



**COPTIC ORTHODOX  
PATRIARCHATE**



*See of St. Mark*

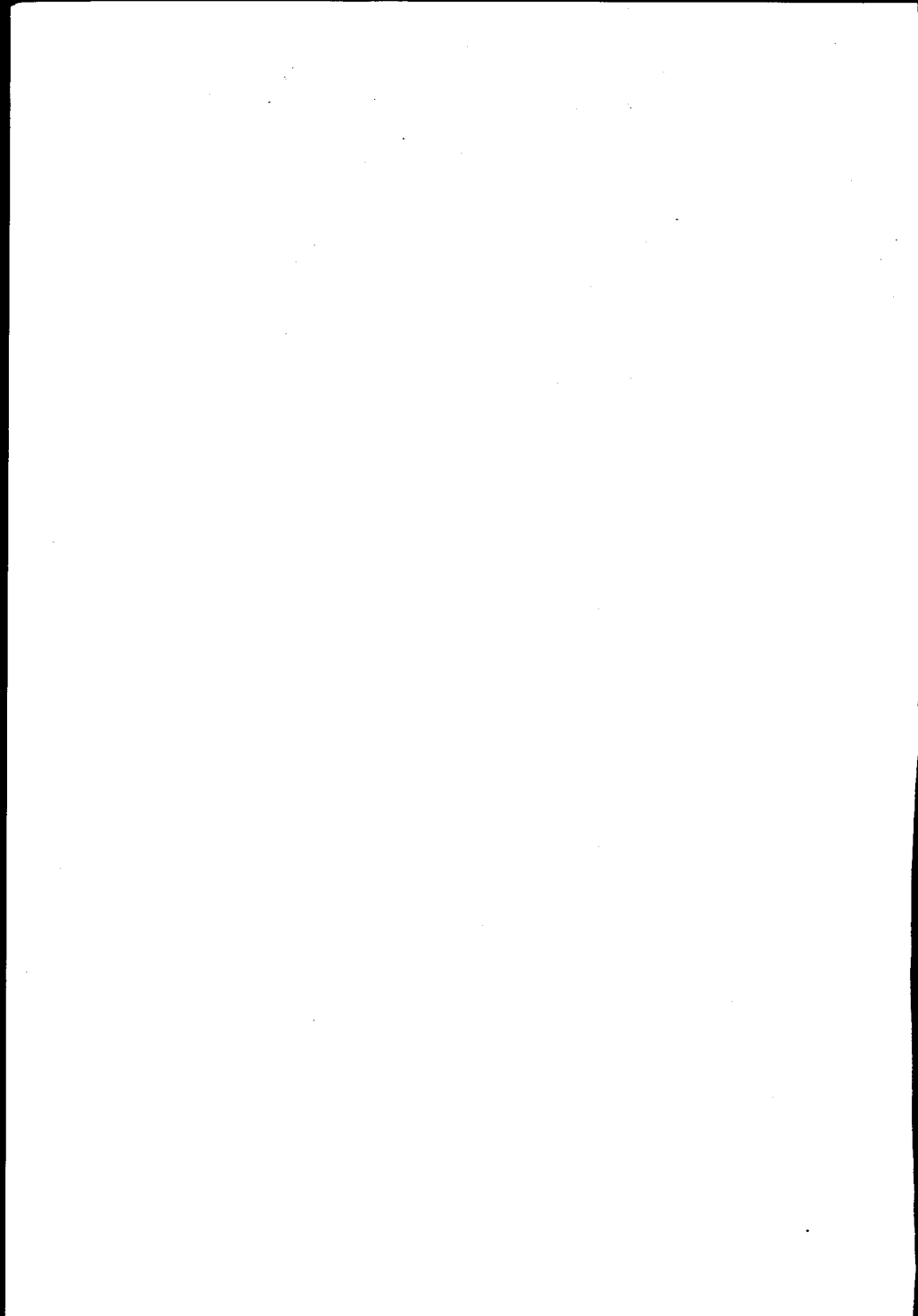
**SALVATION  
In the Orthodox Concept**

**BY  
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## **THE STORY OF THIS BOOK**

Salvation is one of the most important topics of belief and theology. Suffice that for the salvation of mankind, the incarnation, redemption and atonement have been perfected.. For salvation everyone strives in his spiritual life.. And for salvation also the ministry of evangelizing, pastorship and preaching is being carried out...

A great theological dispute rose in the sixties regarding the subject of salvation which gave rise also to various questions. Thereupon, two conferences were held for the Sunday Schools of Lower Egypt in Banha in March and April 1966.. A great number of ministers attended; and two lectures were delivered on 'Salvation' besides the answers given to the questions raised by the ministers.

This book is the fruit of these two lectures and the answers of the said questions.. It was published in 1967 and entitled "Salvation in the Orthodox Concept". The first edition was followed by many others.

The book was translated into English by the translator Mrs. Wedad Abbas and printed in Los Angeles in 1986.. The same translation revised the translation and a second edition was published.

The subject of Salvation is a great one that could not be included in just one book. Therefore, a second book entitled "The Heresy of Salvation in a Moment" was issued and is currently being translated. I hope its translation would be published soon, God willing.

Both books are among the subjects taught to the seminarians in St. Mark Saminary in Cairo and its branches under "Comparative Theology".

**Pope Shenouda III**

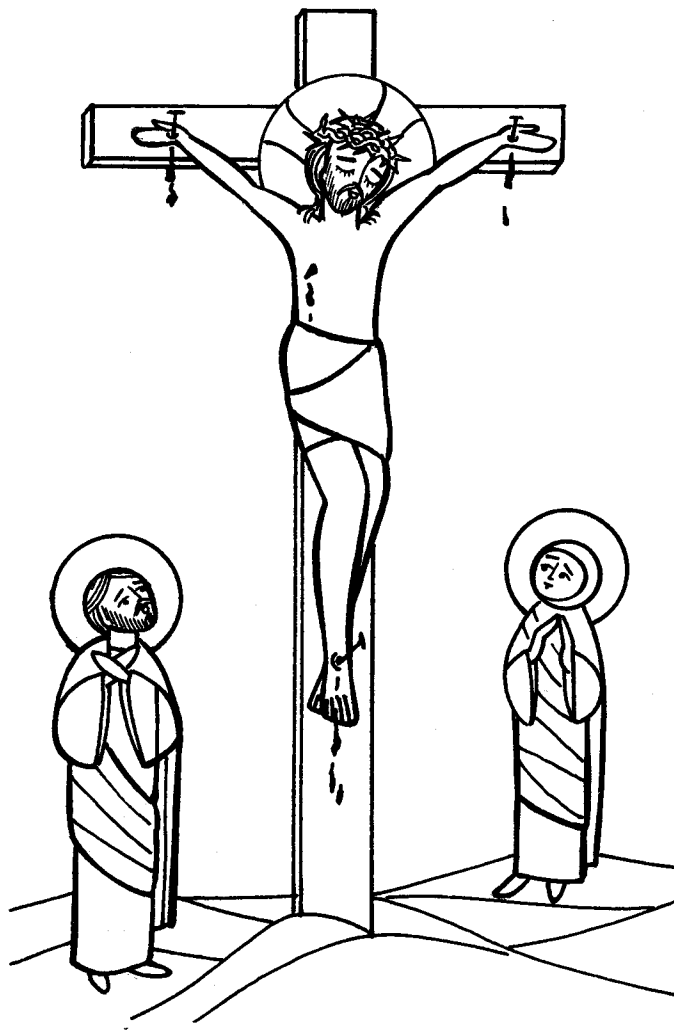
**PERFACE**  
**to the first edition of 1967**

This research, written by His Grace Anba Shenouda Bishop of the Institutes of Religion and Church Education, is distinguished for its clarity, preciseness and generality.. It deals with one of the most important subjects that occupy the minds of the believers in all ages; for it relates to the issue of Salvation. This issue is the objective of faith and the crown of the Christian hope.

In this research, you will find the upright Orthodox education supported by the proper reasoning and correct use of the holy texts, thus revealing any equivocations...

I affirm that this valuable book did treat the subject of salvation - for the first time - in a perfect way that is capable of giving a true picture of our Orthodox teaching regarding the issue of Salvation.

**Gregorius**  
**General Bishop**  
**of**  
**High Education, Coptic Culture**  
**and scientific Research**





## INTRODUCTION

### THE DANGER OF USING "ONE SINGLE VERSE" !

When treating the subject of salvation, as it is the case with any other subject, you should be fully aware, brethren, of the danger of using one single verse separate from the other verses of the Holy Bible. **The Holy Bible is not mere verses but a certain spirit involves all its parts.**

A foolish person puts before him one verse or part of a verse only, separating it from the circumstances and the occasion on which it was said, and even from the general context. But a wise researcher who seeks truth, brings together all the texts relating to the topic of his research to see what they signify..

With respect to the subject of Salvation, let us take some examples which show the danger of using one single verse alone:

★ *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household."*  
(Acts 16:31). ★

Some people take this verse as a proof that salvation can be attained through faith alone!! that is because St.

Paul the Apostle says in this verse to the Philippian jailer, *"Believe ... and you will be saved"* (Acts 16:31) Those who depend on this verse forget various things: To whom it was said?.. What is the rest of the verse ? what happened afterwards?... what about the other verses that relate to the same subject?

**1- First, this verse was said to one of the gentiles, an unbeliever.. Whatever good deeds that person might do, would not benefit him unless he believed on christ!!**

Thus, it was necessary to guide him to the first step without which he could attain no salvation. If he took that step, he would be guided to the other following steps... It was not fit that the two apostles speak to that jailer about the importance of good works because this was of no use for him, being an unbeliever... The proper thing was to proceed with him step by step towards the goal.

**2- Sometimes, the first step is used in the Holy Bible to signify the whole matter which begins with this step.**

Take for example the words of Simeon the Elder when he took the Child Jesus up in his arms. He said, *"Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation..."* (Lk 2:28-31). In Fact, Simeon did not see the Lord's salvation which was only fulfilled through the blood of the Lord Christ shed on the cross when He paid for our sin by His death on our behalf!! Simeon saw only the incarnation and birth of the Lord... But the

incarnation of the Lord was the first executive step leading to Salvation; so Simeon the elder said in confidence, "... *for my eyes have seen Your salvation...*".

Almost the same was intended by Paul and Silas when they talked to the Philipian Jailer. They did not mean that his own and his household's salvation would be attained by his faith alone but that his faith was the first step towards that goal.

Perhaps the words of the Lord to Zacchaeus meant the same likewise; for when Zacchaeus promised to pay back four times what he had taken from others, the Lord said to him, "*Today salvation has come to this house*" (Lk 19:9). This means that the repentance of Zacchaeus was the first step towards the salvation of that house...

**3- The most sure evidence that proves that by salvation here is meant the first step leading to it, is the speech of the apostle to the jailer, "... *you will be saved, you and your household.*"**

How could his family be saved merely by his faith?! Does the faith of someone save another one?! The proper thing is that faith of someone serves just as a first step towards the salvation of the person himself when he is baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Then this first step may convince his family to enter into faith and be a good beginning which may lead him and his house as well to salvation.

4- **The same is evident in the following verses, for the Holy Bible says that Paul and Silas, “.. spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house ... and immediately he and all his family were baptized” (Acts 16:32,33).**

5- So, when we study the verse, **“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:13)**, we have to put beside it other verses to understand the subject in full. And here is a simple example which has a great significance:

Once, a young man came to the Lord Jesus Christ and asked Him, **“... what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” (Mt. 19:16)**. The Lord did not say to him, **“Believe and you will be saved”**, but He said, **“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Mt 19:17)**.

Would we dare say then that keeping the commandments alone is sufficient to give salvation! without faith, without baptism, and without sacraments?! Nay, we cannot do wrong against ourselves, against others or against faith itself by using a single verse alone...

In the same example, we notice that the young man replied, **“All these things (commandments) I have kept from my youth. What do I still back?”** Thereupon our Lord Jesus Christ said to him, **“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.” (Mt. 19:21)**.

Here also the Lord Christ did not speak to him about faith or grace... Would we, therefore, use this example to belittle the value of faith just because the Lord mentioned nothing about it in His talk concerning eternal life!

No, God forbid! we cannot do such a mistake by using one single verse, for every situation requires a suitable speech... In this example, the Lord used the words that suited the case of that rich youth and that touched his inherent weakness...

Another verse used by the Protestants and their followers is:

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

You may be faced with some person who concentrates on one verse only saying to you, ‘See, here is an explicit verse about justification by faith. You need not argue or say a word! would you deny the verse or object to God’s words!..’

Say to him, **‘No, brother, we neither deny the verse nor object to God’s words but we put beside this verse another one from the same Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans to see what we can understand. The apostle says, “For not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified.” (Rom 2:13).**

**Here, the apostle talks about the justification of the doers of the law.. would we then make such a mistake**

**as to depend on this verse alone to say that works alone may save a person! Nay, but we put together the two verses (Rom 2:13 and, Rom 5:1) This will provide us with the right teaching which conforms with God's words i.e. the role of faith in justification does not ignore the importance of works.. and likewise, the necessity of works for justification does not deny the value of faith...**

Beside the verse, "*.. having been justified by faith..*" we can put another verse also i.e., "*You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?*" (Jas 2:24,25).

Let us take another verse,

★ "*But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness*" (Rom. 2:5). ★

Does this verse mean that God justifies the ungodly though he continues in his ungodliness without repenting! God forbids. In order to understand this verse, we should put beside it other verses that might make it clear... Let us begin with a verse from the same Epistle to the Romans which says, "*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*" (Rom. 1:18).

Then add to it another verse from the second Epistle of St. Peter the Apostle which says, "*... condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who*

*afterward would live ungodly” (2 Pet 2:6).* By this the apostle reveals to us that the ungodly will have the same end of Sodom and Gomorrah.

St. Jude also explains the same, saying, “*Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, ‘Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgement on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way.’*” (Jude 14:15).

Therefore, we must not understand the verse said by St. Paul the Apostle as to mean that the ungodly needs only to believe in order to be saved though he continues in his ungodliness.. For St. Paul himself warns us expressly saying, “*Do not be deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites... will inherit the Kingdom of God.*” (1 Cor. 6:9,10).

As for the words “*who does not work*”, they perhaps mean the ritual works of the Law such as circumcision in particular as we can conclude from the verses (Rom. 5:6-12).

**My beloved, it is not proper at all to follow this manner of using one single verse only.. It is wrong and dangerous besides being unorthodox.**

Whenever anyone presents you a certain verse however explicit and plain it may be, say to him, ‘One verse is of no use to me. Let us bring together all the texts relating

to the subject, then we can argue'. Beware being deceived by a single verse, for it might have been said on a certain occasion or might have had another part which completes it and clarifies its meaning. This will be evident from the following examples:

**Verses made clear by other verses following them.**

\* St. Paul the Apostle says in his Epistle to the Ephesians *"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast"* (Eph. 2:8,9).

This verse may seem quite plain; but wait a little and read the verse that follows it directly, it says, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them"* (Eph 2:10). Then, it is not meet to pick up one verse rashly and unwisely say that the matter is over...

**\* Another example:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, *"And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace"* (Rom 11:6).

It is preferable to meditate a little and follow up what the apostle proceeds to say in the same chapter, for he says, *"... you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but*



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

What does this mean?.. It means that you have attained salvation through the blood of the Lord Christ, but you have to hold fast to it, otherwise you will lose it if you do not do works meet of repentance... A branch cut off from a tree withers and dies.

