in the process.

As long as sin sentenced only the guilty to death, no interference with it was possible, seeing that it had justice on its side. But when it subjected to the same punishment Him Who was innocent, guiltless, and worthy of crowns of honor and hymns of praise ... it was stripped of its power.

CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA<sup>34</sup>

The death of Christ was not a price God set for man's redemption but rather the consequence of sin inherited by all who lived after Adam and Eve. In taking on human form, Christ also knowingly took on man's legacy of suffering and death. The deaths of those who lived before Christ, however, were justified because all had sinned. There was no justification for Christ's death, but as the perfect sacrificial Lamb,<sup>35</sup> He willingly assumed the burden of the sins of man. As His life ebbed on the Cross, the sky darkened and the earth quaked. The downward spiral of creation had been reversed. The veil in the Temple tore in two because Christ's redeeming death removed the barrier of sin be-

tween God and man, giving man, once again, access to God.<sup>36</sup>

To whom was the Blood offered which was shed for us, and for what purpose was it shed, this great and precious Blood of our God Who was both Priest and Victim? For we were held in bondage by the Wicked One, sold under the dominion of sin, receiving instead the pleasure of wickedness. But if the price of redemption is paid to the one who holds the bond, to whom, I ask, was it offered, and why? If to the Wicked One: then alas for the loss of it! If the thief receives, not alone from God, but also God Himself as ransom, it would have been more equitable to have saved the payment of so great a price in exchange for his tyranny. If it was paid to the Father first, how was this done? For we were not held in bondage by Him. And again, why should the Blood of His only-Begotten Son be acceptable to the Father, Who would not accept Isaac when he was offered by his father but instead changed the sacrifice, substituting a ram in the place of the rational victim? (Gen 22:13).

Is it not plain that the Father accepted It, but that He neither demanded It, nor had need of It; but because of the Plan of Redemption. ...

GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS<sup>37</sup>

Christ had brought others, like Lazarus, back to life, but only temporarily—they faced death again. Our Lord became the first fruits of the dead<sup>38</sup> because He would die no more. After walking the earth for forty days so His Apostles and disciples could see Him, know that He was indeed alive again, and be assured that there is life after death, He ascended to His Throne at the right hand of His Father, where He waits for those who love Him.

The third and final BLOOD COVENANT with God was thus established as the fulfillment of the Oral and Written Covenants before it. In keeping with its provisions, all who believe that

Jesus Christ is the Son of God and accept and confess that He is their Lord and Savior, the promised Messiah Who provided the way to the eternal Kingdom, will receive the gift of salvation. They are the new Israel, the adopted seed of Abraham through Christ (Gal 3:29), redeemed once and for all from the effects of sin,<sup>39</sup>not by their own efforts but by virtue of being a part of Christ through Baptism, Eucharist, and a life of faith. This attachment helps them to be more and more receptive to God's love, transforming them and enabling them to enjoy His promises (share Christ's inheritance).<sup>40</sup>

**BELIEF MUST BE PROVED.** It is very easy to say, "I believe." It is much harder to live accordingly—yet that is the true test. Even *demons believe* (Jas 2:19); they know that God exists and has a plan for His creation—which they rejected from the beginning. Thus Christ said, *Not everyone who says to me "Lord, Lord," shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of my Father* (Mt 7:21). Scripture is very clear in making the point that we cannot just profess faith and thereafter feel confident of salvation. Faith must be proved by a life lived according to the word of God because *faith without works is dead* (Jas 2:20). Those who object that God knows whether or not we have faith so there is no need to "prove" it should consider Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Every day and every hour, proof is demanded of us of our love of God. For God, every day and very hour, proves His love for us. ISAAC THE SYRIAN <sup>41</sup>

Certainly God knows the intentions of our hearts. The requirement that we demonstrate faith in Him during our lives is for our benefit—not His. It is a blessing, not a burden. It helps us guard against complacency. It stirs us to action and prods us toward holiness, that we might rise above corrupted human nature and become *partakers of the divine nature* through the acquisition of virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, kindness and love in addition to our faith. Scripture promises that *if we participate in this struggle for spiritual growth to the extent we are able, we will be allowed to enter into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ* (2Pe 1:2-11, Act 14:22).

*Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.* Acts 13:38-39

A young Abbot was counseled thus, in our own day, by a Holy man: ‘Today many people, wishing for an excuse not to do what God asks of them, find fault with the teaching of the Holy Church and reject correct Christian belief. Instead, they choose to believe what they wish. This is akin to a man not wishing to believe that he will die, simply because the notion does not comfort him. Not only will he fail to prepare for death, as one ought to do, but he will inevitably find himself in the snare of death. Correct belief is not based on what we wish were true, but on Truth itself.’<sup>42</sup>

**PSALM 129 (130)**

**WAITING FOR THE REDEMPTION OF THE LORD**

*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord;*

*<sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive*

*To the voice of my supplications.*

*<sup>3</sup> If you, Lord, should mark iniquities,  
who could stand?*

*<sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with You,*

*That You may be feared.*

*<sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,*

*And in His word I do hope.*

*<sup>6</sup> My soul waits for the Lord*

*More than those who watch for the morning-*

*Yes, more than those who watch for the morning.*

*<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord;*

*For with the Lord there is mercy,*

*And with Him there is abundant redemption.*

*<sup>8</sup> And He shall redeem Israel*

*From all his iniquities.*



## LEO THE GREAT

### ON CHRIST AS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW, KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH CONTINUES TO BE OF VALUE FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM

As, therefore, there is no one among the faithful to whom the gifts of grace are denied, so neither is there any among them not subject to the Christian rule of life. For though the harshness of the symbolic Law has been taken away, yet the gain from free obedience of the Law has increased, as John the Evangelist says, *For the Law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ* (Jn 1:17). For everything that belonged to the Law, whether to circumcision, or to the different offerings, or to the observance of the Sabbath, all gave testimony to Christ, and foretold the grace of Christ.

And He is *the end of the Law* (Rom 10:4), not in that He brings it to nothing, but in that He fulfills it. And though He is the Author of both the New and the Old, He brought the mystical significance of the Figures and the Promises to an end, in that He fulfilled the promises and caused the prophecies to cease, since He who had been foretold had now come. But in the moral order there was no change in the precepts of the Old Law; rather many of them were enlarged through the Gospel teaching, that they might be clearer and more perfect teaching us salvation than they were when promising us a Savior.<sup>43</sup>

## *The Second Step: Prove Belief*

# ICON OF THE FOUR EVANGELISTS



*We must “Prove Belief” in Christ as our Savior by trying to become like Him, with the guidance of the accounts of His Life written in the Gospels.*

O Merciful Master, cause the pure light of the knowledge of You to shine in our hearts, and open the eyes of our minds to perceive Your message of good tidings; fill us with the fear of Your Blessed Commandments, that we, trampling down our fleshly desires, may seek a Heavenly citizenship and may do and consider all those things that are well pleasing to You.

For You, Christ our God, are the Source of Light to our souls and bodies, and to You we ascribe glory, with the Eternal Father, and the All Holy, Good and Life Giving Spirit, now and forever and from all ages to all ages. Amen.

Prayer before the Reading of the Gospel,  
*Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

*2Ti 4:3-5*

## Chapter Two

# THE SECRET OF SALVATION

Perhaps each of you will say to himself: 'I have believed, I shall be saved.' He speaks what is true if to faith he joins good works. That is indeed true faith which does not deny in work what it professes in word. For this Paul says of certain false faithful: *They profess that they know God; but in their works they deny Him* (Tit 1:16). For this John also says: *He who says that he knows God and keeps not His Commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1Jn 2:4).

GREGORY THE GREAT

*M.F. Toal, Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*

### SANCTIFICATION BY FAITH AND GRACE

Orthodox theology puts less emphasis on the negative aspect of being saved “from” Satan than on the positive aspect of being saved “for” sanctification: personal growth toward the image of God, following Christ’s example (Gk.: *theosis*). This is a process that is made possible by grace and is fueled by faith. It begins in this life and continues through and beyond our last breath on earth. We are saved by grace, through faith.

