

GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH OF THE ASSUMPTION

Studies in the Faith

Theosis, Salvation & Life After Death



GREEK ORTHODOX
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THEOSIS, SALVATION and LIFE AFTER DEATH

“Theosis! What does this deep and profound word mean? It means the elevation of the human being to the divine sphere, to the atmosphere of God. It means the union of the human with the divine. That, in its essence, is the meaning of Theosis. Thus, human nature ought to be moving toward spiritualization, and in the process, its heavy materialism is to be broken down and dissolved...That is how the union of the human with the divine becomes a reality.”

(Partakers of Divine Nature by Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos—p. 18)

READING ASSIGNMENTS

The Orthodox Church: by Timothy Ware, Pages 102-105 & 208-238.

Introducing the Orthodox Church: by Fr. Anthony Coniaris, Pages 47-55.

Genesis 1:1–4:26

Romans 5:1–6:23

SUGGESTED READING

Partakers of Divine Nature by Archimandrite Christoforos Stavropoulos

AN ORTHODOX PERSPECTIVE OF SALVATION

What is my purpose in life?

Have you ever asked yourself the question, “What is it that gives my life meaning?”

- A. People look for life’s meaning in a job, etc....so that there may be fulfillment in their life.
- B. If they don’t find meaning in life, they are lost.
- C. Often, an emptiness occurs, even leading at times to depression if we don’t have a purpose in life based on society’s standards (i.e., to be a success!!!)
- D. Maybe, at times, people feel this way not because they can’t find the perfect job, but because God is not in their lives.
- E. We, as Christians, have a purpose. Our purpose is to grow in the image and likeness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This spiritual growth, this spiritual purpose, is called Theosis! The end result of Theosis is Holiness.

II. Introduce Justification, Sanctification and Glorification.

III. Justification:

- A. The key to our salvation lies in the creation narrative of mankind. This creation narrative comes from Genesis 1:26 which states, *“Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the Earth.”* We as human beings are made in the image and likeness of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. The “whole person” is made in God’s image and likeness and is therefore Holy. The “whole person” consists of both the soul and body.
- B. Prior to Adam and Eve having sinned, the image of God in man was a perfect reflection of God’s image. As a result, man had the ability to strive to the likeness of God. As St. Irenaeus

states, "Adam was a child, not yet having his understanding perfected. It was necessary that he should grow and so come to his perfection. " However, Adam sinned! As a consequence of Adams sin the image of God in man was tarnished, not destroyed but tarnished. Therefore man's ability to attain God's likeness was destroyed.

1. Image was tarnished
 2. As a result sin has the power over our souls and bodies, able to destroy our souls and bodies because we no longer were able to attain God's likeness and as a result,
 3. Death came into the world.

- C. That does not mean however, that the divine plan for the Theosis of mankind had been destroyed.

- D. Christ came into the world to save us! God came as man to save us from sin and death. Did He do this by abolishing sin altogether? No! Sin still exists in the world. Rather, God came to save us by making it possible for God's image in man to, once again, be perfected. How did our Lord accomplish this?
 1. Restored the fallen image of God in man - Incarnation
 2. Died on the cross for the Remission of our Sins - Crucifixion
 3. Conquered the sting of death - Resurrection.

- E. We are Justified by faith through Christ's actions, through God's actions, since through these actions God bridges the chasm that had separated man and God until that time. We appropriate our Lord's Incarnation, Crucifixion and Resurrection through the sacrament of baptism. In essence, it is through the sacrament of Baptism that God's tarnished image in man is once again perfected. The result, we are once again able to attain our Lord's likeness.

IV. Sanctification:

What is Sanctification? Sanctification is a process of spiritual growth. Through spiritual growth, the likeness of God within us is developed. This spiritual growth is made possible because our Lord's image is once again perfected within us through the sacrament of Baptism.

This process of spiritual growth is called Theosis. Theosis leads us to holiness. Holiness is derived from a Greek word, "Ἁγιος, which literally means "different than the Earth".