**\* A third example:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, "*Where is boasting then?.. It is excluded. By what law? Of works? .. No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.*" (Rom. 3:27,28).

When we read such a verse, we should not judge in haste but we ought to read what follows.. The apostle proceeds to say, "*Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law.*" (Rom. 3:31).

**\* A fourth example:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, "*But when the kindness and the love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but*

*according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit...” (Tit. 3:4-6).*

Notice that this verse in particular speaks about salvation through baptism and the act of the Holy Spirit.. As for works, the apostle proceeds to say directly, *“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men.” (Tit. 3:8).*

Beloved brethren, I am not discussing the subject of ‘faith and works’ in this introduction for it is not time for this yet.. But I want only to draw your attention to a main rule which is ‘the danger of using one single verse’.

We cannot allow ourselves to follow this harmful dangerous method.

**We do not use one verse only  
though it be for our benefit**

For example, when we read the words of St. John the Apostle,

- *“If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practises righteousness is born of Him” (1 Jn 2:29).*

We should not say that regeneration depends on works alone. We have to remember faith, baptism and Church Sacraments which things are not mentioned in the verse.

Another verse also said by St. John the Apostle is,

- ***“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren” (1 Jn. 3:14).***

Here we cannot say that this verse proves that love alone can save a person and convert him from death to life!!

The same applies to the verse,

- ***“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16).***

We cannot also benefit from any verse that speaks about works and their importance such as the words of the Lord Christ to the rich youth,

- ***“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments” (Mt. 19:17).***

Is it possible that merely keeping the commandments would be sufficient without faith or baptism?! Certainly not.. we have to consider the circumstances involving the verse to be able to understand the real meaning..

Thus, my beloved, to be acquainted with the right faith, we have to remember always the beautiful verse,

- ***“.. not of the letter but of the spirit, for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life” (2 Cor. 3:6).***

Let us search then into the concept of salvation guided by the spirit of the Holy Bible not by the letter and try to bring together the various texts relating to the subject. Let us approach the subject from all its sides not from one side only nor regarding certain circumstances alone.

I advise you to avoid reading foreign books that may lead you astray from the right faith.. I advise you also to be humble when searching such matters because self-conceit regarding theological matters has led many to fall in heresies.

After this short introduction, we shall speak about "Salvation in the Orthodox Concept and Its Media".



## CHAPTER 1

### NO SALVATION EXCEPT THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST ALONE

**No faith nor works without the blood of Christ can be of any benefit... Faith means to believe in the blood of Christ, and works are those based on the deserts of the blood of Christ, as St. Paul the Apostle says, "... without shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).**

What then is the role of the blood of Christ in the process of salvation? and what is the role of faith?.. what also is the role of works?..

- **Works without the blood of Christ:**

There can be no salvation except through the blood of Christ. No good works, however excellent, elevated or perfect they may be, can save man without the blood of Christ. **Therefore the righteous people who pleased God in old times with their good works, remained also in Hades until the Lord Christ brought them out after His crucifixion.**

Good works alone cannot save a person without believing in th blood of Christ... Otherwise, the heathen who do good works would be saved through their works!! God forbid.

As a general rule I tell you:

**Any verses included in the Holy Bible attacking works mean works alone without the blood of Christ or the works of Law of the Old Testament. Without the blood of christ works are of no avail.**

**So, When St. Paul the Apostle Speaks about works he means works alone without the blood of Christ as in Tit 3:5 "Not by works of righteousness which we have done," and Eph. 2:9 "Not of works, lest anyone should boast".**

**So, in case an unbeliever does good works, the righteousness of the Law will avail him nothing, and his good works alone without faith will not save him.**

You have to say to such a person who is not in the faith, 'Your works are not sufficient. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.'

There is a main difference between words said to a believer and words said to an unbeliever. **Addressing an unbeliever, you must destroy any works because they avail nothing without the blood of Christ. You must say to him, 'Your works will not save you... What saves you is the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ is the start point towards salvation?**

Then, when such a person believes, you have to tell him about the good works that suit his faith because, *".. faith without works is dead."* (Jas 2:20).

• **Why can there be no salvation except through the blood of Christ?...**

1. Sin is disobedience to God, transgression of His rights and lack of love for Him... Since God is Unlimited, sin is unlimited too because it is committed against God, the Unlimited.. **So, sin cannot be forgiven except by an unlimited propitiation. But whatever works man can do are limited.** God alone is Unlimited.. The only solution then for the remission of sin was that God Himself becomes incarnate and die. Thus His death can be an unlimited propitiation (atonement) that satisfies God's unlimited justice ~~which required punishing the unlimited justice~~ which required punishing the unlimited sin committed against God the Unlimited.

2. **This applies to the sin of Adam as well as to the sin of anyone else; because sin is sin, God's justice is the same, and death-the punishment of sin-is the same in the Old Testament as in the New Testament.** It is stated that, *"For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God", "There is none who does good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:23,12).* So, everyone became under the sentence of death, *".. that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God."* (Rom. 3:19).

There became no other means to attain salvation except that Gods' grace would seek us.. and it did .. God's grace sought us, and saved us through the blood of Christ, the only means for salvation.

**3. Therefore, St. Paul the Apostle said,**

+ *“Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth to be a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed”* (Rom. 3:24,25).

+ And *“Who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose which was given to us...”* (2 Tim. 1:9).

+ *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit”* (Tit. 3:5).

+ *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”* (Eph. 2:8,9).

+ *“And if by grace, then it is not longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace.”* (Rom. 11:6).

**We mention such verses used by the Protestants and and do not conceal them because we do not deny God’s grace which sought us, nor deny the free salvation given us by God. We cannot deny that all of us were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and would have perished but for His most holy blood.**

But the point is that we understand the true meaning of these verses and confess that we attain salvation through the blood of Christ.



**4. However, we say that the blood of Christ is one thing and the deserts of His blood is another thing. The blood of Christ is capable of the remission of the sins of the whole world.. but did the whole world gain the remission of their sins?!.. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son...” (Jn. 3:16). Are all the world saved because of His giving His only begotten Son? Or only those who believe in Him are saved?**

**So, the blood of Christ is available, ready to save and capable of that .. but there are certain conditions that must be fulfilled first so that a sinner might deserve to be saved by this blood.**

St. John the beloved also says about Christ, *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 Jn. 2:2).*

The propitiation of Christ, then, is unlimited, and is sufficient for the remission of all sins of all people in all ages, in the past, present and future...

However, in spite of the availability of the blood of Christ, some people perished, some still perish and others will perish! That is because the deserts of the blood of Christ require certain conditions.

## **CONDITIONS OF SALVATION THROUGH THE BLOOD OF CHRIST**

I'd like to set before you four essential conditions viz:

1. Faith.
2. Baptism.
3. Church sacraments necessary for salvation.
4. Good works.

### **1- FAITH**

#### **1. Faith being a condition:**

Faith is a main condition to deserve the blood of Christ. The Lord Christ asserted this, saying about Himself, "*.. whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" (Jn. 3:16).

The importance of this condition is again asserted in the same chapter by the Lord Christ when He said, "*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*" (Jn. 3:18).

St. John the Apostle says also at the conclusion of the gospel written by him, "*But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and and that believing you may have life in His name*" (Jn. 20:31). The condition then for your salvation is to believe..

St. Paul the Apostle preached the same in Antioch, he said, "... *through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins, and by Him everyone who believes is justified..*" (Acts 13:38,39).

Our Lord Jesus Christ declared to the Jews that without faith there would be no salvation, He said, "... *if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins*" (Jn. 8:24).

How dangerous are the words, "*you will die in your sins*"! There is the blood of Christ, and it is capable of saving.. but it cannot save you against your will.

In order to be saved through the blood of Christ, you must believe.. This is the first condition, not the only one.. It is a step towards baptism..

Faith is the condition which SS. Paul and Silas required from the Phillipian Jailer saying to him, "*Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household*" (Acts 16:31).

## 2- What is faith?

The term "faith" is very broad and includes many things.. When St. Paul said, "*.. having been justified by faith*" (Rom. 5:1), what did he mean by that faith by which we have been justified?

St. Paul also lays before us a very serious question regarding faith, he says, "*Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Prove yourselves*" (2 Cor. 13:5) We have then to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith or not.. What sort of faith is this?..

### • Living faith:

The faith required for salvation must be a living one. This is well indicated by our master James the Apostle, as he says, "*.. faith without works is dead*" (Jas. 2:20) and also, "*For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also*" (Jas. 2:26).

Such dead faith, void of works, cannot save anyone as St. James the Apostle says, "*What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works, Can faith save him?*" (Jas. 2:14).

It is true that the apostle said that we have been justified by faith (Rom. 5:1) but such faith has two main qualities: it is living and supported by works.. In both qualities, good works are found.

**Thus, we do not think that any Protestant - even though he denies works - can say that salvation may be**

**attained through faith void of works. The apostle says further, “*Even the demons believe - and tremble!*” (Jas. 2:19).**

Do you mean then, brother, by faith that sort of faith which the devils have, through they are destitute of any good works? The devils believe and tremble because they are aware of their horrible evils and corruption..!

**The words ‘living faith supported by works’ may extend to involve the whole spiritual life. How can that be? Listen carefully, beloved brethren, to what the apostle says:**

**• Faith working through love:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, “*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.*” (Gal. 5:6). What does the quality “working through love” mean? What is this love? and how can it be?..

Such love is explained by St. Paul the Apostle demonstrated by various good works. He says, “*Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely; does not seek its own; is not provoked; thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*” (1 Cor. 13:4-7).

**Therefore if faith is working with love, undoubtedly it will include all such qualities which are all in fact-works.**

Here, the essence of Christianity is clear.. It is not mere verses, but spirit and life (Jn. 6:63). This proves true the words of the Holy Bible that the letter kills, but the spirit gives life (2 Cor. 3:6).

The letter says that there is something called faith, but the spirit explains to you the nature of faith and how it includes all good works.

Do our protesting brethren then, mean faith in its broad meaning which involves the whole spiritual life? Do they mean faith in its sublime meaning referred to by St. Paul in (Heb. 11) when speaking about the heroes of faith? Or do they mean faith alone void of the aforementioned qualities?!

If so, let us discuss to see whether such faith can save them as St. James the Apostle exclaims...

### **3- Faith and love:**

Those who say that faith alone, apart from works, justifies a person, find a strong answer in the words of St. Paul the Apostle. He says, "*.. and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing*" (1 Cor. 13:2). Is there more faith than this?..

As for you, brother, far as you can soar in faith, what is the farthest level you can attain? **Would you attain all faith that removes mountains? .. Believe me, even if you attain such a level without love, you will be nothing!** Such faith cannot save you...! If St. Paul the Apostle, with all his faith is nothing without love, what about you?

Therefore, the apostle set love in a higher level above faith, saying, *“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13).*

#### **4- The believers and the elect:**

As we have previously said, faith must be alive and working through love.. But some people may go far while defining the word “believers” as to make it synonymous to the word “elect”.

**This makes such people declare that a believer never perishes... And if they hear or read about some believer who perished, they say he was not a believer according to their own view!! Certainly the elect can never perish.. but who said that the believers are the elect?.**

The Holy Bible gave us various meanings for the word “faith”.. In one verse it is stated, *“Even the demons believe - and tremble!” (Jas. 2:19)*.. And in another verse St. Paul the Apostle defines faith saying, *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb. 11:1).*

The Holy Bible mentions also that there is a kind of faith which is dead; and though it is dead, the apostle calls it faith. Another kind is faith void of works and this kind of faith cannot save anyone, (Jas. 2:20,14).. But though it cannot save anyone, the apostle calls it faith.

It is stated in the Bible that, *“They have all gone out of the way, they have together become unprofitable...”*

*and fall short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:12,23). Were all people unbelievers and the earth void of faith? Or rather God called them believers who sinned while in faith?*

**God did not deprive those sinners from the name “believers”, as He said once on the mouth of Jeremiah the Prophet, “For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water... My people have forgotten Me days without number” (Jer. 2:13,32). Nevertheless He called them His people...**

God said also through Isaiah the Prophet, *“I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me” (Isa. 1:2)*. Yet, in spite of their rebelling, He called them children.

This reminds us of God’s words concerning the lost son, *“For this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found” (Lk. 15:24)*. In spite of his loss and spiritual death He called him “son”.

Again in the words of the apostle, *“.. though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing ” (1 Cor. 13:2)*; in these words there is another evidence that even a person lacking love and considered as nothing is called a believer.

The Lord even calls them believers, who resemble the seed that fell on rock and as soon as it sprang up, it withered away.. He says, *“But the ones on the rock are*



*those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away” (Lk. 8:6,13).*

Of course those apostates cannot be called “elect” though the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned that they were believers for a while... This applies also to those mentioned by the apostle in (1 Tim. 4:1). *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons”*. Of course such people cannot be called “elect” though they were in the faith before their apostasy.

Now, I hope the great difference between the two words has been made clear.. **All the elect are believers, but not all believers are elect.. for some may depart from the faith giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...**

We shall return to this point again, my beloved, but now let us put it aside for a while to talk about the second condition of salvation and its main entrance.. i.e. **Baptism.**

## **2. BAPTISM**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM FOR SALVATION**

The words of the Lord Christ to Nicodemus show the importance of baptism for He says, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.”* (Jn. 3:3). The meaning of this birth is explained by the Lord when He answered the question of Nicodemus saying, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God”* (Jn 3:5).

It is an explicit verse which indicates that without baptism no one can enter the Kingdom of God, nor even see it.. Thus, salvation is to be attained through baptism preceded by faith.

Therefore the Lord Christ said expressly and plainly, *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved”* (Mk. 16:16). Also when He sent His disciples to preach His Kingdom all over the world, He said to them, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Mt. 28:19,20).

This verse indicates that salvation requires faith, which comes through discipleship; and baptism, the direct gate to salvation; besides good works which appear in keeping the commandments... So, if baptism had not been necessary for salvation, the Lord would have said to His disciples just to go and preach faith without referring to baptism...

St. Paul the Apostle in his Epistle to his disciple Titus, bishop of Crete - explains how salvation is attained through baptism which is a regeneration. He says, "*But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit*" (Tit. 3:4,5).

### **BAPTISM IN THE EARLY CHURCH**

The early church followed the principle laid down by the Lord Christ i.e. "*He who believes and is baptized will be saved*" (MR 16:16) So, on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter the Apostle preached the word of faith and those who listened were cut to the heart and when they asked what would they do, St. Peter said to them, "*Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*" (Acts 2:37,38).

The verse says explicitly that the remission of sins comes through baptism... And how can one have salvation without having one's sins forgiven!!

**This means that baptism is necessary for one's salvation, for through baptism sins are forgiven and one is made capable of receiving the Holy spirit.**

The gift of the Holy Spirit is received in the second sacrament of the church which is the sacrament of the Holy Chrism or (myron), and this is evident from the previous verse...

On the day of the Pentecost, after hearing the words of St. Peter about baptism they, *"gladly received his word, were baptized, and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (Acts 2:41) **If faith alone was sufficient to give salvation, what was the need to baptize three thousand souls on one day!** How easy it was for the apostles to say to the people, 'Now, brethren, since you have believed, go and be blessed by God.. That is enough. You are already saved and the matter is over...’!!

In the story of the **Ethiopian eunuch**, after he had accepted faith through St. Philip, he asked the apostle, *"What hinders me from being baptized?"* *"And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him... and he went on his way.."* (Acts 8:36-39).