Jesus, the Sun of Justice, has arisen. The rays of this spiritual Sun spread out in all directions; and one indeed receives less grace, and another more; not that grace so gives itself, it is our own disposition that supplies the measure. For as the sun is one which gives light to the whole universe, and its ray is one, and its splendor, yet it does not shine with equal light upon all the world. Here is wondrous and abundant sunshine, here there is less. This house has little sunlight, this has it more abundantly; not because the sun gives more to this house and less to that, but according to the win-

dows which were opened to it by those who build the houses it has more room to enter, and pours in accordingly. And since our thoughts and purposes are the windows of our soul, when you open wide your heart you receive a larger, more generous, divine favor; when you narrow your soul, you can but receive a less abundant grace. Open wide and lay bare your heart and soul to God, that His splendor may enter into you.      CHRYSOSTOM<sup>1</sup>

The process of salvation is synergistic. It is a cooperative effort between man and God, “which is simultaneously past, present and future.”<sup>2</sup> As Orthodox Christians we say:

**I WAS SAVED ...** when Jesus Christ died on the Cross to redeem me from my sins (Heb 10:10). He made my salvation possible. Before He did this, the only path to Heaven was through perfection through the Law,<sup>3</sup> an impossible feat.

That our Lord “paid” the penalty of death for our sins is not to be taken in the literal sense as a price exacted by and given in remuneration to someone but as the Savior accepting the painful consequences of the wrongful actions of others. When He took on flesh, the Son of God subjected Himself to death, which came to man as a result of sin. But Christ was sinless, so death could not hold Him. Likewise, under the terms of the Blood Covenant, death cannot hold anyone who is united with Christ through Baptism and Eucharist as part of a life of faith.

**I AM SAVED ...** in that I know the secret Christ shared with us (Mt 13:35; Eph 3:8-12): that the way to the Kingdom is through Him, the Son of God, Savior of all who turn to Him.<sup>4</sup> However, if, for example I were studying the subject of math, I would not be allowed to just inform the teacher that I know the principles of that science and proceed to take a passing grade! I would be given a test. In like manner, professed faith is not true faith unless it has been tested in the context of life. So, in the fullness of the truth, we go on to say ...

**I AM BEING SAVED ...** (present continuous: Heb 10:14) because I must demonstrate faith in Christ as the Messiah (2Th 2:13-15) in the way established by God: by trying to become as much like Him as I can, through obedience. Our Lord's perfect life set the example to follow.<sup>5</sup> This is a process. As St. Paul wrote, we must all press on toward the mark of perfection.<sup>6</sup> "We are always becoming what we already are potentially through faith and Baptism"<sup>7</sup>—a part of the Body of Christ. This ability is inherent in us as a hint from God, evident in the tendency of children to take on the characteristics of their heroes. This inner drive should be harnessed and directed toward a zealous effort to take on the qualities of our Savior, to show our love for and faith in Him and to prepare for life in His Kingdom, where all is holy.<sup>8</sup> The elements of the type of life this produces are the "good works" of the new covenant, which are very different from the legalistic works of the Mosaic Law. They can never earn us a place in Heaven but are, nevertheless, imperative as indicators of faith and components of spiritual growth. They are also the means by which God wants His work to be done, with His people as His hands and feet, eyes and heart.<sup>9</sup> Works done other than as a result of faith have no spiritual value<sup>10</sup> because they produce only temporal benefits. Works done in the name of Jesus Christ and as fruit of faith in Him produce benefits far beyond the obvious. The doer is blessed with grace, which strengthens him according to his efforts and helps him continue the works that prove his faith. The recipient of the benefits of the good works done in Christ's name receives, most importantly, a taste of the love that awaits him in the Kingdom, if he too believes. The "good" comes from pointing the Way to the Kingdom.

**I WILL BE SAVED ...** with God's grace — when my life, my chance to make a choice and to live that choice is over, or at the Second Coming of Christ, whichever occurs first (Rom 10:9). The instances of Enoch and Elijah being taken directly into Heaven are prefigurations of those who will still be alive when Christ returns, so will not have to pass through death.<sup>11</sup> In either case, I must face Judgment<sup>12</sup> because only God (through His Son on the Throne of His Glory) knows whether, through the ups and downs of life, I remained a part of the Body of Christ through faith and

love. My life will be evaluated not by successes or failures but by whether or not I truly tried, as a consequence of faith, to live a Christ-like life. Adam and Eve were expected to obey the one commandment God gave them. We are expected to try to follow Christ's example in all things, as our acknowledgment of Him as Savior, Lord and Master, and when we fall short, to pick ourselves up and continue the ascent. Revelation 20:12-13 clearly indicates that our faith is judged by our works.

*Only one life—too soon will pass; only what's done for God will last!*

What role does God's "grace" play in our salvation?<sup>13</sup> Grace is the "energies" of God available to man to sanctify him for the Kingdom. We can never partake of God's essence, but through His energies we are divinized to the extent we cooperate. Positive action or attempt at action confirming faith is met concurrently by the Holy Spirit, Who grants grace according to our efforts.<sup>14</sup> Without grace, growth in Christ's image would not be possible.

The grace of God is not able to visit those who flee salvation. Nor is human virtue of such power as to be adequate of itself to raise up to authentic life those souls who are untouched by grace. ... But when righteousness of works and the grace of the Spirit come together at the same time in the same soul, together they are able to fill it with blessed life.

GREGORY OF NYSSA<sup>15</sup>

At the time of Judgment, grace will also compensate for the shortcomings of those whose lives, on balance, showed faith. God calls us to be perfect in imitation of our Lord to prove our faith and grow in His image (holiness). He requires, however, only that we continually strive to do the best we can—His grace mercifully fills the gap.<sup>16</sup> So we continually pray: *Kyrie Eleison*, Lord have mercy.

Christ's role in our salvation is objective. He did that which was necessary to make our union with God possible again. Our role is subjective. The inner man Paul wrote about<sup>17</sup> recognizes Christ as Messiah and exhibits faith on a mystical level through

prayer, Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, and the other Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church. The outer man exhibits this faith on a moral level by showing love to others in a right relationship with God, following Christ's example.

Our salvation will become objective, "actualized," when we die. Our souls will immediately be judged and we will then receive, apart from our bodies, a foretaste of that for which we have prepared, much as we experience events in the dream state of sleep. If faith in Christ has manifested itself in the pursuit of fellowship with Him through obedience, we will experience the joys of His presence. Then, at the Second Coming of Christ, we will be resurrected, with new bodies, and will enter the fullness of the Kingdom.

If pressed for an encapsulated answer to the question, "Are You Saved?" the most appropriate, concise response would be: "by the grace of God, I AM BEING SAVED" (growing in sanctification by trying to live in obedience to Christ to prove my faith and love, which also prepares me for life in Heaven).<sup>18</sup> But we must strive to have a complete understanding of the all-encompassing stages of the process of salvation and be ready and eager to share this life-giving knowledge with others. To do so is the epitome of the type of love that Jesus practiced and taught.<sup>19</sup>

## THE DANGER INHERENT IN "INSTANT SALVATION" THEORY

There are those who profess the so-called "instant salvation" theory, which is contrary to the witness of the early Church, thus to Orthodox theology. They cite Romans 10:9 as their biblical reference: *If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.* That the only route to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ as Savior is not a matter of contention. Orthodoxy parts company, however, with those who believe that this is an instantaneous event: that one need only orally proclaim Jesus as Lord, with the resultant right to say, "I Am Saved!" Those who make this proclamation usually display a type of zeal that is both admirable and threatening. Admirable in that child-like faith is exhibited, with the strength of conviction Peter displayed when he professed that Jesus is the Son of the Living God (which prompted our Lord



to promise to build His Church on such rock-like faith).<sup>20</sup> Threatening in that those who are exposed to it can either be drawn to the simplicity of it or offended by the aggression relative to it: they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2).

The simplicity implied may cause some to overlook the requirement to engage continually in the process of sanctification, as this theory bolsters the convictions of those who want to consider themselves Christians but don't want to have to try to live as Christ taught. They can then feel free to follow the ways of the world while fully expecting to go to Heaven when they die, confident that because Christ died for sinners there is no necessity for them to "do" anything other than that which pleases them. On the other hand, the aggressiveness of one who proclaims instant salvation, who often is very insistent that everyone must believe as he or she does, may cause others to become defensive and close their minds to the subject entirely. In either event, Satan will have accomplished his goal, which is to delay or prevent spiritual growth. The unqualified statement "I am saved!" is also reminiscent of the attitude of the Pharisee, whose voice resounded in praise of himself and whose arrogance and lack of humility Christ condemned. The repentant attitude of the tax collector who beat his breast and murmured, *God be merciful to me, a sinner*, drew the approval of Jesus, who said, ... *everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted* (Lk 18:9-14).