Sanctification occurs when our focus is on God. When we continually turn to God in (1) prayer (both communal and private) and fasting, (2) through the sacramental life of the church and in (3) repentance, our bodies and souls are transformed. When we humble ourselves to Him in obedience and love, this transformation which results is the Theosis described above leading us to Holiness.

Remember, our Lord did not abolish evil in the world. We are still subject to the forces of evil even though we have been Baptized. Our Lord gave us free will so that our response to His free gift of salvation would be a response reflective of our love for Him. Through our own free will we move daily toward Christ, through repentance and Christ's forgiveness of sins. A forgiveness which is mediated through the sacramental life of the church. (Baptism, Eucharist, Unction and Confession).

- A. Hence, Salvation for the Orthodox Christian is Synergetic.
 1. St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians 2:12 " Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."
 2. WE CANNOT SAVE OURSELVES!
 3. Because God asks us to co-operate with Him does not mean that we must per-

form a certain work requirement or uphold our own end before He can save us.

4. It is not as if God does half of the saving work and we do the other half. God alone saves us!
- B. If we are in communication with Christ it only make sense that we must respond to him in application of our faith. Therefore God saves us 100% but to experience His redemption we must be willing to respond to Him 100%. We respond to our Lord's free gift of Salvation by (1) prayer and fasting, (2) by participating in the Sacramental life of the Church and by living an life of (3) repentance.
1. The good works issue: We are not saved by good works. Good works are our grateful response to God's love. Good works will come naturally and is an expression of the fact that we have salvation in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 2. For example, in James 2:14-17, St. James states that faith if it is does not show itself in good works is dead. Salvation, if it is not responded to will also die, or is dead.
- C. Our choice must be continually for God and if we continue to choose him, God is able to infuse our will with His presence and hence his likeness is fulfilled in us! The result is spiritual growth or Theosis leading to Holiness.
- D. Salvation then for us as Orthodox Christians is not only a question of where we will spend eternity (Heaven of Hell) but how we as Christians live in Christ, or express the love of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in the here and now!

V. Justification and Sanctification leads to glorification in Christ.

In review, there are three stages in the process of salvation:

1. Past - Justification: We have been saved from sin and death through our baptism. "We have been saved."
2. Present - Sanctification: Through the daily work and growth in Jesus Christ and in the life of the spirit. "We are being saved."
3. Future - Glorification: When Christ comes at the end of time, "By God's Grace, we will be saved."

Once we realize that salvation is not a static process but a dynamic process, something that we never fully achieve in this life, we come to the realization that salvation occurs through a daily struggle to move toward God. That struggle to move toward God occurs mainly through repentance. We experience Theosis through a daily conversion that occurs through a constant repentance for our sins and through the sacramental life of the Church in which God dwells. Therefore sin in the life of the Christian is no longer a practice but an incident.

FAITH AND WORKS

Many believe that salvation comes through faith alone. All one has to do is to confess one's belief in Jesus Christ. If we confess our belief in Jesus Christ we have secured our salvation. Not only is this belief UN-Orthodox, but it is also unscriptural and therefore UN-Christian.

The Orthodox position on faith and works in regards to salvation can be summed up in three scripture verses.

Each scripture verse supports the other. Let's see how:

...we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9)

...What does it profit my brethren, if a man says he has faith. but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them. the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has not works, is dead. (James 2:14-17)

...when you have done all that is commanded you, say, we are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty. (Luke 17:10)

In summary, our faith manifests itself in good works! The good works we do as a result of our faith do not earn us any special "merit points" with God. The Orthodox Church believes there is no way to earn salvation through good works. Our good works are a natural response to God's love and His gift of salvation which He has bestowed upon us and is an expression of the fact that we have appropriated our Lord's free gift of salvation in our lives.

**GOOD WORKS DO NOT PRODUCE SALVATION.
SALVATION PRODUCES GOOD WORKS!!!**

Finally, good works must be done in Jesus' name. Only then do our works manifest Christ's love to others. Good works done by those who do not believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior are worthless in that they are not a manifestation of God's love. A work is only good insofar as it is done in Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit.