Likewise, the **Philippian jailer** who accepted faith through Paul and Silas, *".. immediately he and all his family were baptized"* (Acts 16:33).

We have also the example of **Cornelius** to whom the angel of God appeared in a vision saying to him, *"Your*

*prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God”.. After St. Peter had preached to him the word of life, the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word and St. Peter answered, “Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:47,48).*

**And Lydia, a seller of purple from the City of Thyatira, when she accepted faith through St. Paul the Apostle, “. she and her household were baptized” (Acts 16:15).**

Beautiful indeed are the words of St. Paul the Apostle about baptism which say, *“For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27)..* In baptism then one puts on Christ.. What greater salvation than this there could be!..

Baptism is the gate through which one attains salvation, while faith paves the way to it.

We say this because many Protestants think that one’s faith is capable of saving one...! Or in other words they think that regeneration is achieved through faith not through baptism! **They do not admit that baptism is the regeneration.. in spite of the plain verse speaking about the washing of regeneration (Tit. 3:5)!!** and also in spite of the words of the apostle in the Epistle to the Ephesians, *“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it, that He*

*might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle..” (Eph. 5:25-27).*

The protestants and their followers take the words, “.. *sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word*” to mean that sanctification is done by the “*word*”! ignoring the words “*the washing of water*” as if they were of no meaning...

The “*word*” here means preaching.. What do the words “*the washing of water*” mean then?.. They mean baptism which one obtains after hearing the word preached.. This conforms with the commandment of the Lord Christ, “*make disciples... baptizing them..*”. Making disciples is effected through preaching the word .. and baptizing is effected through the washing of water.

### **A THEOLOGICAL VIEW OF THE “IMPORTANCE OF BAPTISM”**

What is the fundamental teaching of Christianity about baptism as a means for salvation? Why is baptism necessary for salvation? Why can no one be saved without it? The matter is very clear and can be explained as follows:

The Holy Bible say, “*For the wages of sin is death..*” (Rom. 6:23). Then, there must be death.. and the way

to salvation must begin with death.. continue through death and the last stage in the process of salvation is to be attained through death.. It means that salvation begins with death, is perfected in death and continues through death because the wages of sin is death... What does all this mean?..

### **1. Salvation began with death:**

**Salvation began with the death of Christ on the cross paying for sin and purchasing us with His blood.. But how does salvation reach you? It reaches you through death.. How is this effected?.. Christ gave salvation through His death... And in order that you may have a share in such salvation, you must share Christ His death.. You must die with Christ and rise with Him in order to be glorified with Him. Thus, St. Paul the Apostle says, “.. *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death*” (Phil. 3:10).**

**Unless you undergo such death, you will be seized by the second death which is torment forever in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).**

**But how can you undergo such death? How can you share Christ His death? This is effected through baptism as St. Paul the Apostle says, “*Or do you not know that as many of us as were batized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death..*” (Rom. 6:3,4).**

It is our death with Christ and burial with Him that makes us share the glories of His resurrection. So, St. Paul the Apostle says, *“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”* (Rom. 6:5,8).

Now, we can sum up the issue as follows:

**The wages of sin is death .. so man must die and be buried.. But Christ died for us and we have to share His death in order not to be apart from the deserts of His death...**

It is not proper at all to leave Christ die alone for us without sharing His death or at least being conformed to His death having the fellowship of His sufferings... Thus St. Paul the Apostle says, *“.. baptized into His death... buried with Him... we have been united together in the likeness of His death... our old man was crucified with Him... Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him.”* (Rom. 6:3-8).

The Holy Bible explains to us that such death is effected through baptism.. in which we must be immersed completely as if buried in the baptismal font as St. Paul says, *“.. we were buried with Him through baptism into death”* (Rom. 6:4). Then we rise from the water of baptism to *“Walk in newness of life... knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with..”* (Rom. 6:4,6).



Baptism, then, is necessary for salvation because it is sharing in the death of Christ, believing in death as a means of life and admitting that the wages of sin is death... Those who say that salvation is attained through faith alone, without baptism, have not yet understood faith properly.. So, let us discuss the matter together to understand it well:

What is faith? .. It is to believe that the wages of sin is death; to believe that Christ died for you; and to believe that you must die with Him in order to live with Him also ... Thus, faith leads you to what we have already said i.e.

Salvation began with death, the death of Christ.. It is a paid for salvation .. We began to attain this salvation through death for we died with Christ and were buried with Him in Baptism.. That is the salvation which we attained..

We add now that such salvation continues through death...

## **2. Salvation continues through death:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, "*Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey it in its lusts*" (Rom. 6:11,12).

These are beautiful words indeed which explain to us the Orthodox faith thoroughly. "*Do not let sin reign in*

*your mortal body*"; we entered into salvation through death.. so, our bodies must be always dead against worldly lusts. **For as long as the body is dead, salvation lives in it.. But, when the carnal lusts rise from this death and begin to move, we become liable to lose salvation since salvation is only attained through death.**

so, we pray God in the ninth hour saying, 'Mortify our bodily senses, O Christ our Lord and deliver us'.

This conforms with the verse, "*.. but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*" (Rom. 8:13). St. Paul the Apostle says also, "*So then death is working in us*" (2 Cor. 4:12).

He asserts the same saying, "*For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh*" (2 Cor 4:11); and also, "*And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness*" (Rom. 8:10). He says also, "*For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter*" (Rom. 8:36), "*Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body*" (2 Cor. 4:10).

So, as long as we are along the way of salvation, the body must be dead against sin; death must work in us. **If someone says he is already saved, yet he still loves the world and the things of the world, he is in fact mistaken, for, "*.. friendship with the world is enmity with God*" (Jas. 4:4).**

Salvation, then, continues through death: death of the deeds of the body, death of the lusts of the body, and death against the world, material and its demands which fight the spirit.

**+ What is the meaning of the words, “*We shall be saved by His life*”?**

Let us meditate on the verse which says, “*For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life*” (Rom. 5:10). What do the words “*we shall be saved by His life*” mean?

These words perhaps mean that we shall be saved by His life as an Advocate, a Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek who is, “*able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He ever lives to make intercession for them*” (Heb. 7:25).. We are saved by His life due to His being an advocate because we always sin, “*And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous*” (1 Jn. 2:1).

We can say here that the continuous intercession of Christ for us means that we are continually in need for salvation and for its work in us all the time..

**There is another beautiful meaning for the words, “*we shall be saved by His life*”.. We find this meaning in the speech of St. Paul the Apostle, where he says, “*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*” (Gal. 2:20)... Being crucified with**

Christ.. This is the death required, “.. *have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires*” (Gal. 5:24). Thus we are saved, when Christ lives in us.. Also, the words, “*it is no longer I who live*” show submission of one’s will completely to the Lord so that one can always say, ‘not what I will, but what You will’ One becomes as if dead, as not existing.. It is no longer the person who lives but Christ lives in him. He addresses Christ saying, ‘I shall be saved by Your death, I shall be saved by Your living in me’.

This is the right concept of salvation according to Orthodoxy: **We have been saved through the death of Christ when we died with Him in baptism... We are now capable of being saved by Christ living in us and by our submitting our lives wholly to His will saying along with the apostle, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me”.**

### **3. Salvation is perfected in death:**

We have said that salvation begins with death in baptism, continues through death against the wordly lusts.. But, till when?.. The Holy Bible says, “*Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life*” (Rev. 2:10).

**Thus, death keeps working within you until the body dies actually.. As long as you do away with the deeds of the body, then you are still on the way of salvation.. When will you reach the end of the way?.. You will reach it when you die and pass to the other world.**

Then, you are still on the way.. would you stop in the middle and cry out, 'I am already saved'! Be humble, brother, and listen to the apostle saying, "*.. considering the outcome of their conduct*" (Heb. 13:7). Do not boast vainly because many had begun in the Spirit, but were made perfect by the flesh (Gal. 3:3).

Now let us move to another point and we shall return to the previous one in detail - God willing - when we speak about perfection of salvation.



### 3- SACRAMENTS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION

Some sacraments are not necessary for your salvation. For example, you may not marry, but you are the offspring of marriage.. You may not have a disease and so you may not need the sacrament of the Holy Unction... You may not be ordained a priest, but you do need the sacrament of the Holy Orders (Priesthood) to give you the Holy Spirit that will work in the other sacraments which you need for your salvation...

No doubt you are in need of the sacrament of Baptism which we have already discussed..; and also the sacrament of the Holy Unction (Chrism or myron), the sacrament of repentance and the sacrament of Eucharist (Holy communion)...

Now, we shall talk about the importance of each of these sacraments seperately.

#### THE SACRAMENT OF THE HOLY UNCTION

When St. Peter called upon the Jews to be baptized, he said to them, *“Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission*

*of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). What is this gift of the Holy Spirit? And is it necessary for our salvation? What is its importance? And can we be saved without it?*

**We can never be saved without this gift of the Holy Spirit... That is because our whole spiritual life is just a response of our will to the work of the Holy Spirit within us.**

Unless we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, all our life will be futile and subject to perdition. It is a gift which we receive through the sacrament of the Holy Unction and for which we cry out in prayers continually saying, *“Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me”* otherwise we shall perish.

**Your spiritual life does not at all depend on your human arm (power).. but it is a fellowship with the Holy Spirit as we shall explain in the chapter entitled “Striving and Grace”.**

You must then receive this sacrament of the Holy Unction, for St. John the Apostle says about it, *“But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things”, “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true” (1 Jn. 2:20,27).*

To know the importance of the Holy Spirit for your salvation, let me ask you, ‘Can you lead a spiritual life without the work of the Holy Spirit within you?.. Can

you proceed along the way of salvation without the work of the Holy Spirit supporting you?.. If it is impossible .. then you must receive this unction.

**Therefore, the apostles were very careful regarding giving the gift of the Holy Spirit to the believers. At first, it was given by the laying of the hands of the apostles.. that was before using myron (Chrism)..**

**We see this evident in the story of the acceptance of faith in Samaria..** where this sacrament was considered complementary to faith and baptism.. The Holy Bible says, *"Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:14-17).. So we see that baptism was not sufficient - alone - for the people of Samaria.. they had to receive the Holy Spirit.

**The same applies to the faith of the Ephesians..** When St. Paul came to Ephesus and finding some disciples *"he said to them, 'Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed!' And they said to him, 'We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit'"* (Acts 19:2). They were baptized into John's baptism only... But when St. Paul talked to them, *".. they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them"* (Acts 19:5,6).



**In baptism, then, we share Christ His death and we become sons.. while by the Holy Spirit we live in a way that suits our being sons... Both matters are necessary for our salvation.**

## **THE SACRAMENT OF EUCHARIST (HOLY COMMUNION)**

To know the importance of partaking of the flesh and blood of the Lord, we shortly cite the words of the Lord, *“Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the the last day... He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him...”* (Jn. 6:53-58).

From this speech, we see that eternal life depends on partaking of the flesh of the Lord to the extent that whoever does not partake of it, will have no life.. he will perish..

Would you ask after all this what the necessity of the holy communion for salvation is!

Being Orthodox, and having the Orthodox faith, we believe in what is said in the Divine Mass about the flesh of the Lord, *“.. given for us: salvation, and remission of sins, and eternal life for whoever partakes of it”*.

So, if anyone asks, 'Is salvation possible without the holy communion?' I say, 'No, this is impossible.. because the flesh of the Lord is given for us: salvation and remission of sins and eternal life for whoever partakes of it..

**How can we explain the importance of Eucharist theologically?...**

You are saved through baptism from the original sin.. This is the first salvation you have attained. Through baptism you have become a son of God, worthy of the deserts of the blood of Christ.. But you commit new sins every day, and you need to wash out your sins with the blood, for, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 Jn. 1:8).

**Every day you sin, and you need the flesh of Christ sacrificed on your behalf. You need the Holy Sacrifice an atonement for your sins.. In fact, the Holy offering of Eucharist is a continuation of the sacrifice of Christ. Therefore, you cannot be saved of your sins without it because it is given for us: salvation and remission of sins.. Through it, we also abide in the Lord as He Himself said.**

Someone may say to you, 'If you want to be saved, just throw yourself at the feet of Christ and say to Him: accept me, O Jesus!!' My brethren, such words need to be put into action.. **do you want Christ to accept you!.. This is the way of salvation:** to die with Christ, and be buried with Him in baptism and He will accept you..; to be anointed with the Holy Spirit, and He will accept

you..; to partake of His flesh and blood in order to abide in Him, and He will accept you.., to confess your sins, and He will accept you.. **This is the practical way through which the Lord may accept you.. It is improper to ask Him to accept you without going along the way planned by Him.**

The same may be said likewise regarding the words, 'Submit your life to Jesus'... How easy it is for a person to utter such words, but how difficult for him to carry out..! Do you think that submission of one's life is a slight matter?! All our spiritual striving is summed up in these words "submission of one's life".. They mean that a person submits his will to the Lord, submits his heart and his affections, his intentions and his thoughts... that is to do works meet for repentance.

Talk about the sacrament of Eucharist must be preceded by talk about the sacrament of repentance:

### **THE SACRAMENT OF REPENTANCE**

Is repentance necessary for salvation? Yes.. to the extent that without repentance there would be no salvation.. You may ask 'how can this be? .. I have accepted faith, I have been baptized and am already justified..'

**It is true that you had been bapitized and are delivered of the original sin.. But what about your actual sins..**

**those which you commit every day? where can you escape from them? and how?**

Do faith and baptism prevent you from sinning afterwards?! Certainly not..., for St. John the Apostle declares, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"* (1 Jn. 1:8). It is because, *"No one is good but One, that is, God."* (Mt. 19:17), and, *"For we all stumble in many things"* (Jas. 3:2) We say also in the "litany of the departed" *"No one is free from sin even though his life on earth be one single day"*.. What can we say about all these sins? How can one be saved of them? Can't this be through repentance?..

Someone may whisper to you saying, 'Just believe.. *Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household"*..!! (Acts 16:31)' My beloved brother, this verse is said before, previous to baptism.. **but as for your sins after being baptized, you have the advice of St. John the Apostle. He says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 Jn. 1:9).** The Holy Bible says also, *"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy"* (Prov. 28:13).. So, the holy church set up for us the sacrament of Repentance.

Since a believer is apt to fall and perish due to his sins in spite of his being in faith; and since man is in a continuous battle against sin and every day he stumbles

**and falls.. so, God gave us repentance through which we may be renewed, and cleansed and our sins washed out.**

No Protestant denies repentance and its importance and necessity.. Repentance includes regret, mourning, confessing and deciding to forsake sin, all of which are works.

**However, I do not say that a person can be saved through repentance alone for repentance without the blood of Christ is of no avail. But, I say that repentance makes one worthy of being washed off and cleansed by the blood of Christ and thus be saved.**

The blood of Christ is like a great treasure which we can only approach through repentance.. Then we take it and get enriched. On the other hand if we do not repent, the treasure retains its value but we remain far from it, in poverty, perishing of hunger. The compassion of the Father is there, the best robe and the fatted calf are prepared.. but the lost son has to come to the Father in repentance in order to have all this.. Let us admit then that *"God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life"* (Acts 11:18).

**The importance of repentance is further indicated in the words of the Lord Christ - glory be to Him - for He says, ".. unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Lk. 13:3).**

This verse shows that repentance is a means for salvation that saves from perdition.. It shows also that

without repentance, a sinner perishes and *“These times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent”* (Acts 17:30). Not only does God command people to repent, but also to *“do works befitting repentance”* (Acts 26:20).