Scripture can only be correctly understood in its entirety, not from fragments out of context. To insist on a literal interpretation of an isolated sentence here and there is to adhere to the *letter* but ignore its *spirit*,<sup>21</sup> which is what caused most of the Hebrew nation to reject Christ as their Messiah. To fully understand Romans 10:9, we must remember that St. Paul was addressing the Jews of Rome to try to help them understand that they were no longer dependent upon the Mosaic Law for salvation. The Law had been superseded by the Blood Covenant, whereby faith in Jesus Christ as Savior is the only criterion (Jer 31:31-4). However, Paul also plainly stated in Romans 3:31 that the Law was not abolished by Christ's coming but fulfilled by it, as Matthew 5:17 makes clear in Jesus' own words.

**WE MUST GROW IN CHRIST'S IMAGE.** The message of the Book of Romans, if taken in its entirety, is that if we truly believe that Christ is our Savior, we will learn that it is only by trying to live in imitation of Him that we demonstrate faith, and so *will be* saved (future tense). Imitating Christ includes loving one another as He loved us, the summation of the Ten Commandments and the Law.<sup>22</sup> It means giving of ourselves for others as He gave Himself for us. This requires physical and spiritual struggle, so St. Paul also urges us to *endure hardship* like good soldiers and *compete according to the rules like athletes* (2Ti 2:3-5); *to put on the whole armor of God, that [we] may be able to stand against the wiles of the Devil* (Eph 6:11); *and to work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling* (Php 2:12). He makes the point that if we love Christ, *our salvation is nearer than when we first believed* (Rom 13:11), meaning that as we live “in Christ” (united with Him through Baptism, Eucharist, and a life of faith), we come closer and closer to fully-realized salvation, which is assured only when our life on earth is over and we have completed the test of faith. As long as we have life we can still stray from the road to God, but *He who endures to the end shall be saved* (Mk 13:13), receiving the *crown of life* from Christ Himself (Rev 2:10).

The instant salvation concept is formally known as “justification by faith alone.”<sup>23</sup> Orthodox theology affirms that the believer is justified, declared guilt-free, by the intercessory saving acts of Christ but points ever beyond *justification* to *sanctification* by faith—through grace<sup>24</sup>—and rejects the word “alone,” which carries with it the premise that no qualifying works or actions are required as demonstration or proof of faith. Martin Luther was a former Roman Catholic priest who stressed justification by faith alone because of his grave concern about the legalistic overemphasis on works that had crept into the theology of the Roman Church (culminating in the sixteenth century with the selling of indulgences, which conveyed the impression that one could buy salvation). Luther’s concerns were justified and his intentions good, but his theology (which marked the beginning of the Protestant Reformation) constituted a break in the crucial connection between professed faith and the essential elements of a Christ-like life (Jas 2:14-26).

“Justification by faith alone” usually encompasses either of two viewpoints: (1) after the proclamation of faith, good works will naturally follow, but are *not* necessary for salvation; or (2) after the proclamation of faith (considered a gift from God), the Holy Spirit will effect a change in one’s life and *cause* him to grow in Christ’s image.<sup>25</sup> The former is very ambiguous, lacking the sense of urgency that the early Church taught. Unfortunately, we usually do not automatically do that which we should, unless we are convinced of its necessity. The latter puts the entire burden on God and none on us, and does not take free will into account.

In contrast, the Old and New Testaments, from the examples of Adam and Eve to the blind man whose sight was not restored until he obeyed our Lord’s command to *go and wash in the pool of Siloam* (Jn 9:7, 11), demonstrate the fact that God’s plan for our salvation through faith in Jesus Christ as Messiah is in effect but requires that our faith be put into action and is subject to His judgment. The Book of Hebrews gives many examples of faith exhibited by people of God, citing instances when they *subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions ... and obtained a good testimony through faith ...* (Heb 11:32-39). They did not just say they believed, they proved it by the way they lived (their works).

## THE WAY TO PROVE BELIEF

The most important part of our work for God, and the way to demonstrate faith in and love for Christ, is to both *physically and spiritually* feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, minister to the sick and visit the imprisoned.<sup>26</sup> Jesus Himself taught that whenever we help those in need, we are ministering to Him. This does not mean sporadic token activity. Doing God’s work must become a way of life—*the Life in Christ*—and must touch all aspects of our daily activity. In our minds must always be the question, “In this situation, what would Jesus do?” Then we must *try* to act accordingly.

If a Christian, Abba Agathon said, kept the judgment which follows death in mind every moment, he would not sin with such ease.<sup>27</sup>

Jesus said that if we are not *for* Him, we are *against* Him,<sup>28</sup> meaning that the Kingdom must be actively pursued. Indifference is the same as rejection. Revelation 3:16 warns that God will spit the lukewarm out of His mouth because they do not even care enough to take a stand. God gives us life to make our choice and to demonstrate that choice in all our actions and decisions.

The fifth chapter of Romans describes the free gift that can be ours through faith in Jesus Christ, but the sixth chapter depicts *the newness of life* in which we must then walk, toward holiness and eternity with God (6:22). It tells us that we should *become slaves of God*. To say that we must prove our commitment to Christ is not to deny the fact that salvation is a gift from God. No amount of money can buy salvation, and we could never “do” enough to earn it. Clearly, then, if we can neither buy nor earn it, to those who receive it, salvation is a gift. Under the terms of God’s Blood Covenant, this awesome gift is given to those whose lives show faith in Christ, undeserving though they are, for we would have to be absolutely without sin, as Jesus was, to deserve salvation.

The works that are the facets of a Christ-like life not only prove belief but also effect and indicate spiritual growth, which is impossible without works. The spiritual life is just that: life that is operating on the spiritual level—through prayer, meditation on God’s truths, teaching His word, doing His work, giving of our time, talent and treasure, whoever and wherever we are. Those who take part in this life of faith continually grow in the image of God and develop an enriching, exciting relationship with Him that will increase in intensity throughout eternity. That relationship will be reflected in a name He will write on a white stone that He will give to each of His beloved as they enter the fullness of His Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> In that blessed place there will be, however, no envy or competition because the special qualities of each relationship will be private—shared only with God.<sup>30</sup>

## **GREGORY THE GREAT**

### **THE EVENT THAT OPENED THE GATES OF PARADISE**

However justly the Fathers lived before the Coming of the Lord, they were not brought into the Kingdom until Christ opened the gates of Paradise by the intervention of His death. They murmured because they had lived justly in order that they might enter the Kingdom, yet they suffered long delay before they entered it. They had labored in the Vineyard, yet the abodes of hell, however peaceful, had received them after their just lives. ... Not until after the long ages of hell did they reach, at last, the joys of the Kingdom. We, however, who have come at the eleventh hour murmur not after our labor. ... Because we came into this world after the Coming of the Mediator, we are brought into the Kingdom almost as soon as we depart from our body; and we receive without any delay that which the ancient Fathers merited to receive after prolonged delay.<sup>31</sup>

## **JOHN CHRYSOSTOM**

### **ON JUDGMENT**

Taking all these things into account and believing them in our heart: that after this present life we are to stand before a fearful tribunal, that we shall render an account of all we have done, that we shall receive sentence and suffer punishment if we remain in our sins, or that, on the other hand, we shall receive a crown and countless other good things if for this brief present time we have a care for our own souls, let us put to silence those who dare to say, to proclaim, what is contrary to this belief. Let us walk the paths of virtue, so that drawing near with a confident heart to that tribunal we may receive of the good things He has promised us, by the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be honor and glory now and forever. Amen.<sup>32</sup>

## *The Third Step: Face Judgment*

# ICON OF CHRIST, *PANTOCRATOR*



*Christ, Pantocrator, Ruler of All, Who will judge the living and the dead by the truth found in His Gospels (Rom 2:16).  
We must all "Face Judgment."*

When he was about to die, the Holy Agathon remained in his bed motionless for three days, his eyes open and upturned towards Heaven. On the third day, when he recovered some, his disciples, who had gathered around him, asked him to tell them where his soul was during that interval of time.

“Before the Judgment of God,” he murmured, trembling. “And are you afraid, Father?” the brothers asked with perplexity.