**BIBLICAL TEXT
FROM ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE ROMANS
CHAPTER 6**

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

For if we have been united with him in a death. like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him. so that the sinful body might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For he who had died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death. he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. Do not yield your members to sin as instruments of wickedness, but yield yourselves to God as men who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments of righteousness. For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! Do you not know that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death; or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? But that be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of

teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once yielded your members to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now vie your members to righteousness for sanctification.

When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But then what return did you get from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

REVIEW WORKSHEET ON SALVATION

1. Read Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7. What is sin?
2. Read Romans 5:12. What are the consequences of sin?
3. What did Christ do to save us?
Read Philippians 2:6-7 and Hebrews 2:14-15. What was the first thing God did to save us?

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

Read Romans 6:5.

4. How does all of the above become relevant to us?

12. What does the Greek word $\alpha\lambda\omicron\sigma$ mean?

13. What is the Theosis?

SESSION CHECK LIST

- Attended class
- Review worksheet on Salvation
- Read pages 102-125 & 208-238 of The Orthodox Church, by Timothy Ware.
- Read pages 47-55 of Introducing The Orthodox Church, by Fr. Anthony Coniaris.
- Read Genesis 1:1–4:26
- Read Romans 5:1–6:23

CHRIST'S SECOND COMING

At Christ's second coming all will be judged in Jesus Christ! Scripture tells us the following all occur at Christ's second coming: (Look up the specific scripture verse and write in your own words what will happen when Christ comes again).

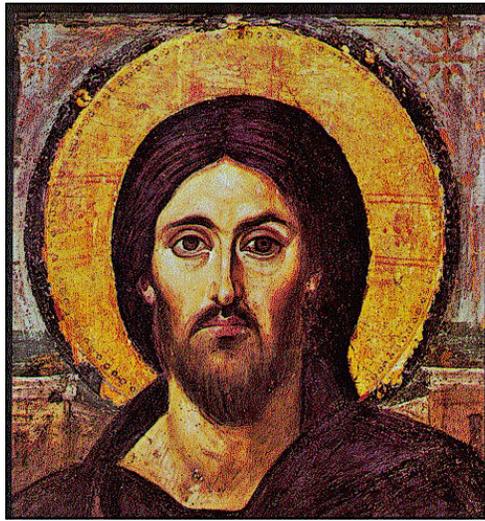
1. Acts 1:6-11 & Matthew 24:31 & 1 Thessalonians 4:16
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
3. 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10
4. Philippians 3:20-21

When Christ comes again the General Judgment will occur. The purpose of His first coming was to prepare us for His second coming. Our Lord and Savior will be our judge on the last day. He will not condemn those who have sinned, but rather those who have sinned without repenting.

HERESIES CONCERNING CHRIST'S COMING

There have been those in the history of Christianity who have believed in something called millennialism. This belief teaches that when Christ returns He and His disciples will rule the earth for one thousand years. This belief is based on a wrong interpretation of St. John's Revelation, Chapter 20, and was espoused by heretics in the early Church. As a result this heresy was condemned by the second Ecumenical Council in the year 381 A.D. It is due to this heresy that the Church Fathers put the following statement in the creed, "And He shall come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, whose kingdom shall have no end." To emphasize that God will come again to judge everyone and upon His coming there will not be two kingdoms of Christ, one on earth and one in heaven as the millennialists believe, but one everlasting kingdom of God in heaven for an eternity.

PRAYERS FOR THE START OF THE DAY



In the name of the Father , and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory to thee, our God, glory to thee.

O heavenly King, O comforter, the Spirit of truth, who art in all places and fillest all things; treasury of good things and giver of life; come and dwell in us and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O gracious Lord.

Holy god, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3 Times)

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit; now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

All holy Trinity, have mercy on us; Lord, cleanse us from our sins; Master, pardon our iniquities. Holy God, visit and heal our infirmities for thy name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit: now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by thy Name: thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit; now and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.

[Add your personal prayers here]

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, Lord Jesus Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us.



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