**This repentance is preached by the holy apostles as a means for salvation from the perdition set for sinners. St. Peter the Apostle - for example - says that God, “is longsuffering towards us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.”** (2 Pet. 3:9). Here is a contrast between repentance and perdition.. which means that whoever repents will be saved and escapes perdition and vice versa...

St. Paul the Apostle also shows the wrath awaiting those who do not repent and are subject to the just condemnation of God.. He says, *“Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance? But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds”* (Rom. 2:4-6).

God did not require repentance from the gentiles and non-believers only, **but He required it also in the Revelation from the angels of the seven churches in Asia..** He says to the angel of the Church of Ephesus, *“Remember therefore from where you have fallen;*

*repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place - unless you repent'' (Rev. 2:5). God required repentance also from the angel of the church in Pergamos (Rev. 2:16). To the angel of the church in Sardis God said, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you'' (Rev. 3:3). And to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans He said, "be Zealous and repent'' (Rev. 3:19).*

**My brother, do not think that Adam's sin alone deserves death.. but in general the wages of sin is death. Any sin you commit after being baptized may lead to your perdition - unless you repent.**

**The sacrament of Repentance is also known in Church as the Sacrament of Confession.. for you need to come to the priest and confess your sins in order to have absolution from him and have them forgiven...**

The sacrament of Repentance had been practised by the holy church since the beginning.. The Holy Bible states that in the epoch of the apostles, "*Many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds'' (Acts 19:18).. Even before this epoch, the Bible tells about John the Baptist that many "... were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins."* (Mt. 3:6).

**Along the way of your salvation, I wish you would benefit of the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to His**

disciples when He said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained”* (Jn. 20:22,23).

#### 4- GOOD WORKS

We have already talked about salvation through the blood of Christ and how one needs faith, baptism, the sacrament of the Holy Unction, the sacrament of Repentance and the sacrament of Eucharist in order to benefit from the deserts of the blood of Christ.

Now, we have to talk about works and their importance for salvation.. This we shall do in a seperate Chapter due to its importance...





## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKS FOR SALVATION**

#### **Introduction:**

**The works of man are either good or evil...** Evil works lead a person to perdition and makes him lose his salvation.. But good works are necessary for salvation.. and absence of good works shows that the faith is dead and fruitless.. However, good works alone are not sufficient for salvation without faith, baptism and without the deserts of the blood of Christ.

**Good works are the fruit of faith;** they demonstrate faith and perfect it as we shall see in detail hereinafter. God required and even commanded us to do good works setting up punishments to be inflicted upon whomever neglects them.

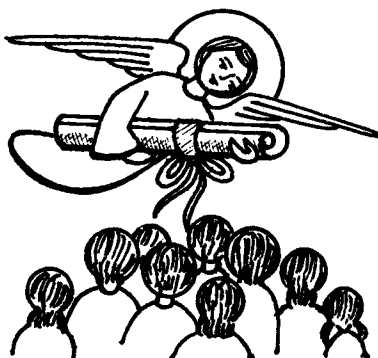
**Condemnation on the day of judgment will be according to one's works.**

**But we say that salvation is not attained through good works yet it is not attained without them..** For, salvation cannot be attained except through the blood of Christ.. but works make one worthy of the deserts of this blood.

Here, we must draw your attention to something very important which is that **a person needs the help of grace to be able to do good works as the Lord Christ** - glory be to Him - says, "*.. without Me you can do nothing*" (Jn. 15:5). Our good works then, are the outcome of the communion between our will and the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

**The texts of the Holy Bible which belittle the value of works**, either mean the works of the Law such as circumcision, ritual practices, observing days, months, and feasts and other similar matters or they are attacking the works which are not based on the blood of Christ and His redemption such as the works of non-believers of heathen and so on.. Such works are without faith or preceding faith.

I shall try to deal with each of these topics seperately as far as God's grace gives help..



## EVIL WORKS LEAD TO PERDITION

**It is a matter of course that evil works lead to perdition.. for God is perfect in His mercy as He is perfect in His justice. And as "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23,)** so a sinner must be punished for his sin...

It is true that Christ died for us.. but only the penitent would enjoy the deserts of the death of Christ. **Otherwise such free savlation would be an open door for recklessness and corruption, or would be a permission for sinning without fear of the punishment, depending on the blood of Christ and the atonement which paid for everything!!!**

In this respect, St. Paul the Apostle says, *"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? ... Therefore do not let sin reign in your immortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts"* (Rom. 6:1-2).

St. Paul goes on saying, *"What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin to death, or of obedience to*

*righteousness?" (Rom. 6:15,16).*

**In these two verses, the apostle shows us that if we obey sin - though being under grace - this obedience will lead us to death .. And if so, this means that we lose the eternal life which we have in Christ Jesus.**

How great the importance is of these verses especially because they are the words of inspiration on the mouth of St. Paul the Apostle upon whom the Protestants depend mostly regarding the topic of grace and justification through faith.. These verses are part of the Epistle to the Romans, the main epistle they depend on in this concern.. [See also Gal. 2:17].

### **Texts from the Pauline Epistles:**

Many are the texts of the Holy Bible that prove the fact that evil works lead to perdition. The following are some examples:

- **Gal. 5:19-21:**

*"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God"*

*Faith then, accompanied by such evil works, avails nothing and cannot save a person alone...*

• **Eph. 5:5,6:**

*“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man who is an idolator, has any inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience”.*

• **1 Cor. 6:9,10:**

*“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God.”*

• **Heb. 13:4:**

*“.. but fornicators and adulterers God will judge”..*

**In these explicit verses, St. Paul the Apostle mentions over twenty evils that close the gate of the Kingdom of God before any believer who may sin...**

Listen also to the very harsh words of St. Paul, the apostle of grace and justification, in his Epistle to the Hebrews:

- **Heb. 10:26,27,29-31:**

*“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries”.*

*“Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*

- The same meaning of the first two verses is asserted by the apostle in another part of the epistle (**Heb. 6:4-8**) in harsh similar words.

- **Rom. 1:18:**

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men”.*

- **Col. 3:5,6:**

*“Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience”.*

- **2 Thess. 1:8,9:**

*“... taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord”.*

We notice here that the everlasting destruction is set up as a punishment for both matters: abandoning faith, and forsaking works. The words *“do not know God”* refer to lack of faith, while the words *“do not obey the gospel”* refer to forsaking works.

- **Rom. 2:8-10:**

*“But to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness - indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honour, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”.*

We notice here that not only the punishment of the evil works is mentioned but also the reward of good works.

- **Comment:**

The verses quoted above show: **the punishment of sin, how a believer may perish if he sins, how evil works prevent a sinner from inheriting the Kingdom of God, how God's wrath fall on him and how he becomes among the sons of disobedience, how he is subject to fearful**

**judgment and fiery indignation which may devour him, how such a sinner will be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and how tribulation and anguish will be on his soul and how God will judge him.**

All this has been mentioned by St. Paul the Apostle who talked in great details about grace and justification through faith.. We started with these verses so that - in their light - we may understand the verses that dealt with grace and faith which St. Paul himself mentioned. Thus, no one may ever think that St. Paul the Apostle taught different doctrines.. for in almost every epistle he taught that sins close the gates of the Kingdom of heavens... He even taught that evil works do away with faith.. He said in his Epistle to Titus:

• **Tit. 1:16:**

*“They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work”.*

**Other texts from non-Pauline Epistles:**

• **2 Pet. 2:4-22:**

*“For if God did not spare the angels who sinned but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world ... then the Lord knows how to*



*deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness... and will utterly perish in their own corruption, and will receive the wages of unrighteousness... to whom the gloom of darkness is reserved forever... for if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb 'A dog returns to his own vomit' and, 'a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire' ''.*

• **1 Pet. 4:17,18:**

*"... What will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' "*

• **Acts 5:9,10:**

*"Then Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out... and the young men came in and found her dead, and carrying her out, buried her by her husband."*

The perdition of Ananias and Sapphira proves that evil work leads to destruction and faith alone is not sufficient.. Both of them were believers but their hearts were not upright; so they perished.. And the Bible states that after their death, *“great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things”*.

• **Rev. 21:8 :**

*“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolators, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death”*.

• **Rev. 18:7:**

*“In the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously, in the same measure give her torment and sorrow”*.

• **1 Jn. 3:15:**

*“Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him”*.

• **Jas. 3:1,2:**

*“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things”*.

• **Jas. 5:1,9:**

*“Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you... Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door”.*

• **Comment:**

**We see, from the previous texts that many sins lead to perdition and to the lake which burns with fire and brimstone. Such sins bring about torment and sorrow, deprive sinners of eternal life and cause misery and condemnation whether they are serious sins or slight as some may deem them.. such as much teaching, excessive riches, oppressing the hired or hating one’s brethren... etc. This is also the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.**

• **Jn. 5:28,29:**

*“For the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

• **Mt. 13:40-42:**

*“Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who*

*practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.”*

• **Mt. 7:19,20:**

*“every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them”.*

**In all the previous texts we notice that the Lord Jesus Christ did not say that the non-believers will be cast into fire or condemnation but those “who have done evil”, “all things that offend and those who practice lawlessness”, and those who “do not bear good fruit”.**

**The following texts indicate clearly that faith alone is of no avail for salvation unless accompanied by good works.**

• **Mt. 7:21-23:**

*“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”.*

**We notice here that those who were to perish were not merely believers but they were also endowed with gift and worked miracles.**

• **Mt. 25:41-46:**

*“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angles: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me. Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when ....? And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life’”.*

**We notice here likewise that those who were to perish were not murderers, fornicators or idolators, but the cause of their perdition was merely their not giving food to the hungered, nor visiting the sick..**

• **Lk. 13:3,5:**

*“Unless you repent you will all likewise perish”.*

• **Mt. 5:29,30:**

*“And if your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin...”.*

**Here, the lack of faith is not the cause for casting into hell but just one sin of the flesh such as the lust of the eyes which lead to adultery or to theft for example.**

• **Lk. 13:24-28:**

*“Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock, at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us’ And He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from’.... Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth..”*

**The Lord here is addressing believers who say to Him, ‘Lord, Lord’ ... However they were to perish because they were workers of iniquity.**

• **Mt. 19:24:**

*“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God”.*

**This shows that some people may lose the Kingdom not because they did not believe but because of the dangers of wealth.**

• **Mt. 12:36:**

*“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”.*

**One's faith does not protect one against falling under condemnation due to one's words.**

**This reminds us of the words of St. Basil the Great who said,**

**[What would it benefit me if I did all righteousness but said to my brother 'You fool', for then I would be in danger of hell fire as our Lord Jesus Christ said, "*But whoever says, 'You fool' shall be in danger of hell fire*".]**



## JUDGMENT ... ACCORDING TO WORKS

It is an obvious fact which shows the importance of works.

- In the Old Testament, David the Psalmist says, *“Also to You, O Lord, belongs mercy; for You render to each according to his work” (Ps. 62:12).*

And in the Ecclesiastes, it is stated, *“For God brings every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil” (Eccless. 12:14).*

- In the New Testament, this fact is asserted by the Lord Jesus Christ and by His holy disciples.. The Lord says, *“For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to His works” (Mt. 16:27).*

He says also, *“.. for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn. 5:28,29).*

Notice that He is speaking in this verse about works, *“those who have done good... those who have done evil”.*



**Condemnation is not for works only but even for words as the Lord says, "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Mt. 12:36).**

This is obvious also in the Revelation as the Lord sent to each of the seven angels of the churches saying, "*I know your works*" (Rev. 2:2). He also says expressly, "*And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work*" (Rev. 22:12).

It is also said in the same Book, "*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. 'Yes', says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors and their works follow them'*" (Rev. 14:13), and "*The dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books*" (Rev. 20:12).

The picture of judgment which the Lord revealed to us by His words to those on His right hand and the others on His left hand is judgment according to works.. For He said to those on His right hand, "*I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in ...*" Because of such good works He said to them, "*Come, you blessed of My Father inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*" (Mt. 25:31-46).

He did the same, likewise, concerning the evildoers, He judged them according to their works.

**A person, then, is apt to lose the Kingdom if only his heart becomes void of mercy and he does not give food to the hungry nor visit the sick. Whatever mercy he may have, and whatever vain confidence may fill his heart would avail him nothing!!** How hard are the words of St. James the Apostle in this regard; he says, *“What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?”* (Jas. 2:14).

Judgment according to works is also a fact very frequently referred to by St. Paul the Apostle. He says, *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”* (2 Cor. 5:10), and also, *“But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God who will render to each one according to his deeds”* (Rom. 2:5-7).

About the same topic St. Paul the Apostle says, *“.. whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Gal. 6:7,8). He says also, *“Each one’s work will become manifest; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work of what sort it is”* (1 Cor. 3:13). He says that every one will have his reward *“according to his labor”*, not *“according to his faith”* or *“according to the work of grace”*...

St. Peter the Apostle also-speaking about judgment according to works - says, "*.. the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear*" (1 Pet. 1:17).

Since works whether good or evil, are so serious as to cause one's condemnation, would anyone then dare belittle their value and importance?

**My beloved brethren, since God does not forget "a cup of cold water" and the reward is not lost, nor forget at all the labor of love, "therefore be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58).**

Works are very important for our salvation and for determining our eternal destiny.. Let us then contemplate on their necessity..

**+ Works are fruits requisite for faith:**

Works are fruits of faith.. for living faith must bear fruit and its fruit is good works Such works prove the existence of faith and its liveliness.. They are also fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit within us and are requisite for the life of repentance which we lead.

**Does God require such works or such fruit?.. Yes, He does and He emphasizes that..**

**John the Baptist stood crying out to the multitudes, “.. bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’...” (Lk. 3:8).** He wanted to say, ‘Your being chosen by God does not mean that you can be saved without works.. You must bear fruits worthy of repentance’ But if we do not do? In this case you will perish. What is the evidence?

John the Baptist, who among those born of women there has not risen one greater than he, goes on to say, *“And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Lk. 3:9).*

**It means that whoever does no good works with perish. You may argue saying, ‘I have Abraham as my father; I am born of God; I have been justified , sanctified and regenerated...’. Well, but I say to you, “Bear fruits worthy of repentance”.**

This is not said by John the Baptist alone, but in the New Testament, St. Paul the Apostle also says, *“.. but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance” (Acts 26:20).* And in the Epistle to Titus, St. Paul says, *“This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works” why do you say this, you great*

*saint? He proceeds to say, "And let our people also learn to maintain good works... that they may not be unfruitful" (Tit. 3:8,14).*

**Works then are fruits of faith. If you do have faith but your faith does not bear fruit, it is then dead faith.. For had it been living faith, it would have brought forth fruit..**

This issue is expounded by our master James the Apostle; he says, *"What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14).* You believe on Christ, and you say, *'The blood of Christ has cleansed me, renewed me and justified me'* Very well .. But suppose you have no good works, would such faith save you?!

St. James the Apostle asserts explicitly that faith is unable to save a person who has no good works..

But is it St. James only who attacks such dead faith? Nay.. But St. Paul the Apostle also says, *"And though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2).*

**If you are truly the son of God and a temple for Him, and the Holy Spirit dwells in you, then you ought to have works which are the fruits of the Spirit within you... St. Paul the Apostle describes such fruits saying, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22).**

Do you have these fruits? If not, what is the evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit within you?