“I tried, as best I could, to keep the laws of God all of my life. But I am a man. How do I know that I have pleased God?” the holy one responded with great pain. “You are not sure that your works were pleasing to God?” said the astonished monks.

“Until I am before God, no,” answered the holy one, “for man judges with one standard and God with another.” The brothers wanted to ask other things for the benefit of their souls, but the holy one nodded to them not to speak any further.

“I am preoccupied,” his lips whispered.

His countenance began to shine! His disciples saw him leave this vain world for eternal life with the joy one feels when he sets off to meet his most beloved acquaintance.

Archimandrite Chrysostomos,  
*The Ancient Fathers of the Desert*

## Chapter Three

# THE ROAD TO THE KINGDOM

The blessed Synkletike related to the Sisters that, “Those who begin the life in God encounter much toil and struggle in the beginning, afterwards, however, finding indescribable joy.

“For,” she said, “just as those who wish to light a fire are at first choked by smoke and their eyes water from the fumes, yet later succeed at their task, so we who wish to light the divine fire within us must know that we will succeed at this only by many struggles and toil; for the Lord also says, *‘I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what else do I wish if the fire be more greatly kindled?’*

“Indeed some,” the blessed one continues, “while tolerating the bother and hindrance of the smoke in order to do a little work at the beginning, nonetheless, out of laziness, did not light a fire; for they went away quickly and did not have the forbearance to persist to the end.”

Archimandrite Chrysostomos,  
*The Ancient Fathers of the Desert*

### IT'S NOT EASY

The road to God's Kingdom is often bumpy and sometimes hazardous,<sup>1</sup> but it leads to the *pearl of great price* (Mt 13:46). No effort is too great for such a glorious treasure. Our role in the process of salvation consists of four steps:

**1. BELIEVE:** Acknowledge that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Savior, Who provides for us the only Way to the eternal presence of our Creator,<sup>2</sup> as we proclaim each time we recite the Nicene Creed:



I believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages ... Who for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven and was incarnated by the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man ...

We may come to this acknowledgement at any time. As long as we have life, it is never too late to come to faith, if it is sincere.<sup>3</sup> But we never know when our life will end—death does not always announce itself in advance—so the sooner we address the issue of faith, the better.<sup>4</sup> Also, the more we delay, the more likely we are to stray so far from God that we may not even realize the need, or know how to *find Him* (Act 17:27).

2. **PROVE BELIEF** by trying to follow the teachings and example of Jesus in all things throughout our lives. Before He returned to His Father, Christ gave His chosen Apostles authority to continue His saving work through the Holy Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church. This authority has been passed on to the priests of the Church through the ages through “Apostolic Succession.” Through the Sacraments, we can tap into God’s divine energies, which provide the grace for the life-in-Christ to which we are called. Part of the “mystery” of the Sacraments is that in them, Christ is actually the officiator: God sends Christ to act through the Priest, with the power of the Holy Spirit. As St. John Chrysostom wrote in his Homilies on the Gospel of John, the priest merely “lends his tongue and provides his hand.”

The Sacraments are outer symbols of inner grace (energies of God) received by those who submit to them—spiritual tools to help us reach our goal and to strengthen us for the struggle.

BAPTISM was instituted by Christ when He asked John to baptize Him, setting the example for all who would follow. Those who receive this Sacrament in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit become a part of the Body of Christ,<sup>5</sup> the Church, which sets them apart as belonging to Him (Gk.: *agios*: holy)—*if* they try to live accordingly.<sup>6</sup> This is what saves us! Just as physical birth from our mother’s womb brought us into the world,

our spiritual birth through Baptism puts us in God's Kingdom, until and unless we exclude ourselves from it. At one point during this Sacrament, the priest blows on the waters of the baptismal font—the breath of new life in Christ accessible through this Mystery.

Jesus asks us to be born to a life different from that of all animals and other living things, a life which is the Life of God Himself. This life is given by the breath of God, which is the Holy Spirit of God (*pneuma*, in Greek, means both “breath” and “spirit”). God had already given this breath to us at Creation (Gen. 2:7), thus giving us His image, His freedom and the possibility to be more and more like Him through our own creative activity. Because of this breath, man is always called upon to surpass himself, so that he is truly man only when he participates in God's nature. Man loses this breath, this divine presence, through sin and death; but he can regain it in the water of Baptism, the source of Life.<sup>7</sup>

Baptism is the beginning of our Christian walk, as it was the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Through this Mystery, we are freed of any association with the sin of Adam and Eve and cleansed of any personal sins we may have committed. We are given a clean slate—our own opportunity for salvation. But as powerful and indispensable as Baptism is,<sup>8</sup> it is only the beginning—it gets us started.

CHRISMATION gives us the “seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>9</sup> the second element of the spiritual birth needed to enter the Kingdom, as Christ told Nicodemus.<sup>10</sup> A seal is a mark of authenticity. That which bears a particular seal conveys the authority it represents, as a document marked with the seal of a particular nation carries with it the power of that entity. Through the Sacrament of Chrismation we receive the Holy Spirit within us. The seal of this gift is the sign of the cross, imprinted on us with consecrated myrrh. God knows His people by that seal (Rev 22:4), which marks them as belonging to Him. It is operative to the ex-

tent we act accordingly (or others act on our behalf before we reach the age of reason). The more Christ-like we become in cooperation with the Holy Spirit as He meets our efforts by strengthening, encouraging and directing us as we struggle along the steep and narrow road to the fullness of the Kingdom, the more we act with the authority of God. This spiritual authority is recognizable to those who are in communion with Him.<sup>11</sup>

EUCCHARIST (Holy Communion) was instituted by Christ at the Mystical Supper when He passed bread and wine to His Apostles, declaring that unless we eat His Flesh and drink His Blood, we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Jn 6:53-58). God always provides the antidote appropriate to the poison. Through the act of eating, man lost communion with God, so it is in like manner that communion is restored. Eucharist, as the gathering together of the Body of Christ at His Table in the Kingdom, is a continual renewal of our union with Him and with each other.<sup>12</sup> Through this Mystery, we once again have access to the Tree of Life—the food of immortality—as part of the life in Christ.

This Blood causes the image of our King to be fresh within us, produces beauty unspeakable, and prevents the nobleness of our soul from wasting away, watering it continually and nourishing it. ... This Blood, *if rightly taken*, drives away devils and keeps them far from us, while it calls to us Angels and the Lord of Angels. For wherever they see the Lord's Blood, devils flee, and Angels run together. This Blood is the salvation of our souls. By this the soul is washed, by this is beautiful, by this is inflamed. This causes our understanding to be more bright than fire and our soul more beaming than gold; this Blood was poured forth and made heaven accessible.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>13</sup>

UNCTION is a tool for physical and spiritual healing. As the Book of James relates, we can ask our priests for the anointing and prayers of healing of this Sacrament at any time for a serious malady of body or soul,<sup>14</sup> to help us remain healthy and whole for our journey.

Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist and Unction are such important conveyors of grace that they are not denied to infants in the Orthodox Church. Through these Mysteries they receive vital spiritual nourishment for their souls while they are growing, just as we take steps to insure that they receive nourishment for their bodies before they understand the need for vitamins and minerals. If we were brought to Baptism as infants, it was an indicator of the faith of our parents and/or godparents, who then had the responsibility to nurture us spiritually as we grew. In a loving, faith-filled environment, who can say exactly when faith begins, and who can put limits on the power of grace? With maturity, the responsibility for spiritual growth becomes ours.

If we come to Baptism willingly and lovingly after the age of reason, it is an indicator of our faith in Christ. St. Paul wrote that circumcision did not automatically confer righteousness upon the Jews under the Law. Rather, it was an outward sign, of merit only when the inner condition of the heart matched its meaning: commitment to keeping God's covenant with Moses while awaiting the Messiah.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Baptism for Christians is not a magical act guaranteeing a place in Heaven. It is, rather, the outward sign of inner grace received, the beginning of the process of sanctification for those who, thereafter, try to become more and more like Christ as they are able—a natural consequence of true faith but only with much discipline and effort.

We must be sure our Baptism has meaning for us: that we understand its significance and power; that we remember the date of its occurrence and try to receive Holy Communion on each anniversary of that date; that we wear a cross as a witness of our commitment to Christ (not as jewelry); that we try to live that commitment; and that we renew it continually, especially during the Divine Liturgy, which gives us that opportunity often by reminding us to “commit ourselves and one another, and our whole lives to Christ, our God.”