A tree which bears no fruit is a dead tree, and the Lord Jesus Christ - glory be to Him - says, **“Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord’, shall enter the Kingdom of heaven but he who does the will of My Father in heaven”** (Mt. 7:19-21).

We notice here that the Lord has set a relation between salvation and good fruit which fruit appears in doing the father’s will.

**Due to the importance of these fruits, the Lord rebuked the Jews saying, “Therefore I say to you, the Kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it”** (Mt. 21:43).

The Lord has also explained to us how he intended to cut down the fig tree which gave no fruit and how the keeper of the vineyard implored Him, **“Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and fertilize it; and if it bears fruit, well. But if not, after that you can cut it down”** (Lk. 13:6-9).

Brother, if you do fear to be cut down like that tree, make haste now and do works meet for the sons of God. Do not look slightly upon the value of works for the ax is laid to the root of the tree.

Moreover, works are not only fruits of faith but they are also:

**+ Works are evidence of the existence of faith:**

St. James the Apostle says, *"Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"* (Jas. 2:18).

This shows that works are evidence of the existence of faith. This is evident from the words of the Holy Bible, *"You will know them by their fruits... every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit"* (Mt. 7:16,17).

**+ Works are evidence of being born of God:**

The Holy Bible says, *"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him"* (1 Jn. 2:29), and also, *"Whoever has been born of God does not sin"* (1 Jn. 3:9) This is what distinguishes God's children, for it is said directly after that, *"In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest"* (1 Jn. 3:10).

This goes along with what the Lord said to the Jews who boasted vainly of their being Abraham's children. He addressed them saying, *"If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham"* (Jn. 8:39). He considered works as evidence of sonship.

St. Paul the Apostle also asserts this point saying, *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God"* (Rom. 8:14).

If God's children, then, are those righteous people, what would we call the sinners? The Bible calls them, "*Brood of vipers!*" (Mt. 3:7) "*Children of the devil*" (Jn. 8:44, 1 Jn. 3:10), "*the sons of disobedience*", "*children of wrath*" (Eph. 2:2,3).

So, if anyone says to you, 'I am God's son because I have been renewed, justified and sanctified.', say to him, "*By their fruits, you will know them*".

We said that works are fruits of faith, are evidence of the existence of faith and are evidence of being born of God... What else?..

**+ By works faith is made perfect:**

This is what St. James the Apostle says, "*By works faith was made perfect*" (Jas. 2:22).

St. James the Apostle - when speaking about religion - goes far as to say, "*Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world*" (Jas. 1:27). Certainly, such things are all works... However, we do not use one verse only for our benefit as some others do because we believe in the principle which says that "using one verse only in dangerous".

Since works are of such importance, let us then remember always the words of St. James the Apostle, "*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin*" (Jas. 4:17).



**+ The importance of behaviour and good works:**

Some may inquire, 'What relation is there between salvation and one's behaviour? It is a matter of faith, not a matter of behaviour or good works'!! So, we shall indicate here the importance of behaviour and of keeping the commandments.

- St. John the Apostle says, *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 Jn. 1:6,7).

**Thus, walking in the light has two results: fellowship and cleansing.**

Walking in the light gives us fellowship with God and fellowship with each other.. while walking in darkness hinders our fellowship with God.

**Walking in the light makes us worthy of being cleansed with the blood of Christ as the apostle says, *"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"*.** It depends upon our walking in the light...

So, it is evident that the deserts of redemption and the cleansing with the blood of Christ requires our walking in the light... How significant, then, and how serious our behaviour is!...

- **Such good behaviour saves us from condemnation**

**on the day of judgment** as the Holy Bible states, *“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”* (Rom. 8:1).

It means that you can be saved from condemnation through the Lord Jesus Christ.. provided that you walk according to the Spirit i.e. to behave in a spiritual way.

**We notice here that the words of St. Paul the Apostle comprise both positive and passive aspects..** On one side, a believer should abstain from doing evil, and not walk according to the flesh.. While on the other side, he should bear fruit in virtue and walk according to the Spirit.

• **Therefore many are the commandments of our fathers the apostles regarding the importance of behaviour:**

St. Paul the Apostle says in his Epistle to the Galatians, *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit”* (Gal. 5:25).. *“He stresses the same point again saying, “Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh”* (Gal. 5:16). He orders us to walk *“in newness of life”*.

He sends to the Ephesians saying, *“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called”* (Eph. 4:1), and also, *“See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise”* (Eph. 5:15).

[See also 1 Thess. 2:12, 4:1; Col. 1:10; Rom. 13:13].

• **Hence, our fathers the apostles prevented mixing up with those who walk disorderly**, for St. Paul the Apostle says in his second Epistle to the Thessalonians, *“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not, according to the tradition which he received from us”* (2 Thess. 3:6,11).

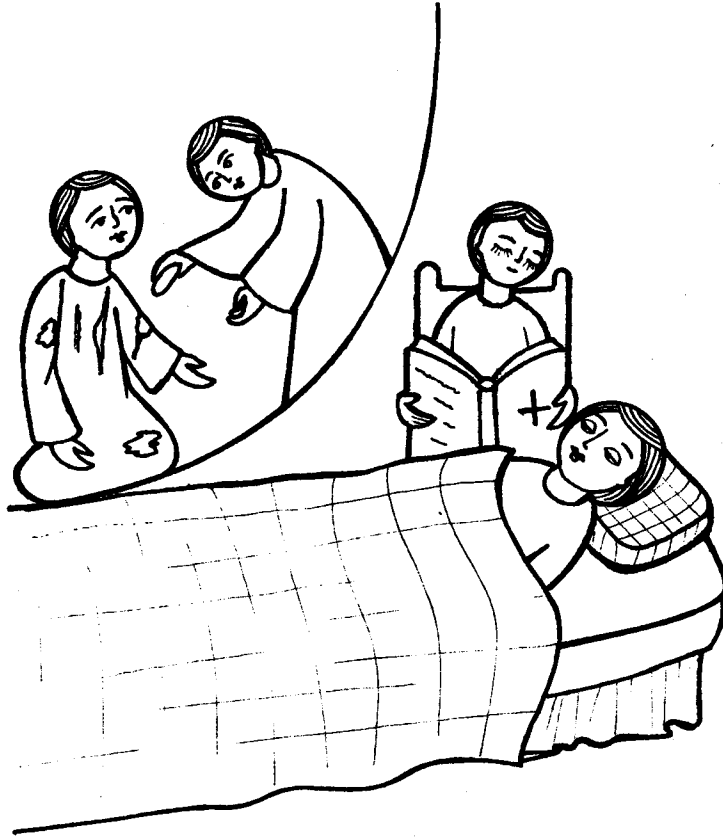
• **Our fathers the apostles see also that good behaviour is a sign of love and a proof of abiding in Christ**: St. John the Apostle says, *“This is love, that we walk according to His commandments”* (2 Jn. 6), and also, *“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked”* (1 Jn 2:6).

• **Keeping the commandments is an evidence of having love for Christ and being related to Him**: In this regard St. John the Apostle says, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome”* (1 Jn. 5:3). This is said also by the Lord Himself, for He says, *“He who has My commandment and keeps them, it is he who loves Me”* (Jn. 14:21).

As for being related to Christ, He says, *“For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother”* (Mt. 12:50).

If one's behaviour is of so great significance to the extent that on it depends our fellowship with God and with Church and our being cleansed of our sins through the blood of Christ; also according to it we are to be

**judged; besides its being an evidence of our love for God, our abiding in Him, and our relation to Him... would then anyone ignore it and say that our life is not just behaviour but it is faith!!..**



## CHAPTER 3

### STRIVING AND GRACE

Since works are necessary for salvation, would a person be saved by his works or by the grace of the Holy Spirit working in him? Many went far in defending either of them and were mistaken.. So, we shall try here to give an answer to such an important question i.e. How is man saved? Is it by striving? by grace? or by both together?

#### **Striving and grace together:**

A person cannot be saved by his striving alone, for the Lord Jesus Christ - glory be to Him - says, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (Jn. 15:5). You cannot be saved, then, by your own human arm (power) alone without God supporting you.. whatever striving or labor you may have.

**But grace would not save you by itself unless your will responds to it.. How beautiful the words of St. John Chrysostom in this regard are, he says, "God does not want us to lie down on our backs and He gives us the Kingdom.. for grace does not do everything alone". Grace is not a cause for laziness, carelessness and slackening.**

Do not stay then in laziness, without any striving in your life and unwisely say, 'I submit myself to grace to do whatever it wants for me!!' The work of grace within you, brother, does not mean that you sleep and slacken in performing your duties.

### **The example of Joshua and Moses:**

Joshua the son of Nun led the army and fought Amalek, while Moses stood on the top of the hill holding up his hands in prayer (Ex. 17:11).

**Did the people defeat Amalek through the fighting of Joshua's army or through the prayer of Moses?** Concentrating on one of them and neglecting the other would be a mistake.. because Joshua alone, however hard had he fought, without the prayer of Moses, or in other words without God's help, would have never defeated.

However, the prayer of Moses did not mean at all encouraging the army to slacken before the enemy depending on that prayer! Fighting and prayer went together, side by side. One was striving in the war and the other holding up his hands in prayer.. both were inseparable

### **The communion of the Holy Spirit:**

There is a beautiful verse which if well-understood would make us understand more about grace and striving, it is the apostolic benediction which says, "*The*

*grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.”* (2Cor. 13:14).

**It is a communion between two, working together: the Holy spirit and man. The Holy Spirit is able to save and redeem you..., but He would not do it alone.. He wants you to participate with Him in managing your own life ... This is the communion of the Holy Spirit.**

You may argue saying, ‘How is that! Is not the Holy Spirit-alone-able to save me? Nay, He is able... but He does not want ... It is not God’s dispensation to force you to do good, because you would not be rewarded for an action done without your discretion...

**Again, we say if it is the Holy Spirit who works alone, why then are there righteous people and evil ones? If the matter is confined to the work of the Holy Spirit alone, there would be no single sinner on the earth.**

The Holy Spirit can make a sinner repent... but He does not want to do so unless the sinner’s will agrees with Him ... It is a communion ...

The mere existence of just one sinner in the world not willing to repent is a sure evidence that grace, alone, does not do everything.

**Does the work of grace mean abolishing of personal freedom?**

No, for you still have your discretion and your will. You can respond to the work of the Holy Spirit within

you, to participate in work with Him and be led by Him ... **But you can also stop the work of the Holy spirit within you if you wish to. So, the Holy Bible warns us saying, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19), and also, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Eph. 4:30).**

Grace is standing knocking at the door.. as the Lord says, *"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me"* (Rev. 3:20). But what if he does not open? He has full discretion to determine his own destiny as he wishes...

**Grace offers you help ... and you have the option to accept or refuse, to work or not ...**

If you do participate with the Holy Spirit in action, for your own sake, you will-with the grace of the Holy Spirit-attain perfect holiness according to the extent of your response and submission ... But if you refuse to participate, grace will never force you to do good.

**Many people go far in interpreting the word "striving" as to consider it including a heresy? as if it were something against faith, and against God's help! All this is wrong.**

Grace is just a weapon offered you.. You have the option: either to fight with it and conquer, or neglect it and meet the adversary disarmed and be defeated.. In both cases, you are free to carry out your own will.. but it is for your own good to make use of the weapon offered you for your own salvation.



**Take as an example for this, the soldiers who receive from their leadership during war, tanks, guns, bombs, and weapons to fight with.. In case they conquer, is their victory due to their own bravery or to the weapons?..**

Their bravery alone, without weapons, would not be sufficient at all to bring them victory because fighting needs weapons .. Likewise, weapons alone without skilled soldiers to use them, can do nothing. The same applies to spiritual wars in which man's will participates in work with the spiritual weapons.

### **The necessity of striving:**

Many indeed are the holy texts which confirm the necessity of striving.. from among these texts we cite the words of the apostle, *"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Heb. 12:1). Then he rebukes the Hebrews saying, *"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin"* (Heb. 12:4)

It behoves us, then, to strive.. not the ordinary striving, but striving to bloodshed against sin. Would anyone ask, 'Until when?', we say, 'Until the end of one's life.. as the Holy Bible says, *".. he who endures to the end will be saved"* (Mt. 10:22).

The apostle who strove much and spoke of striving explains to us how his life was supported by grace, he

says, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give to me on that day.."* (2 Tim. 4:7,8).

**It is a striving, but not a personal one separate from God's work .. It is rather a combination of both matters .. as the apostle says about his preaching, *"To this end I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily"* (Col. 1:29).**

**It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs:**

Some people go far in talking about the role of grace as to belittle the role of striving.. depending on the verse which says, *"So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy."* (Rom. 9:16).

**What does this mean? Does it mean that God's mercy grants us free salvation and transfers us to the Kingdom of heavens without any effort or good will on our side?! Does it mean that a person relaxes lazily and runs not towards good nor even wishes it depending on God's mercy to have compassion upon him in spite of his slackness?!**

This can never be the meaning.. It is impossible to say that the apostle meant this by his words *"not of him who runs"* which in another place he says, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race.."*

**He who says, “not of him who runs”, he himself has finished the race and attained the crown of righteousness as a reward for his running and his good fight.**

The same person who said, “not of him who runs” said also about himself, “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me-Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended, but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead. I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of god in Christ Jesus*” (Phil. 3:12-14).

**St. Paul himself pressed on that he might lay hold .. Is this just a personal experience which St. Paul had? Certainly not .. It is for everyone. So, St. Paul goes on saying, “Therefore let us, as many as are mature (perfect), have this mind” (Phil. 3:15). Then, if you are mature (perfect), you have to press on so that you may apprehend.**

St. Paul himself calls us all to this running and this striving; he says, “*Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it*” (1 Cor. 9:24).

What is it that you require us to do, great apostle? Why should we run since it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs? what is the use of running and striving then? Suffice us to stand still where we are and wait for God’s grace to come and transfer us from death to life

and bring us into the Kingdom of heavens freely without our willing or running..!

But St. Paul proceeds saying, *“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things ... Therefore I run thus ... But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”* (1 Cor. 9:25-27).

This running and striving then, is not only for us, the weak believers, but also for the apostles. As we see from the verses, **St. Paul himself ran and pressed on .. though he was filled with the Holy Spirit and grace worked in him more than in the others .. Yet he was in need to run, to pass on, to finish the race and to fight the good fight .. He calls us to do as he did in order that we may attain.**

**This great saint disciplined his body and brought it into subjection in order not to become disqualified! If St. Paul himself strove and was afraid lest he should be refused ... What ought we to do then?**

What then is the meaning of the words, *“It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”*.

The meaning is that you cannot attain the Kingdom just by your willing or striving, without God's work within you, without the help of His grace, and without the communion of the Holy Spirit.

The main action in this regard is by God who shows

mercy .. So, whoever depends on his own will and his own striving is actually in the wrong way.. But the right thing is that I press on, and God shows mercy .. and when God blesses my labor I ascribe the result to God, not to my own labor.

**It is true that it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy .. But towards whom does God show mercy? One of the saints said, 'God shows mercy towards them who will and who run'.**

This reminds me of another verse said by St. Paul also, *"So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase"* (1 Cor. 3:7).

**True indeed, it is God who gives the increase; but to what? to the plant which is planted and watered. Then, we must not abstain from planting and watering saying to ourselves that neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters.. and wait foolishly for God to give the increase!!**

**The right thing is to plant and water yet say that neither he who plants is anything nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase...**

**It is the same as we said before that we have to will and to run yet say that it is not of him who wills nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.**

### **The spiritual war:**

Let us meditate on St. Paul's description of the spiritual war in his Epistle to the Ephesians; he says, *"Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication..."* (Eph. 6:10-18).

**Here, we find wrestling, spiritual fight and striving, while the weapon is the whole armor of God.** This does not mean that you do not strive, but you ought to strive, yet depend on God in your striving .. Do not be like one given God's spiritual weapons but he stands still not using them, nor fighting with them .. The weapons are available but one must fight.

**God's weapons have their power but unless you use them, you will be defeated.** there are some persons whom St. Paul mentions even weeping in (Phil. 3:18), those could have used such weapons but because they neglected them, deviated towards sin and submitted to it, they perished in their sins.

**We notice here also that among such spiritual weapons are righteousness, truth, the word of God, prayer and supplication, being watchful... which are all works.**

St. Peter the Apostle also speaks about this spiritual war; he says, *"Be Sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith,..."* (1 Pet. 5:8,9). The devil, our adversary is like a roaring lion: What should we do, then?

St. Peter says, *"Resist him"*.. i.e. strive, be firm and be brave but do not depend on your human arm (power) ... You ought rather to *"resist him steadfast in the faith"*.. This verse includes both sides: striving in resisting the devil, and grace upon which depends the one who strives through faith.

It is the striving which St. Paul the Apostle calls for while rebuking the Hebrews, for he says, *"You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin"* (Heb. 12:4)..

Here, striving and resistance are required but we should resist by God's whole armor, not by our own power and we should be steadfast in the faith.

Thus, St. Paul the Apostle says to his disciple St. Timothy, *"Fight the good fight of faith"* (1 Tim. 6:12). Here, he requires both matters; striving and faith.. and both go together. St. Paul speaks again about his own striving; he says, *"We were bold in our God to speak to you the gospel of God in much conflict"* (1 Thess. 2:2), and in his Epistle to the Colossians, he says, *"For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you"*.

### **The example of David and Goliath:**

How did David defeat Goliath? Was this through God's grace and help? Certainly, yes. David depended wholly on God, so he said to Goliath, *"You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts", "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you and take your head from you ... Then all this assembly shall know that the Lord does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands"* (1 Sam. 17:45-47).

The greatness of David in this battle appears in that he brought God into the field of the battle.. Before David came, there had been no mention of God.., only talk about the man who had come up, the valiant who defied the army and about the prize of the king to the person who would kill that man (1 Sam. 17:25).

David brought the Lord's name into the battle as we see from his words, *"I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts... This day the Lord will deliver you into*



*my hand... the Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion... the battle is the Lord's... etc.*” But, was David satisfied with introducing the name of the Lord into the battlefield? Did he depend on that saying ‘Through faith I shall kill Goliath, without labor or striving. The battle is the Lord’s and He will give him into our hands’?.. No, but David, “*chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in a shepherd’s bag, in a pouch which he had, and his sling was in his hand. And he drew near to the Philistine.*” (1 Sam. 17:40)...

Then as Goliath drew near to meet David, it was so that, “*David hastened and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. Then David put his hand in his bag and took out a stone; and he slung it and struck the Philistine in his forehead, so that the stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the earth. So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone, and struck the Philistine and killed him. But there was no sword in the hand of David. Therefore David ran and stood over the Philistine, took his sword and drew it of its sheath and killed him, and cut off his head with it.*” (1 Sam. 17:48-51).

It is true indeed that the battle is the Lord’s. In this example, it was the Lord who delivered Goliath into the hand of David.. But David had to fight, to hasten and run toward the army, to choose certain stones, to put the stones in the sling and to strike skilfully. He had also to draw his sword of its sheath and prevail over the Philistine and kill him... All these steps are works...

However, we ascribe this victory to God, not to David, because the stone might have missed the deadly point and Goliath might have not died by it. So, although David fought very skilfully and conquered, yet we say along with St. Paul the Apostle, "*It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy*" (Rom. 9:16). There must be striving and labor but at the end victory is to be ascribed to God.

### **Faith and works together:**

The same is to be said of the spiritual striving... Undoubtedly, it is a battle likewise.

**You fight with all your power, but the power you have is God's power ... You fight with every weapon you have, but this weapon is God's whole armor...** On the other hand, do not say 'I shall sleep and dream; for in my dreams I see God's grace saving me...?'

God does not save the sluggard, and the grace does not encourage slackness and permissiveness.

**Suppose that a pupil does not study, but he goes to the priest asking his prayers for him to succeed, trusting in the power of prayers... What do you say of that?...**

The rule is "Faith without works is dead".. A pupil has to study, and to ask for prayers.. Thus faith and works go together in unity.

**Some would say that striving represents the human arm (power) while it is said, "*Cursed is the man who... makes flesh his strength*" (Jer. 17:5).**

In fact striving becomes a human power if a person depends on himself alone..., in other words if he thinks that he can be saved by his own striving without the work of grace! At this point he is faced with the words of the Lord, "*Without Me you can do nothing*" (Jn. 15:5).

**Fighting can never be without a weapon.. and a weapon by itself without fighting, and without a person to use it skilfully, cannot bring victory. Both are inseparable as St. Paul the Apostle says, "*If anyone competes..., he is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules*" (2 Tim. 2:5).**

Thus, you have to strive, and your striving be according to the rules so that you may be saved.

### **The striving of the Apostles and pastors:**

Did not the apostles strive and labor for faith? Nay, for St. Paul the Apostle himself says, "*.. I labored more abundantly than they all*" (1 Cor. 15:10). All the apostles labored and St. Paul labored more. He even recorded his labors in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 11: 23-33). If it were merely a question of grace.. why then would St. Paul labor? what would be the necessity of evangelizing, preaching, giving advices, serving the word of God, pastoral work and labor as long as grace was to do everything!!

**Why should a pastor labor, perform his pastoral duties look after people and strive? Is not God able to speak in the hearts of people and save them alone? What need**

**is there for apostles, pastors and preachers?! What need is there for any striving? Do we call all this human power (arm)?**

Would grace do everything alone, a priest then might sleep and pray in his heart to the Lord saying, 'O Lord, it is You who look after your people and take care of them. Who am I to strive and look after them?! It is not of him who wills nor of him who runs but of You who care for the people!!

**As for preachers also, why should a preacher give a sermon? He can lie resting at home and say, 'O Lord, it is Your grace that speaks in the hearts of the people, guide them and saves them!!'**

You also, why do you labor in your life whether in prayers, in fasting or striving.. Rest then depending on grace to do everything!

#### **Working with God:**

We say all this because many people were lost because they followed a wrong counsel said by others, which is: 'Do not strive. Why should you strive? God will not begin to work for you except when you stop working! Stop working then so that God may work!!.

**What strange deadly words are these? How can it be that you stop work in order to let God work! why do you not work with God so He works with you, works within you, and works through you, as St. Paul said**

about himself and Apollos, "*For we are God's fellow workers*" (1 Cor. 3:9).

Why do we separate our work from God's work. Why do we not be fellow workers with Him, to work with Him, and He with us. So, St. John the Apostle speaks about the Lord and the "*fellowship with Him*" (1 Jn. 1:6), and St. Paul speaks about *the community of the Holy Spirit...*

**God, with His grace, with His power, and with His Holy Spirit says to you, 'I want to work with you to save you. If you accept to work with Me, you will be saved, but if you do not accept, you will deprive yourself of such salvation.. I stand knocking at the door, offering My grace, My love, My strength, My help and all the powers necessary for the salvation of the soul at which door I am knocking ... But, if anyone opens for Me, if he accepts to work with Me, if he gives up Himself to Me to work in, if he submits to My work, then I shall co-work with him and He with Me'.**

**The extravagant point of view:**

The worst of what I read throughout my life concerning extravagance in denying the value of works was what F.B. Mayer wrote in his book entitled, (Saved and Preserved)...

**Even the most fanatic Protestants who fight striving, say that a person has to strive in one field only i.e. striving in prayers .. But F.B. Mayer fights even this striving in prayers.**

Under the title "When I stopped my efforts", he says, 'You have to realize a fact: that **as long as you wrestle with God, you will lose the most valuable blessings!** Jacob wrestled with God all the night until the breaking of day but did not advance even one step... But when he became no more able to wrestle because the socket of his hip was out of joint and was about to fall, he received the blessing that made him head!! (Gen. 32:24-29)'.

Mayer goes on saying, 'You have moaned and struggled and implored but in vain. **Now you have to stop and keep silent!! Your tremendous efforts complicated your affairs more'!!** This Protestant writer goes on fighting prayers, striving, imploring and wrestling with God till he says, '**Know that God is able to save you ... He was waiting all this long time to save you ... and when you stop your labor, He will begin'!!** In this way, he calls people to stop running and working.

In another chapter entitled "we do not seek but we receive", he says, 'You will not get the blessing you long for by struggling and striving, by your cries and prayers, nor by your determination and attempts but rather by calming yourself down before God and accepting grace'.

He gives an example of the ineffectiveness of striving in prayers, the story of a person who struggled for two years raising prayers to God to grant him power to overcome a certain temptation.. It seemed that the prayers were not accepted and he became very desperate. But when he stopped prayers, God began to work...!!!

Does this teaching satisfy anyone's conscience? The Holy Bible itself in all the scriptures calls us to strive in prayers, to pray unceasingly and to keep watch and pray... But it is the Protestant extravagance that denies the value of striving even in prayers!!

### **Spiritual exercises:**

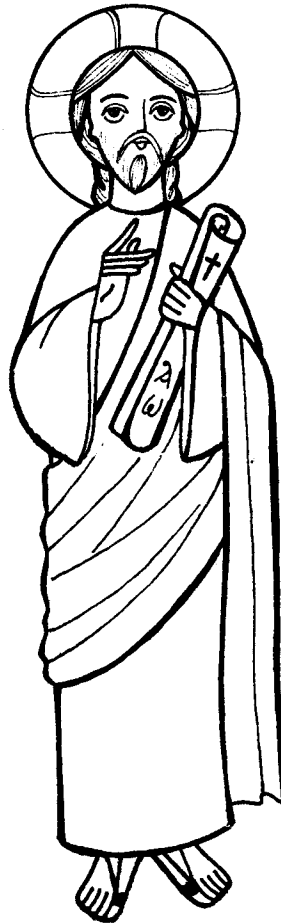
**The Protestants and others like them who fight striving and works, fight also spiritual exercises as if these also mean dependence on human arm (power).**

But we say that only if a person proceeds with his spiritual exercises depending on his own power, he will certainly be mistaken .. It is good for a person to practise but he should depend on God's power and say along with St. Paul the Apostle, "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me*" (Phil. 4:13).

**Also, speaking about his own exercises, St. Paul the Apostle says, "*This being so, I myself always strive to have a conscience without offense toward God and men*" (Acts 24:16). And in his Epistle to the Philippians, he says, "*Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need*" (Phil. 4:12). He had become trained and had his senses exercised (Heb. 5:14).**

**It is good then for a believer to have spiritual exercises and can even pray God saying, "*Lead me in Your truth and teach me*" (Ps. 25:5). But, in all these exercises he**

has to depend on God's power which gives him help; and in every success he has to ascribe the merit to God not to his own courage or self-control.





**CHAPTER 4**

**CONFIDENCE AND TRUST  
CONCERNING THE KINGDOM  
OF GOD**

Two questions often occur to many people, viz:

1. To what extent may one have hope in God's mercy?
2. Can a believer trust that he would attain the Kingdom?

What is the answer to these two questions?

**To what extent may one have hope in God's mercy?**

**A. Unlimited trust in God:**

If we inquire: to what extent one would have hope in God's mercy, we find that actually there is no limit for such hope.. As far as God's mercy is, hope in it would be. **And since God's mercy is unlimited, hope in God's mercy is likewise unlimited.**

Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned in (1 Cor. 13:13). Like any other virtue, it grows in a person until it reaches its relative perfection in him. But hope

cannot be perfected unless it becomes void of any doubt and confirmed with all certainty.

**The certainty of hope emanates from two things: one pertains to God, and the other to the person himself. Regarding God, hope is based on believing in: God's attributes, His previous dealings, the atonement of His blood and His true promises.**

As for God's attributes, He is unlimited in His mercy, His compassion, His forgiveness and His love. He has no pleasure at all that the wicked should die but that he should turn from his ways and live (Ezek. 18:28). Besides, God's previous dealings demonstrate such attributes.. The atonement of His blood is unlimited, and sufficient for the remission of the sins of the whole world from the beginning of the ages to the end of ages. As for His promises, they are abundant and true, opening the doors of hope wide before the penitents.

This is one aspect of hope. If one sees eternity through it, one would be filled with trust.

As For the person himself is his look to himself capable of making him trust that he would attain the Kingdom?

#### **B. We should not trust our own will:**

**I do not like the song which says, 'I do trust...'** It is a protestant song certainly... Though some of its words are correct, it gives in general a protestant teaching which is unsound.

But if someone asks you, 'Do you have trust?' what answer would you give?...

**You can say, 'Yes, I have trust in the blood of Christ, unlimited trust.. but I do not trust myself. I do not trust my free will which may deviate towards evil and though having begun in the Spirit, I would be made perfect by the flesh. (Gal. 3:3).**

So, those who lose salvation, lose it not because God is not able to save them, but because their own will deviate towards evil...

Would then a person lose hope? No, this is an extravagance in which Cain - the first sinner of Adam's offspring - fell when he said, "*My punishment is greater than I can bear!*" (Gen 4:13). Judas also fell in despair and went and hanged himself (Mt. 27:5).

**A person who loses hope is mistaken as we have seen; likewise is the person who depends on false hope based on self - righteousness, A person would be mistaken also if he neglects striving and caution, depending on the blood of Christ and not doing anything that may make him deserve the effectiveness of this blood...**

A person would be mistaken also if he thinks that he had done away with sin and that he is renewed and sanctified and leads a new life in which he can never sin. This is a false hope which conceals behind it a kind of self-righteousness whether a person is aware or not...

We trust in the blood of Christ and in its sufficiency

for atonement and redemption. But, at the same time we admit - within us - that we are sinners and that our sins can very possibly lead us to perdition...

A person who says, 'I trust I shall attain the Kingdom' seems as if he were saying 'I am sure I will not sin, and even though I sin, I am sure I will repent and my repentance will be true and acceptable!!'

Perhaps such a person may object to my words and say, 'No, you are wrong. I shall not speak about repentance; but if I do sin, I have the verse which says, "*And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins*" (1 Jn. 2:1,2).

**Yes, brother, He is the propitiation for our sins. But, it is He who said also, "*.. unless you repent, you will all likewise perish*" (Lk. 13:3). Or do you think that He will intercede for you though you do not repent?! No, this is a false notion... Be concerned then about your eternal life, and repent .. Know that whoever does not repent, will not have Christ as an advocate but he is warned by the words, "*Hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you*" (Rev. 3:3).**

**Be humble then, brother, and listen to the warning of St. Paul the Apostle, "*Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.*" (1 Cor. 10:12).**

**You are not stronger than those who fell before, but perhaps you are in a lower level than that which they were in before their fall.** Listen to what St. Paul says and consider carefully the qualities mentioned, he says, *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away...”* (Heb. 6:4-6).

How terrible and frightful!! Did you who trust that you will attain the kingdom - attain such high levels which those have attained? Have you been enlightened, and have you become partaker of the Holy Spirit? Have you tasted the heavenly gift, the good word of God and the powers of the age to come?! **However, those who received all such gifts, fell and not this only but they also perished** because the apostle says, *“It is impossible... to renew them again to repentance”* He even compares them to a land that is, *“rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned”* (Heb. 6:6,8).