CONFESSION allows us to eliminate the barriers that sins form between God and us. If we stray from the road leading to Him (failing to follow Jesus' example and teachings in any way), the Church calls us to repentance, which includes change (a turnaround). Through this Sacrament, the authority for which Christ gave the Apostles, sincerely repented and confessed sins

are forgiven and erased.<sup>16</sup> The sin-free state of the newly baptized is restored; we are born anew from above spiritually and put back on the road to God. In the case of serious sin, a drastic falling away, the reconciliation with Christ offered by Confession can have dramatic and life changing effects.

MARRIAGE is a Sacrament in keeping with Christ's blessing of the marriage at Cana. If we choose to have a partner accompany us on the road to God (hopefully to include being a spiritual helpmate), the Church offers this Mystery, to bless and sanctify our union.<sup>17</sup> God's plan calls for new, human life to be brought forth within the state of marriage between a man and a woman to provide for the nurturing of souls for His Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> In a good marriage, one party can provide what the other lacks. Together man and woman are whole in a way not possible for either alone, reflecting the wholeness of God.

ORDINATION is offered to those males in the Church who feel called by God to a life of service, to bring as many as possible to Christ and help them remain in the fold, as Christ personally "called" each of His Apostles and charged them with carrying on the work they would see Him do (Mt 10). This is not the Levitical priesthood of the Old Testament, established to offer atoning sacrifices of the people to God under the Mosaic Law. It is, rather, the high priesthood of Christ Himself, after the order of Melchizedek,<sup>19</sup> that is eternal, and continually offers to God, sacramentally, the one, final blood sacrifice of Christ in redemption of the sins of mankind, our only defense. The priest "can fulfill this service only because the priesthood ... is not 'his' ... but the one and same indivisible priesthood of Christ, which eternally lives and is eternally fulfilled in the Church, the Body of Christ."<sup>20</sup>

We can also partake of God's energies through prayer. When a person of living faith prays in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, divine energies flow to him/her as well as to the one for whom prayer is offered (Jas 5:16). Among other sources of grace are the spiritual tools of fasting, worship, and knowledge (Holy Tradition—which includes Scripture, writings of the Fathers of the Church and Councils, Iconography, Liturgics, etc.—all God-given vehicles that have been employed to preserve the truth about Christ) to help us in our endeavor to grow in holiness as part of His Kingdom.

3. **FACE JUDGMENT:** Each of us will be judged by that which we were able to learn and understand about what God expects of us and the extent to which we tried to live accordingly.<sup>21</sup> To some has been given the privilege and responsibility of insight into the deepest mysteries of God.<sup>22</sup> He will expect much from them in terms of Christ-like lives and resultant souls brought to Him. To others, perhaps only a glimmer of God's Light has been able to penetrate the barriers erected by Satan. Each will be judged fairly by Christ, Who is All-Knowing, All-Loving, All-Just. Awareness of the fact that we must face judgment is a blessing because it helps us prevent spiritual negligence.

In a sense we will judge ourselves: the way in which we judge others will be the standard by which we will be judged,<sup>23</sup> and when the Book of Life is opened (Rev 20:12-13), we will have total recall of our lives. We will not have to be told where we stand in our relationship with God—we will know.

The wicked will understand how great a salvation they rejected, how great a love and mercy they scorned in life...<sup>24</sup>

Of those who profess instant salvation, or salvation by faith alone, some ignore the idea of judgment and emphasize the Resurrection when, it is said, the saved will be resurrected to God's Kingdom and the unsaved to damnation.<sup>25</sup> In other words, it is considered that there will be no actual time of judgment, for those who have announced themselves "saved" are, while the rest are damned. But this theory is based on erroneous worldly rationalization, not on the enlightenment that God will provide at Christ's Second Coming. Others say judgment is for the saved only, whose Christian lives will be assessed to disclose what has been "valuable to God's Kingdom" and what has been "worthless,"<sup>26</sup> affecting their placement in Heaven. But Paul writes that we must *all* appear before the judgment seat of Christ and refers to the terror of the Lord (2Co 5:10-11). Is there to be punishment in Heaven? If we are saved instantaneously by profession of faith only, why need we worry about judgment for placement? Any place in Heaven would be wondrous.<sup>27</sup>

There will indeed be judgment, but the sincere Christian need not despair. We should not live our lives in doubt and trepidation because we have the hope of salvation.<sup>28</sup> We know that God keeps His promises, and that if we truly love Him and really try to be followers of Christ, *we shall be saved* (Mt 24:13). The Day of Judgment will be no problem for true lovers of Christ. They will sail through the process, finding no condemnation but passing from death to life (Jn 5:24). This knowledge can serve to fill us with deep, inner joy, no matter what ups and downs our earthly life brings.<sup>29</sup>

The Christian on the road to salvation, the road which leads to personal unity with God, must constantly find himself between fear and hope. Fear restrains us, yet at the same time it pushes us toward God. Hope fills us with power and draws us toward the love of the Father.<sup>30</sup>

**4. REALIZE THE KINGDOM** *from within or without.* Those whose lives have demonstrated faith that Jesus is the Son of the Living God, Savior of the world, will be invited to enter fully into the Kingdom of eternal joy prepared for them from the foundation of the world.<sup>31</sup> God will call each of them by name and give them the Crown of Life.<sup>32</sup> In that blessed place there will be no more death, no more sorrow, no more crying, no more pain.<sup>33</sup> The Kingdom begins in this life for those baptized Christians who commit their lives to Christ because they live with the joy of knowing the certainty of God's promises. As soon as real faith begins, the believer actually begins to experience God's Kingdom—while still on earth. To the extent worldly life is rejected, spiritual life flourishes and its fruit is tasted (Gal 5:22).

As wickedness tends to punish those who pursue it even before they arrive at the pit, so also virtue, even before the gift of the Kingdom, provides delights for those who practice it on earth, so they live in company with good hopes and continual pleasure.

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>34</sup>

God created us to live forever—and so we shall—in one situation or another. Those whose lives have not demonstrated faith in Christ as Savior (if they were exposed to this saving truth) will join Satan and his followers,<sup>35</sup> in the eternal agony of being unable to enjoy the presence of God and the glory of His power (2Th 1:9).

We cannot imagine what it will be like to be deprived of that Blessed Glory, to be hated by Christ, to hear *I do not know you* (Mt 25:12).

CHRYSOSTOM<sup>36</sup>

This interminable misery of estrangement from God is the natural consequence of rejecting Him.<sup>37</sup> We are granted that which we have chosen.

*NARROW IS THE GATE and difficult is the Way which leads to Life, and there are few who find it* (Mt 7:14). The endeavor to live a Christ-like life can be likened to an uphill climb on a steep mountain road. Inching our way upward through the joys and pitfalls of life, the narrow gate into the fullness of the glorious Kingdom of God is our destination. We are put on this road at Baptism, with our eyes fixed on our Savior. The Holy Spirit lovingly nudges us along throughout our lives at a pace determined by our love and faith. The tools provided by the Church help us along the way, with sincere repentance and the Sacrament of Confession renewing us and putting us back on the road when we stray.

**WE'RE ALL DIFFERENT.** We each start out in a different environment for our climb. Some enjoy an atmosphere of love, mature guidance and material comforts. Others struggle with deprivation of all sorts. Some are blessed with fertile spiritual soil in which to grow and begin the process early; other souls gasp for breath in a spiritual wasteland and are not awakened to God until late in life. All sorts of scenarios are possible. As we have not been given the same resources for our journey through life, God does not expect the same from each of us. Along with free will, we have each been given the opportunity to respond to God in our own unique way. He demands, for our own good, only that we use that



which we have been given in His service,<sup>38</sup> in accordance with His word. He will judge accordingly. The crucial point is not how far along on the road to perfection our struggle takes us, only whether we have the love for God and faith in His Son as Savior to really try to continue the ascent until the end of our lives. God does not promise that we will not encounter difficulties in life. He does promise to be with us, to guide and strengthen us, and to help us complete the journey.<sup>39</sup> He allows us to feel His love through glimpses into the Kingdom that are so glorious and powerful that we thirst for more. These glimpses are sometimes given through an enhanced awareness of the beauty of God's creation, hinting at the glories waiting in Heaven.<sup>40</sup> They may also come during times of suffering, when we become aware of our complete dependence on God's mercy in those things that really matter, and when, having exhausted our human means of coping, we can actually feel His presence sustaining us, comforting us.<sup>41</sup>

## EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN

### ON THE JOY OF ENTERING THE KINGDOM AND THE AGONY OF BEING EXCLUDED

With what joy shall we be filled, if we are directed to the right hand of the King? What must we be like when the Just embrace us there? ... Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Noah, Job, Daniel, the holy Prophets, the Apostles, the Martyrs, who were all pleasing to God in the days of the flesh? And whomsoever you have heard of, and whose life you have admired, and whom you now wish to see, they will come to you, and embrace you, rejoicing in your salvation. What kind of men must we be? Of what kind shall be that unspeakable delight which we are to receive, when the King shall with joyfulness say to those who will be on His right hand: *Come you blessed of my Father, possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world* (Mt 25:34).

Then you will receive the Kingdom of beauty, the Crown of all your desires, from the Hand of the Lord, and reign with Christ forever. Then you will receive for your inheritance the gifts which God has promised to those who love and serve Him (Jas 1:12). From then forward you will be secure, no longer filled with anxiety. Be mindful of what kind of a person it must be, to whom it will be given to reign with Christ in Heaven. Reflect upon what it means to dwell forever in the light of His Countenance, to possess the source of all light. For then you shall no longer have the sun for your light by day, neither shall the brightness of the moon enlighten you (Isa 60:19), but Christ will be your un-failing Light and God your glory. Behold what glo-

ry He has laid up for those who fear Him, observing His Commandments.

Then think about the end of sinners as they are led before that tremendous tribunal. What terror will lay hold of them in the presence of that just Judge, having now no way to escape His presence? What shame will seize them as they are turned towards the left hand of the King? What dread gloom will fall upon them, when in His anger He shall speak to them, and trouble them in His rage, saying: Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, which was prepared for the Devil and his angels (Mt 25:41).<sup>42</sup>

## **GREGORY THE GREAT**

### **ON NOT JUDGING OURSELVES OR OTHERS**

Many come to faith, but few are brought into the Heavenly Kingdom. And many serve God with their tongue but turn from Him in their lives. From this we should reflect on two things. The first is that no one should presume concerning his own salvation because though he is called to the faith he does not know whether he will be chosen to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The second is that no one should take it upon himself to despair of the neighbor he sees steeped in vice because no one knows the richness of divine mercy.<sup>43</sup>

## *The Fourth Step: Realize the Kingdom*

# ICON OF CHRIST'S DESCENT INTO HADES



*We are given life to make a choice: God or not (Mt 12:30).  
We will live the consequences of that choice eternally.*

While the Body of Jesus Christ lay in the Tomb, His Soul descended into Hades [1Pe 4:6 and Eph 4:9-10] to give those who had lived and died before His redeeming death released man from the bondage of Satan the opportunity to recognize and accept Him as the Messiah of Old Testament prophesy. Thus the icon of Christ's Descent into Hades (also known as the Resurrection) depicts Him trampling upon the gates of Hades, and Adam and Eve (representing believers) being freed from the throes of death. The figure shown in chains in the blackness at the bottom is the Devil, illustrating the fact that his power had now been harnessed. The hold he had over mankind was death—but it has lost its “sting”: though man still has to pass through death (until the Second Coming), it cannot hold those who belong to Christ. Surrounding Christ are figures from the Bible who lived and died before His Death opened the Gates of Paradise: on His right, Kings David and Solomon and John the Forerunner, Prophet, and Baptist; on His left, Abel (who foreshadowed Christ) and the prophets.<sup>1</sup>

Going down to death, O Life immortal, You have slain Hell with the dazzling light of Your divinity. And when You had raised up the dead from their dwelling place beneath the earth, all the powers of Heaven cried aloud: Giver of Life, O Christ our God, glory to You.

Troparion from Great Saturday's Matins,  
Kallistos Ware and Mother Mary, *The Lenten Triodion*

Being God, you were present in the grave bodily; in Hades with the Soul; in Paradise with the thief; and on the throne with the Father and the Spirit, fulfilling all things, yet inscribed by none.

From the Service of Proskomide,  
*The Order of The Divine and Holy Liturgy,*  
*Holy Cross Orthodox Press*

That the end of our lives may be Christian, without torment, blameless and peaceful, and that we may have a good defense before the fearful Judgment Seat of Christ.

From The Petitions,  
*Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*

## Chapter Four

### IF ONLY

There are times in the course of life when words are uttered or held back, actions are taken or not, that at some point lead to suffering, loss, even death. Precious moments of life are spent lamenting those occasions, repeating over and over the rueful words, *if only* ... . It is unlikely that any of us is immune to these very human thoughts and feelings. At one point or another, we are plagued by what might have been if another choice was made, another path taken.

Those words must have crossed the lips of Adam and Eve when they had to leave Eden. Surely they were also uttered by those who had ignored Noah's warnings when rain kept falling, the water level kept rising, and God closed the door to the ark. And consider Abraham, whose beloved son Ishmael was a child begotten of disobedience, or at the very least, erroneous presumption of God's will. How could the haunting phrase *if only* not enter Abraham's mind and spill from his lips when, as a consequence, he had to send that son away forever when the boy was in his early teens. The remorse that accompanies those two little words is a taste of what hell will be: the worm that eats away at our soul unendingly, the fire that is never extinguished. It is also a warning, with persistence reminiscent of that of John the Baptist—to correct our ways, change our path—while there is still time (Mt 3:1).

The everlasting fire ... will not be a material fire such as we are accustomed to but a fire such as God might know.                      JOHN OF DAMASCUS<sup>2</sup>

Life there is so unbearable that it is impossible to comprehend clearly the misery caused by the deprivation of God's good things.                      CHRYSOSTOM<sup>3</sup>



The river that flowed through Eden and out into our world (Gen 2:10) brought with it God's overflowing love, which accompanies each of us through life, no matter what path we take. That love can make the joys of life sweeter and cushion its sorrows. But God never overrides our free will, so it is up to us to avail ourselves of His beneficence. We are given life to make a choice—God, or not! It cannot be otherwise because this offers man his highest potential. But there is no riding the fence. *Now* is the time for salvation (2Co 6:2). After death there can be no change in the choice we have made—no alteration of direction—so where there has been rejection or indifference, they remain. “Nothing can be gained by repentance in Hades. ...”<sup>4</sup>

As long as we are in this world, even if we commit countless sins, it is possible to wash them all away by manifesting repentance for our offences. But once we have departed to the other world, even if we display the most earnest repentance, it will be of no avail: even if we gnash our teeth, beat our breasts, and utter innumerable calls for help, no one with the tip of his finger will apply a drop to our burning bodies. We shall only hear those words which the rich man heard in the parable: *...between us and you there is a great gulf ...* [which no one can pass] (Lk 16:26). CHRYSOSTOM<sup>5</sup>

Prayer draws the energies of God to the one who prays as well as to the one for whom prayer is offered. It can soften the hearts of those still in life while time remains for the removal of barriers between God and man caused by sin. Prayer can also be of benefit to departed believers: those who opted “for” Christ during their lives but who, for one reason or another, “find themselves in the wanting condition of not having corrected their lives or of not having had their sins forgiven through repentance.”<sup>6</sup>

The major Fathers of the early Church agree that the eternal state of those who depart this life in rejection of God cannot be changed by prayer. Chrysostom concurs in general, but adds that prayer does benefit even them in that it provides “consolation” which, “in a certain way, refreshes them,”<sup>7</sup> especially

during the Divine Liturgy, when the assembled Body of Christ prays with one voice. This comfort is, perhaps, somewhat like lighting candles in a dark tunnel, introducing to those trapped in that cavernous environment, points of light and the awareness that someone cares. At any rate, since judgment belongs to God, and only He knows the true state of a person's soul, it is our sacred responsibility and privilege to pray for all our brethren, living and dead (2Mac 12:42-44, Jas 5:16). The rest we leave to God and His mercy.