### **C. Are you saved or not?**

A young man asked me, ‘what answer shall I give if someone asks me whether I am saved or not’..

First, you should know that such a person is not a true Orthodox.. Certainly he is a Protestant or at least living in a protestant environment and his culture is protestant. That is because whoever ignores your baptism and the

holy sacraments you have received trying to fill you with doubt regarding your faith and calling you to believe and be saved as if you were a heathen all your past life!! such a person can never be an Orthodox; his speech betrays him.

Anyhow, you can answer him saying, 'Yes, I am already saved - through baptism - from the original sin, inherited from Adam. This first salvation is attained through the blood of Christ and the atoning and redeeming power of this blood..

As for the final salvation, it shall be attained when we put off the flesh.. We are still in a war, "*For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but... against spiritual hosts of wickedness*" (Eph. 6:12).. We shall attain salvation only when we canquer and win in this war...

As long as we are in the flesh, we cannot say that we have conquered and attained salvation... Hence, the holy church does nto celebrate the birthdays of the saints nor the days of their acceptance in church, but it celebrates the days of their departure or martyrizing according to what the Bible says, "*Remember those... whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct*" (Heb. 13:7). Thus, in the commemoration of saints during the Holy Mass, we remember the souls of all the righteous persons who were perfected in faith or whose lives ended in faith...

This reminds us of the story of the passing of St.

Macarius the Great.. The devils chased his soul after its coming out of the body, saying to him, 'You are already saved, Macara'. But he did not say to them, 'Yes, through the Lord's grace I am saved' except when he entered into Paradise.

**D. Let your answers be from the faith of the church:**

If you are asked any question relating to beliefs, never depend on your own views or understanding when you give an answer; for the Holy Bible says, "*Lean not on your own understanding*" (Prov. 3:5).

**Since you are a son of the Coptic Orthodox Church, you have to give the answers which conform with the faith of your church.. This faith is found in the recognized books of the Orthodox Coptic church, in the sayings of its fathers, in its laws and traditions.**

Let us examine two of the church books that are of great importance viz: the Euchologion which comprises the holy liturgy, and the book of the canonical hours (agpeya)..

You pray everyday the **Vespers** (the eleventh hour prayer - at 5 O'clock p.m.) in which you say,

"If the righteous is hardly saved, where shall I, a sinner, appear!"

"Count me, O God, among those of the eleventh hour" "I have spent my life in pleasures and desires, the time in running out".

**“I practised evil with diligence and enthusiasm; with earnestness and keenness I committed every sin. For this, I deserve suffering and condemnation”.**

**Is there even one phrase among all this that may show that you are already saved and can be sure of attaining the Kingdom’.**

**Or rather they are prayers raised by a broken spirit confessing its sins and admitting that it deserves punishment and asking the Lord for mercy?...**

Before sleeping, you stand before God with the same contrite heart to pray the **Compline** (the twelfth hour prayer - at 6 O'clock) saying,

**“Behold, I am about to stand before the Just Judge in fear because of my numerous sins, for the life that is spent in pleasures deserves condemnation. Repent therefore, O my soul, so long as you dwell on earth”.** Then you reproach yourself saying.

**“If your wicked deeds and nasty evils are revealed before the Just Judge, what answer would you give while you are lying on the bed of sin and slackening in vanquishing the body?”.**

**This is the broken - heartedness of the tax-collector who stood before God in humility not the pride of the Pharisee... We do not stand before God with a feeling of righteousness as if we are already regenerated,**



**sanctified, saved and sure of attaining the Kingdom. But, in every prayer, we admit that we deserve condemnation and ask for salvation ...**

The same goes with the prayer in the compline which begins with the words, "Lord, by Your grace protect us".. In this prayer each of us implores the Lord saying,

"I have sinned against You, have mercy upon me and save my soul. Save me Lord, for I am seeking You. Teach me to do Your will".

In the Sext (the sixth hour prayer - at 12 O'Clock-noon), we start with (Ps. 54:1) "*Save me O God, by Your name*" and we pray the Lord saying,

"Tear up the deed of our sins, O Christ our Lord, and save us".

Then we conclude this part of the prayer saying,

"My words I utter, and He hears my voice and saves my soul peacefully".

Thus, the church teaches us to implore the Lord every day asking Him to tear up the deed of our sins.

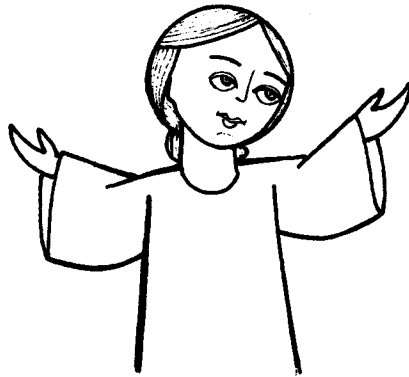
In baptism, you are saved of your original sin. Your old man died when you died with Christ and were buried with Him... However, you still do sin everyday and if you say that you have no sin, you deceive yourself, and the turth is not in you (1 Jn. 1:8).

**You sin everyday, and since the wages of sin is death, you are subject to death everyday and do need salvation**

**everyday. You need the blood of Christ everyday to cleanse you of every sin. Therefore, you have to confess your sins continually, to repent, and to partake of the Lord's flesh and blood that is "given for us a salvation, a remission of sins and an eternal life for whoever partakes of it" as the prayers of the Holy Mass teach us.**

Salvation then, is renewed continually. You pray for it every day, and obtain it every time you repent, and in every absolution the priest prays on your head and everytime you partake of the Lord's flesh and blood.

**Now, after this introduction, let us return to the subject of confidence and the thirst to have the Kingdom.**



These conditions  
for confidence

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## **BASICS AND CONDITIONS OF CONFIDENCE AS EXPLAINED BY ST. JOHN THE APOSTLE**

### **The confidence and certainty of St. Paul:**

Those who say they are sure to have the Kingdom depend mainly on the words of St. Paul the Apostle, *"Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus"* (Heb. 10:19), and also, *"... I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that day"* (2 Tim. 1:12) *"Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness"* (2 Tim. 4:8). besides other holy texts which many people depend on saying that they have **"the certainty of St. Paul"!!**

We shall treat - God willing - all these texts explaining and commenting on them with the help of God's grace.

**But, we want first to know what the basis is for such confidence...** So, to begin with, we find no better explanation for this point than that given by St. John the Apostle regarding the conditions, reasons and basics of confidence.

What are then the basics and conditions which St. John the Apostle mention?

**1. The first condition is to have an easy conscience:**

St. John the Apostle says, *“If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God”* (1 Jn. 3:21). Here the condition is that our hearts do not condemn us which means that our conscience have nothing to reproach or blame us for .. In other words: that we do not do anything wrong for which our hearts might reproach us..

The source of confidence here and its basis is that our hearts be satisfied regarding our relation with God and find nothing to blame us for.. But if our hearts blame us, confidence will - no doubt - be shaken.

**Confidence then is due to having an easy conscience..** But, how can one have an easy conscience? St. John expounds this idea saying, *“If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight”* (1 Jn. 3:21,22).

**Now the source of confidence is obvious which is that we keep God’s commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight... This is the cornerstone of the teaching: if we keep God’s commandments and do the things that are pleasing in His sight, our conscience will be at ease and our hearts will find nothing to blame us for.. Only then we shall have confidence towards God.**

What else is said by St. John the apostle?

## 2. The second condition is to abide in Christ:

St. John says, *“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming. If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him”* (1 Jn. 2:28,29).

**Here is another condition for confidence: that we abide in Christ... If we do not abide in Christ, we shall have no confidence, and we shall be ashamed before Him at His coming... It is a clear teaching..**

Would you say then, ‘I am saved, I have confidence, I am sure that I will attain the Kingdom!!’ though you are rebuked by your conscience for a certain behaviour or you are not abiding in Christ.. If so, you are deceiving yourself or talking nonsense...

**Do you want to have confidence? Abide in Christ then.. And if you want to know what does abiding in Him mean, come let us consult the Holy Bible and be guided by it:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, *“Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage”* (Gal. 5:1) that means you must not let any sin subjugate you.

What else is there about abiding in Christ?

**St. John the Apostle explains, “Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him”** (1 Jn. 3:6).

So, if you do sin, you are not abiding in Him and in this case, you will have no confidence and you will be ashamed before Him at His coming.

How easy it is for you to say 'I have confidence, I am sure of attaining the Kingdom', without considering what the Bible says regarding the meaning of confidence which requires you not to sin..

This meaning is confirmed by St. John the Apostle in the same Epistle, for he says, "*Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him and He in him*" (1 Jn. 3:24).

It is a mutual abidance which can be achieved by keeping the commandments.

But to what extent a person has to keep the commandments? The apostle answers us saying, "*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked*" (1 Jn. 2:6).

Who dares, after reading this explicit text, to say that he is abiding in the Lord?! And since we are not abiding in Him, how could we have confidence then and be not ashamed before Him at His coming?..

It is better then for each one of us, instead of saying 'I have confidence, I am sure' rather to stand with the tax-collector beating his breast and saying "*God be merciful to me a sinner*" (Lk. 18:13).

You can only say that you have confidence and you are sure that you will attain the Kingdom if you are

continually abiding in Christ, walking just as He walked, or at least always keeping His commandments and doing the things that please Him, for the apostle says, "... *he who does the will of God abides for ever*" (1 Jn. 2:17). He says also "*If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father*" (1 Jn. 2:24).

The Lord of Glory Himself explains to us the importance of abiding in Him; He says, "*If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*" (Jn. 15:6).

Do you want then to abide in Him as a branch that the sap of the vine may flow within you in order not to wither nor be cast into fire and burn? Hear then what the Lord says, "*He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him*" (Jn. 6:56).. O Lord, what else? "*He... will live forever*" says the Lord (Jn. 6:58).

As we have seen in detail, the first condition for confidence is to have an easy conscience; the second is to abide in the Lord... Now what is the third condition?

### 3. The third condition is to have **perfect love:**

As the apostle said, to have confidence, a person must abide in God.. And in order to abide in God, he has to abide in love because God is love... This is what St. John the Beloved says, "*God is love, and he who abides in*

*love abides in God, and God in him” (1 Jn. 4:16).*

**So, if a person abides in God’s love and his love is perfected, then he will have confidence. Thus the apostle continues his speech saying, “Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment” (1 Jn. 4:17).**

How can we abide in God’s love? The Lord Himself tells us, *“If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love” (Jn. 15:10).* In order then to attain that perfect love which provides confidence, we must be perfect in keeping His commandments.

**And if we attain such confidence due to perfect love, we shall have no fear but peace...** Thus, St. John proceeds saying, *“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear” (1 Jn. 4:18).*

**Brother, have you attained this perfect love? Do you now love the Lord from all your heart, from all your mind and with all your power? Do you now -in your perfect love for God - hate the world and all its pleasures, desires and glories and even hate yourself? If so, and if you continue in this state, you are blessed indeed. You can have confidence then as long as you are abiding in this perfect love.**



**A last word:**

**In conclusion I say that confidence as explained by St. John the Apostle has conditions, among which are the following:**

- A person has to keep God's commandment and do the things that please Him. Thus his conscience becomes easy and his heart finds nothing to blame him for..
- A person must abide in Christ, with the full meaning of such abidance.
- A person has to attain perfect love for God; which love might cast out fear.

**If a person attains such levels, he will have complete confidence and will have "the certainty of St. Paul" which is greatly praised by certain people, and which we shall explain hereafter...**

Believe me, many of those who say that they have confidence and certainty are shallow - minded and did not grasp the real meaning of confidence as explained by St. John the Apostle.



## CONFIDENCE AND CERTAINTY IN THE PAULINE EPISTLES

### 1. The certainty of St. Paul and his crown:

Those who say they are sure that they will attain salvation depend on the words of St. Paul the Apostle which say, "*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness*" (2 Tim. 4:8), and, "*For I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*" (2 Tim. 1:12).

To discuss the matter we have to point out the following:

#### a) Who said these words?

It is St. Paul who said them; the greatest unrivalled apostle; who said also, "*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me*" (Gal. 2:20), and, "*For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which, is in Christ Jesus our Lord*" (Rom. 8:38,39).

**St. Paul this was caught up to the third heaven and God had compassion on him lest he should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations (2 Cor. 12:2,7).**

**Do you have, then, such confidence as to be like St. Paul the Apostle who attained great levels of eminence, spirituality and grace?! It is not proper at all to ascribe to yourself what the saints had attained.. St. Paul had certainty.. but it does not mean that you also can claim that you have it.. Another point is:**

**b) When did St. Paul say these words?**

He said them on his last days, for the words preceding them directly were, "*For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand*" (2 Jim. 4:6). He said also before them, "*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith*" (2 Jim. 4:7)

**It is not something impossible for a righteous holy person to be given by God - on his last days - confidence and hope and to be allowed to see the crown awaiting for him. Some martyrs also could see the crowns prepared for them before they shed their blood for Christ.**

However, let us examine carefully the two said phrases to know what is meant by them:

**c) "I am persuaded that He is able":**

St. Paul the Apostle says that he is persuaded (sure) that God is able to keep what he has committed to Him... What does this sentence mean? No doubt God is able to keep what anybody commits to Him, but what about the person himself? What direction does his will take?

**God is able, but perhaps you do not want... God is able to keep what you have committed to Him, but you may - by your free will - throw it into Hades... Did't the Lord say, "How often I wanted... but you were not willing" (Mt. 23:37).**

God's power is undoubted. However God's power does not cancel your free will.. As for St. Paul the Apostle, his free will was completely coinciding with God's ability to keep what he had committed to Him.. Are you the like?

Now we move to the second phrase said by St. Paul, which is:

**d) "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness:**

St. Paul said, "*Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day*" (2 Tim. 4:8). Notice that he said that the crown was laid up but He did not say that it was given to him... The crown is laid for the righteous but the righteous receives it on that Day.

**How many are those for whom the crowns were laid up but they lost them?**

So, the Lord warns the angel of the church in Philadelphia saying, "*Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your crown*" (Rev. 3:11).



**e) What else did St. Paul say in the same Epistle?:**

St. Paul says also in the Same Epistle to St. Timothy, "*This is a faithful saying: For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him, If we endure, we shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us*" (2 Tim. 2:11,12).

The words, "*If we...*" demonstrate that our salvation does not depend wholly on God but on us as well.. God has a part in the savigation of a person, and the person has a part also.. For, if the matter depends on God alone, then, the free will of man will be done away with.

Also, the words, "*If we deny Him, He also will deny us*" prove that a person may lose his salvation.

**2. Having boldness to enter the Holiest:**

Those who say that they are sure of having the Kingdom, depend on the words of St. Paul, "*Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus... let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water*" (Heb. 10:19-21).

This text shows that the boldness to enter, and the assurance of faith, require certain basic conditions. For, the words, "*having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience*" indicate that purity and repentance are requisites. And the words, "*our bodies washed with pure water*" show that baptism is necessary for salvation.

But, did St. Paul stop his speech, satisfied with these two conditions! **No, if we read the rest of his speech, we shall find that it contradicts what those people say (who claim that they have confidence)! St. Paul proceeds, saying, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works" (Heb. 10:23,24).**

**What is the need for love and good works in the issue of confidence? St. Paul wants by this to prove that "boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus" depends also on the works and behaviour of the person, otherwise confidence will be shaken and destroyed in an awful way..**

The apostle goes further to warn us; he says, "*For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*" (Heb. 10:26,27).