Our prayer for ourselves is the plea of the thief on the cross: *Lord, remember me in your Kingdom* (Lk 23:42). There will be no sorrow in Heaven, so after the universal Resurrection, those belonging to Christ will have no memory of those not among them. Thus, our prayer for the departed, "May his/her memory be eternal," expresses the hope that they be among those enjoying eternal blessedness—thus "remembered." Those who have rejected God and His plan for man do, however, have a tormenting awareness of the difference between their state of agonized existence (hell of their own making) and that of those with Christ.

When Judgment Day dawns, an angel will blow his trumpet to awaken the dead from their long sleep, in which they have been experiencing, as in an extended dream, a continuation of the relationship, or lack thereof, they have had with God.

When the body lies in bed, not moving, but in death-like sleep, the soul keeps awake by virtue of its own power. It transcends the natural power of the body, and as though traveling away from the body while remaining in it, imagines and beholds things above the earth, and often even converses with the saints and angels who are above earthly and bodily existence. ... [If, then] when coupled with the body [the soul] lived a life outside the body, much more shall its life continue after the death of the body. ATHANASIUS<sup>8</sup>

Christ's sign, the cross, will appear in the sky, shining like lightning (Mt 24:27). He will descend from Heaven to gather to His right, near to Him and His glory, the living and the dead

who bear that sign through Baptism, Chrismation, and hearts and souls open to His love and its demands during their lives on earth (Mt 25:31-40).

Those who bear His sign, which is the seal of the Holy Spirit, He will set at His right hand, saying: *My sheep, when they hear my voice, recognize me* (Jn 10:14).  
MAKARIOS OF EGYPT<sup>9</sup>

Holy Baptism gives us the sign of the venerable cross upon our forehead, just as Israel was given the circumcision, for by it we faithful are set apart from the infidels and recognized.

JOHN OF DAMASCUS<sup>10</sup>

On Christ's left, He will gather those who have rejected or been indifferent to Him. They will be told to depart from His presence (Mt 25:33, 41, 46), to continue their estrangement—but bereft of the hollow pleasures of the world that distracted them from (or turned them against) the purpose for life. They will forever be in the company of others like themselves.

Sinners, wherever they are, are far from the King. Therefore they are subjects for tears; while the just, be they here, or be they there, are with the King; and there, in a higher and nearer degree, not through an entrance, or by faith, but *face to face* (1Co 13:12).  
CHRYSOSTOM<sup>11</sup>

When we meet God, we will be encountering the same all-encompassing love from which came all creation. As it nourished Eden, it will, on the Day of Reckoning, pour forth from His throne and encompass each of us. We will each, however, receive that love differently, as we have in life. Those on God's right will bask in it and joyfully continue the relationship they had with Him while in life on earth, in ever-growing communion. God's love will envelop those who rejected Him also, but to them it will bring only agony. Their words will echo through the ages: *If only*.

The pain which gnaws the heart as the result of sinning against love is sharper than all other torments. The power of love works in two ways: it torments those who have sinned, just as happens among friends here on earth; but to those who have observed its duties, love gives delight.

ISAAC THE SYRIAN<sup>12</sup>

To fear death is a natural human emotion. As a baby cries in natural protest when it leaves the warmth and security of its mother's womb to enter our big, cold world, we are loath to leave the earthly life we have known. It is also very difficult to say goodbye to loved ones who depart, no matter their age. Most of us yearn to live forever, with friends and family continually at our sides—a hint from God as to the immortal nature of our souls. His divine plan for our salvation through Christ provides hope that we can do just that—live eternally with Him—in a place of great joy, the intensity of which far surpasses that which we have known. The more we believe this promise, put our trust in it, and try to live the Christ-like lives to which it calls us, the more we allow God's grace into our hearts and the less we are tormented by the fear of leaving this earth.

Before the divine sojourn of the Savior, even the holiest of men were afraid of death and mourned the dead as those who perish. But now that the Savior has raised His body, death is no longer terrible.

ATHANASIUS<sup>13</sup>

Death was never God's will for man, so it will come to an end. Sin introduced corruption to God's Creation, which He mercifully curbed with death; Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection removed the "sting" of death (its permanence); death itself, the "last enemy," will be completely destroyed with Christ's Second Coming (1Co 15:24-26).

Death is no more than ... changing your clothing!  
For the soul wears the body as a garment. This garment, however, is removed temporarily by

death, but only to be put on again with greater glory at the resurrection of the bodies. Death is a “temporary journey,” a sleep of greater duration than ordinarily. Therefore, if you fear death, you must also fear sleep!                   CHRYSOSTOM<sup>14</sup>

The only thing to fear is that which stands between God and us: the willful sins and vanities that separate us from Him. As long as we still have breath, the Church calls us to Repentance/Confession to address and put those to rest, and to Eucharist, to continually renew and strengthen our attachment to Christ—for in the end, only that attachment matters. Every moment of life is a gift to be treasured; but when the time comes, may we lay our burdens down as in peaceful slumber, surrender our souls to God’s loving embrace, and never be tormented by the dreadful *if only*.

*Therefore comfort one another with these words.*  
1 Thessalonians 4:18

## *Journey's End & A New Dawning*

# ICON OF THE LAST JUDGMENT: THE RIVER OF FIRE

In this Heavenly scene alluded to in Matthew's gospel, Christ sits "*on the throne of His glory*," and gathers in the nations. He separates them "*as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.*" The Theotokos and John the Baptist flank Him, both interceding for mankind. The Twelve Apostles are enthroned on either side, as Christ promised them.

To those on His right, Christ says: "*Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you*"; to those on His left, He says: "*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*" Two angels bear His words on their scrolls; another holds scales where each man's deeds are weighed. Two demons seek to pull the scales in their favor.

The "river of fire" described in Daniel 7:10 sweeps off to Christ's left. The Church knows this fire to be God's ever-present love, the divine energy that brought delight to the three youths in the furnace but death to their guards (Dn 3:22, 25). At Judgment, those open to this love will find eternal joy; those who rejected it, whether criminals or kings, will be consumed by the beast, which St. Isaac the Syrian says is the "bitter regret" that torments sinners (Ascetical Homily 28). Various creatures of land and water reflect those written of in Revelation.

Among the righteous on Christ's right are some favorite saints of the Orthodox; the Theotokos is enthroned and angels serve her; and Father Abraham holds righteous souls in the cloth at his bosom. The good thief enters the Kingdom ahead of Sts. Peter and Paul, who stand ready to open Heaven's doors.

Usually placed on the wall of the narthex and viewed as one leaves the church, this icon is a reminder of the inescapable reality of the Final Judgment and the fact that we must always be ready to face our Lord.

Are You Saved?





The radiant love and glory of God, from which [the wicked] can no longer hide becomes as a river of fire, pouring forth from the glory or throne of Christ, and it sweeps them away, their conscience receiving it as coals of fire. The righteous receive one and the same “fire” as complete spiritual illumination and understanding and are filled with unspeakable joy and exaltation by it, for this fire shall be to them the rays of the Sun of righteousness which shall heal them of all that they lack, and they *shall go forth* and grow in perfection and knowledge unto all eternity (Mal 4:1-2).<sup>15</sup>

You cannot separate the brightness of fire from the virtue of burning which it possesses; but God, who wished to attract His servant by a wonderful sight, set a fire in the burning bush, which displayed all the brilliancy of flame, while its devouring property was dormant. It is that which the Psalmist affirms in saying *The voice of the Lord divides the flames of fire* (Psa 29:7). Thus, in the requital which awaits us after this life ... the double nature of fire will be divided; the just will enjoy its light, and the torment of its heat will be the torture of the wicked.

BASIL THE GREAT<sup>16</sup>

ON THAT DAY,  
GOD’S LOVE WILL FLOW FROM  
HIS THRONE LIKE A RIVER OF FIRE.

## *EPILOGUE*

**ARE YOU SAVED?** is a question that should be of primary concern to all who have received the gift of life. This work is an effort to provide, in layman's terms, a sketch of God's Divine Plan for His beloved "man," so that those who seek knowledge of the purpose for life may be guided by His Truth, which remains the same in every time and in every place.

The message of salvation through the Son of God is for everyone. It is simple and all encompassing. It should be shouted from the rooftops and taught again and again in our homes and churches at every level of human understanding. It should permeate every area of our lives and guide every action and decision.

The precepts put forth in this work have been taught by the historic Church since Jesus Christ ascended into Heaven to wait for those who love Him. The accompanying prayer is that this telling will help some to understand what Christ has done for us and thus inspire them to make and/or continually renew a serious, life-giving commitment to Him as Lord and Savior. May we all work together to share this life-giving knowledge with all who will listen, and may we all continue to *grow in His image* to show our faith in and love for Him, in readiness for the holiness of His Kingdom.

# NOTES

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## Chapter One

1. Gen 1:28.
2. Gen 3:8-9.
3. Fr. Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, p.52.
4. Isa 14:12-21, Rev 12:7-12.
5. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, "The Second Oration on Easter," *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series, Vol. VII*, p.425.
6. Panayiotis Nellas, "Garments of Skin," *Deification in Christ*, p.46-53.
7. Frederick H. Chase, Jr., "Orthodox Faith: Book Four," *Fathers of the Church: Saint John of Damascus Writings, Vol. 37, Ch. 27*, p.352.
8. "The Orthodox Church has always repudiated the doctrine of 'original guilt'—that is, the view that all men share not only the consequences of but also the guilt for the sin of Adam and Eve." Cronk, p.45. Also see Ware, p.62.
9. Rev 21:3-4.
10. Nikolaos P. Vassiliadis, *The Mystery of Death*, p.519-20.
11. Gen 3:15.
12. Jn 8:44.
13. Rev. George Nicozisin & Presbyteria Freida Upson, *The Sacraments of the Orthodox Church*, p.7-10.
14. Gen 17:1-2.
15. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology, An Introduction*, p.86.
16. Rom 3:19-20.
17. Exo 34:27-28.
18. See Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
19. Deu 27:10, 26; Jas 2:10.

20. 1Jn 2:2.
21. Exo 25:22.
22. Lev 16.
23. Exo 26:33.
24. Heb 9:1-15.
25. Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5; 2Ki 2:1-11.
26. M. F. Toal, The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers, Vol. Two, p.54-55.
27. Mt 5:48.
28. "In order for Christ to save His people He must be *theanthropos* —a divine and human being. He must be God to be able to save, and He must be man so that salvation can be real on behalf of mankind and not merely of God, from above only, as a sort of magical salvation." Bishop Gerasimos Papadopoulos, Orthodoxy: Faith and Life, Vol. Two, Christ in the Life of the Church, p.41.
29. Gen 28:12-13; Jn 1:51.
30. Jn 7:30, 8:20; 10:31, 39.
31. Jn 17:1.
32. Jn 10:17-18.
33. Lossky, "Christological Dogma," Theology, p.114.
34. R. Payne Smith, trans., "On the Incarnation," Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, note 1, p.52.
35. Gen 22:7-8; Exo 12:3-13; Lev 23:12; Isa 53:7; Jn 1:29.
36. Mt 27:51-54; Lk 23:44-45.
37. Toal, "On the Holy Pasch," Vol. Two, p.257.
38. 1Co 15:20.
39. Heb 9:14-15 (read Chapters 8 through 10).
40. Eph 2:4-6; Gal 4:4-7.
41. Nikolai Velimirovic, The Prologue from Ochrid, Part One, p.296.
42. Archimandrite Chrysostomos, The Ancient Fathers of the Desert, p.66.
43. Toal, Vol. Two, p.151.

## Chapter Two

1. Toal, "On the Gospel," Vol. One, p.417.
2. George Cronk, The Message of the Bible, An Orthodox Christian Perspective, p.265.
3. Rom 4:13-15, 7:7-8:4.

4. Jn 14:6.
5. 1Pe 2:21.
6. Php 3:12-16.
7. Papadopoulos, p. 56.
8. Heb 12:14
9. 1Co 12:27.
10. Heb 11:6.
11. 1Th 4:15-18.
12. Jn 5:26-30.
13. Eph 2:8-10.
14. Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature*, trans. Stanley S. Harakas, p.35.
15. *ibid*, p.34.
16. Tit 3:4-7.
17. 1Co 2:11.
18. Heb 5:8-9.
19. Jn 15:9-17.
20. Mt 16:13-18.
21. 2Co 3:6
22. Rom 13:8-10.
23. It is commonly thought that this theory originated at the time of the Protestant Reformation, with Martin Luther, but it was actually one of the heresies of the first century. Most of the Book of James was written as a refutation of this heresy. See Cronk, p.233.
24. Rom 3:23-26; 2Th 2:13-17.
25. J. Leslie Dunstan, *Protestantism*, p.208-10.
26. Mt 25:31-46.
27. Chrysostomos, p.94.
28. Mt 12:30.
29. Rev 2:17.
30. Ware, p.183-185.
31. Toal, Vol. One, p.382.
32. *ibid*, Vol. Two, p.25.

### Chapter Three

1. Mt 11:12.
2. Jn 14:6; 1Ti 2:4-5.
3. Mt 20:1-16.

4. Mk 9:36-37, 10:13-16.
5. 1Co 12:13.
6. Col 1:18-23.
7. Olga Dunlop, *The Living God*, vol. 1, p.223.
8. Mt 3:13-15, 28:18-20; Jn 3:5.
9. 2Co 1:21-22; 1Jn 2:20.
10. Jn 3:5.
11. 1Co 2:4-5.
12. Mt 26:26-28; Lk 22:19-20; Jn 6:56.
13. Philip Schaff. "Homily XLVI of the Gospel of John," NPNF, First Series, Vol. XIV, p.166-167.
14. Jas 5:13-15.
15. Rom 2:25-29, 4:11-12.
16. Jn 20:23.
17. Gen 2:24; Mt 19:4-6.
18. Gen 1:27-28.
19. Gen 14:18; Psalms 110:4; Heb 4:14-7:28; Mk 3:14-15; Mt 28:16-20.
20. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, p.115.
21. Rom 2:1-16.
22. 1Co 2:6-7.
23. Mt 7:1-2.
24. Lazar Puhalo, *The Soul, the Body, and Death*, p.45.
25. Jerry Falwell, ed., with Ed Dobson and Ed Hindson, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon, The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*, p.21.
26. D. Guthrie, *The New Bible Commentary*, p.1080.
27. Psalms 84:10.
28. Rom 8:24.
29. "Orthodoxy believes that salvation is not so much a negative reality as it is a positive one: salvation is not so much to be freed from the bondage of the devil and his dominion of sin, death and corruption as it is life in communion with God." Maximos Aghiorgoussis, "The Theology and Experience of Salvation," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, Vol. XXII, Winter 1977, No. 4, p.414.
30. Stavropoulos, p.54.
31. Mt 16:27; 25:34.
32. Jas 1:12; Rev 3:5.
33. Rev 21:4.

34. Schaff, "Homily XL," p.147.
35. Mt 25:41.
36. Schaff, "Homily XXIII on Matthew," NPNF Vol. X, p.161.
37. Jn 12:48.
38. Rom 12:4-8.
39. Mt 28:20; 2Co 1:3-5.
40. Rom 1:19-20.
41. 2Co 1:8-10.
42. Toal, Vol. One, p.13.
43. *ibid*, p.365.

#### Chapter Four

1. Photios Kontoglou, Ekphrasis, p.180.
2. Chase, Ch 27, p.406.
3. Schaff, "Homily XXIII (7) on Matthew," p.161.
4. *ibid*, Chrysostom, "Homily III on Philippians," Vol. XIII, p.196.
5. *ibid*, Two Exhortations to Theodore after his Fall, Letter 1 (19).
6. Panagiotis Trembelas, Dogmatics, Vol. 3, p.410-411, Vasilladis, p.429.
7. Schaff, Vol. XIII, p.197.
8. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed., Archibald Robertson, special ed. "Against the Heathen," NPNF, Vol IV, St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters, p.21-22.
9. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, "The Raising of the Intellect," *Philokalia: The Complete Text*, Vol. Three, Ch IV, p.312, 63.
10. Chase, Ch 25, p.398; Ch 11, p.350.
11. Schaff, Vol XIII, p.196.
12. A.M. Allchin, intro & ed, "The Scourge of Love," *Daily Readings with St. Isaac of Syria [Nineveh]*, p.83.
13. Schaff and Wace, "On the Incarnation of the Word," NPNF, Vol. IV, p.50.
14. Schaff, "Homily V" (11), *On the Statutes*, Vol. VIII, p.374-375.
15. Puhalo, p.45.
16. Schaff and Wace, "The Hexaemeron [Six Days], Homily VI (3) NPNF, Vol. VIII, St. Basil: Letters & Select Works, p.269.

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