Where is boldness then, if there is this fearful judgment in case we sin? Do we not have to be cautious and on

our guard and walk in fear and humility, if we do want to enter into the Holies in boldness?

**The apostle, speaking about this boldness by the blood of Christ, did not forget God's justice** but continues to say, *"For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay, says the Lord' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'" (Heb. 10:30,31).*

**This reminds us of the error of the Protestants, in using one verse alone which is a dangerous matter..** Regarding this holy text said by St. Paul the Apostle, they ought to have read the whole speech of St. Paul till the end instead of stopping at the first verse in the chapter satisfied with it...

Had they done this, they would have come also by his following words,

*"Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise" (Heb. 10:35,36).* True indeed, *"He who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23);* but receiving the promise depends on doing God's will.. This means that if we do not do the will of God, certainly we shall not receive the promise nor shall have confidence.

**What does this mean? Does it mean that God changes His mind regarding His gifts which are in fact irrevocable (Rom. 11:29)? No, His gifts are truly irrevocable but there are conditions to receive these gifts... So, if you**

do not receive them, it is not because God changed His mind but because you contravened the conditions required. God is faithful in His promises but He said through St. Paul His Apostle, “.. *after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise*” (Heb. 10:36).

**It is quite obvious that doing God's will takes up the whole life; so the apostle says, “*For you have need of endurance*” (Heb. 10:36). It means that we have to endure for the whole life doing the things that please God in order to receive His promises...**

Hebrews  
 Thus, the speech of St. Paul the Apostle in this chapter shows that “*boldness to enter into the Holiest by the blood of Christ*” requires many things: It requires a true heart, a life of repentance and purity, and bodies washed with the pure water of baptism... It requires also that we stir up ourselves into love and good works and do God's will. We have to endure in all this and be careful not to sin. Otherwise if we sin willfully, we shall be under fearful judgement and what a fearful thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God...

### **3. Diligence and endurance in order to have confidence till the end:**

St. Paul the Apostle speaks about endurance in (Heb. 10:35,36) saying, “*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of*



*God, you may receive the promise*". Again he speaks about the same subject saying, *"And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end"* (Heb. 6:11).

**Then, the assurance of hope requires from man to be diligent, until the end..** What else? The apostle continues, *"That you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises"* (Heb. 6:12).

We notice here that St. Paul added to faith something else i.e. patience and said that through both of them we inherit the promises...

**Didn't the Lord Himself say before,** *"In your patience possess your souls"* (Lk. 21:19), and also, *"But he who endures to the end shall be saved"* (Mt. 24:13).

We have received salvation through faith in baptism, but many powers fight it so that we may lose it.. Among the powers that work against our salvation are: our weak will which often deviates towards evil, our adversary the devil who *"walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour"* (1 Pet. 5:8), and also sin that *"has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men"* (Prov. 7:26).

**And in all this we need to,** *"run with endurance the race that is set before us"* (Heb. 12:1), and to endure until the end as the Bible teaches us, *"considering the outcome of their conduct"* (Heb. 13:7).

#### 4. He who has begun a good work in you will complete it:

Those who call for having confidence and certainty to attain the Kingdom, depend also on the words of St. Paul the Apostle to the Philippians: *“Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 1:6).

Referring to what we said before that God is able to complete His work in us, we say, ‘What about us?! God had begun good work in the Galatians but they were foolish, so the apostle says to them, *“Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?”* (Gal. 3:3). Here, it is they who made themselves perfect by the flesh, not giving God a chance to complete in them good work.

As for the Philippians, though St. Paul had confidence regarding them, he prays for them that their love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment that they may be, *“sincere and without offence till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness..”* (Phil. 1:9-11). **Though the Lord Christ is able to complete a good work in them, they themselves have a part: To be without offence till the end. He advises them also saying, “Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ”** (Phil. 1:27), and also, *“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, having the same conflict which you saw in me and now hear is in me”* (Phil. 1:29,30).

**What does all this mean? And as long as God will complete in them what He has begun, what is the need for all these advices: to abound in love and knowledge, to be without offence, to be filled with the fruits of righteousness, to have conduct worthy of the gospel of Christ, to suffer for His sake and strive like St. Paul himself?**

It is because as the Lord Christ has a part in their salvation, they also have a part to carry out. Hence the Lord says, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12). Christ will not work out their salvation by Himself alone, but will accomplish it through them, in them and with them. **God does not take people by force and cast them into the Kingdom, but they have to work with Him.**

So, we find that it is in his Epistle to the Philippians that St. Paul speaks most about his striving "*I press on that I may lay hold..*", "I press toward the goal for the prize" (Phil. 3:12,14).

**St. Paul gives, in this same epistle, the example of those who began in the spirit but were not made perfect in good work.. so, their end was destruction. The apostle mentions them even weeping and asks the Philippians to follow his example not the example of those whose end was destruction (Phil. 3:17).**

**A last word concerning confidence:**

How beautiful are the words of Solomon the Wise in this regard, for he says, "*A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident*" (Prov. 14:16) Therefore St. Paul the Apostle advises us saying, "*Do not be haughty, but fear*" (Rom. 11:20). He advises the Philippians, "*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling*" (Phil. 2:12) St. Peter the Apostle joins St. Paul in giving the same advice, he says, "*And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear*" (1 Pet 1:17).

Would someone say, 'Since there is confidence, assurance and certainty of having the Kingdom, what is the cause of fear and trembling then? Why cannot a person depend on God's promises and have peace?..' Yes, we trust in God's promises but we do not trust ourselves...

So, the apostle associates the divine promises with fear when he says, "*Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*" (2 Cor. 7:1).

## CHAPTER 5

### IS IT POSSIBLE THAT A BELIEVER WOULD PERISH?

**A believer may fall:**

**Among the most famous examples for this are some of the angels of the seven churches in Asia. No doubt they were believers and on the following pages - God willing - we shall explain how they fell.**

**It is easy to give many examples of prophets and saints who fell.. but we shall not concentrate on this point because most of the Protestants, the Plymouth Brethern and the sect called "The Salvation of the Souls", agree that a believer may fall but they say that certainly a believer shall not perish**

**So, let us examine and prove this last point only which is: The possibility that a believer would perish.**

**The word "Believer", and the word "Elect":**

**All the elect are believers, but not all the believers are elect.. because some of them may fall and perish. However, whenever we tell the Protestants of a believer**

who perished, they argue falsely that he was not a believer. They say if he had been a believer, he would not have perished. [See the difference between the term "believer" and the term "elect" on page 133.]

We shall hereafter give examples of persons who perished and prove definitely that they were believers.

## THE FIRST EVIDENCE

### ROME. 11, JN. 15

#### The example of the broken-off branch:

After St. Paul the Apostle had compared the Jews to natural branches broken off from the olive tree and deprived of its fatness, he said, "*You will say then, 'Branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in' Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith*" (Rom. 11:19,20). It is obvious that he was speaking to a believer, who was grafted in the olive tree and became a partaker of its root and fatness (Rom. 11:17).

Let us see what did he say to that believer? He said to him, "*Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.*" (Rom. 11:20-22).

The last words, "*you also will be cut off*" were a warning to that believer that he would perish unless he continued in God's goodness.

This example is similar to another one mentioned by the Lord Jesus Christ in which He compared Himself to the vine and compared us to the branches. The branches in a vine certainly represent the believers because a branch is one of the parts of the vine in which its sap flows. But can it perish in spite of this?

The Lord says, "*Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away...* *If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*" (Jn. 15:2,6).

It means that such an unfruitful believer will certainly perish.

## THE SECOND EVIDENCE

### HEB. 3,4

The example of the disobedient people in the wilderness:

In these two chapters, St. Paul addresses those whom he calls, "*... holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling*" (Heb. 3:1). Were those holy people believers or not? Of course, they were.. However the apostle warns

them against *“departing from the living God”* (Heb. 3:12). Those who are warned against departing from faith are of course believers not unbelievers.

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

Those who rebelled against the Lord and provoked Him are the disobedient people in the wilderness whom the Lord was angry with and said, *“So, I swore in My wrath, ‘they shall not enter My rest’ ”* (Heb. 3:11). So, they perished and their corpses fell in the wilderness.

**Those who fell, who the Lord swore not to let them enter His rest and who rebelled against Him in the wilderness; had not they been saved before? St. Paul answers, *“For who, having heard, rebelled? Indeed, was it not all who came out of Egypt, led by Moses?”*** (Heb. 3:16).

**They had the first salvation: The Lord delivered them from the bondage, divided the Red Sea for them and they went through the midst of the sea and crossed it as a symbol of baptism. However, in spite of all this, they perished in the wilderness and lost the salvation they gained. Moreover, the Lord swore they would not enter His rest.**



Are not those an evident example which shows that believers may perish? Those disobedient people represent -undoubtedly- those who may depart from faith and as a result of this they perish. The people of Israel perished because of their disobedience, and other people entered the promised land as St. Paul says, "*.. and those to whom it was first preached did not enter because of disobedience*" (Heb. 4:6).

The apostle warns us against such disobedience which may prevent us from entering the Lord's rest; he says, "*Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall after the same example of disobedience*" (Heb. 4:11).

He further says, "*Therefore, since a promise, remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it*" (Heb. 4:1).

This story of the disobedient people who lost their first salvation and perished, gives us an example and warning that a believer may lose his salvation as St. Paul teaches us saying, "*Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*" (1 Cor. 10:11,12).

+ This story of the disobedient people who perished reminds us also of Lot's wife who was saved from Sodom but perished outside it. So, the Bible says, "Remember Lot's wife" (Lk. 17:32).

## THE THIRD EVIDENCE

### HEB. 10:19-32

**If we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth:**

St. Paul addresses the same *“holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling”* (Heb. 3:1); who, after being illuminated, they endured a great struggle with sufferings; who had compassion on the apostle in his chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of their goods, knowing that they had a better and an enduring possession for themselves in heaven (Heb. 10:32,34). What does St. Paul say to those whom he starts his talk with saying, *“.. having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus”*?

He says to them, *“For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries... For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine; I will repay’, says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people’. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”* (Heb. 10:26-31).

**It is a warning to whoever sins of those holy brethren that he would perish. This gives us an idea that a believer may perish as St. Paul the Apostle asserts it saying, “Of**

*how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:29).*

Here, we notice that the words "the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified" prove that the person who perished was a believer and was sanctified by the blood of the covenant!

## THE FOURTH EVIDENCE

### Examples of apostates who perished:

Those apostates were believers, then they departed from faith and perished, and we can give many examples from the Holy Bible that show how they perished..

- St. Paul the Apostle says to his disciple, St. Timothy, *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanks-giving by those who believe and know the truth"* (1 Tim. 4:1-3).

Undoubtedly, those who gave heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons perished. However, the words,

**“some will depart from the faith show that they were believers.. It is an obvious example that shows how a believer may perish in case he departs from faith. This applies to all heretics and heterodox.**

• **An example of those apostates is given in the parable of the sower where the Lord says, “*But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away*” (Lk. 8:13).**

**We cannot believe that those on the rock, who fall away in time of temptation, will have any salvation.. Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself calls them believers even though they believe for a while.**

Among the most serious kinds of apostasy is that one which will take place before the advent (Second Coming) of Christ as St. Paul says, *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God.”* (2 Thess. 2:3,4). No doubt in such falling away many believers who depart from faith will perish.

**As for those corrupt heretics and heterodox who depart from faith and perish, St. Peter the Apostle says about them, “*For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowlede of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the***

*beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them“” (2 Pet. 2:20,21).*

## THE FIFTH EVIDENCE

### HEB. 6:4-8

**Those who were once enlightened but fell away:**

St. Paul the Apostle says, *“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance...”*

**The attributes mentioned first demonstrate that they were believers, while the last sentence shows that they perished.** This is a clear evidence that a believer may perish. However, the Protestants argue that those were not believers.. a thing to be regretted indeed!!! in spite of the express words that they were enlightened, they became partakers of the Holy Spirit, and tasted the heavenly gift, the good word of God and the powers of the age to come!!

**We do not want to argue much with them but we only say that the verse proves that those people were believers. Also, the words “it is impossible to renew them again”**

**are an evident proof that they were previously renewed which means that they were believers.**

Their perdition is likewise obvious from the words of St. Paul as he compares them to the earth which is *“rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned”* (Heb. 6:8).

## **THE SIXTH EVIDENCE**

**Certainly requires steadiness and has conditions:**

- **St. Peter the Apostle says, *“Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you do these things (good works) you will never stumble”*** (2 Pet 1:10,5-9).

Then, our being elected and called by God requires more diligence from us so that our election may be sure... Otherwise the election becomes unsure..

- This conforms with what St. Paul says, *“.. whose house we are, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end”* (Heb. 3:6).

**This means that such confidence may be firm or not and requires that we hold fast to it.. to the end.**

Then St. Paul further says, *“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end”* (Heb. 3:14). It is a condition which we must fulfil: to be steadfast to the

end... The apostle goes on to warn us not to harden our hearts lest we should have the same end of the disobedient people who perished in the wilderness.

- The apostle repeats the same requirement in (Col. 1:22,23), saying, "... *to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight-if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel*".

- It is a salvation granted by the Lord and we hope for it... yet the apostle warns us saying, "*How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation*" (Heb. 2:3). **This means that in case we neglect such a salvation, we shall not escape...**

### **THE SEVENTH EVIDENCE**

#### **REV. 13:7**

How serious the words said in the revelation about the beast are! For it is stated that, "*It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them*"! ... The term "*saints*" means undoubtedly that they were believers.

So, if a saint can be overcome, then we have to be on our guard and continue in prayer asking the Lord to have mercy on us that we may not perish...

## THE EIGHTH EVIDENCE

### The perdition of Demas, the assistant of St. Paul:

Demas was one of St. Paul's assistants. St. Paul mentions him in his Epistle to the colossians, "*Luke the beloved physician and Demas greet you*" (Col. 4:14), and in the Epistle to Philemon, "... *greet you, as do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke my fellow laborers*" (Philem. 24).

The apostle in these two verses mentions Demas among three who were of the greatest preachers working with him; two of them are of the four evangelists.. The name of Demas is even mentioned before the name of St. Luke the Evangelist. Was not he a believer yet?

However, that Demas, the believer and great preacher perished as we know from the words of St. Paul, "*For demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world*" (2 Tim. 4:10).

hsh | The Protestants go farther in their books as to say that Demas after departing from St. Paul became a pagan priest!!

## OTHER EVIDENCES

To avoid repetition see the other evidences in chapter 2 under the heading "Judgment according to works".



## OBJECTIONS AND REFUTATIONS

### THE FIRST OBJECTION

JN. 10:27-29

**No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand:**

Their first objection to the possibility of the believer's perdition is based on the Lord's words, *"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand"*.

What does this text signify? Let us meditate deep on it:

**First:**

The first attribute which the Lord mentions about those who will not perish is that they are sheep. The Lord Jesus Christ compares the righteous to the sheep, and the wicked to the goats and speaking about the day of judgment, he says, *"All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from*

*another, 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. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world' (Mt. 25:32-34).*

Since they are sheep, they are good, for if they were wicked He would call them goats.

### **Second:**

He ascribes to these sheep the qualities of righteousness :

a) **He says they hear His voice and follow Him...** which means that they keep the commandments and do good works. And we all agree that whoever hears the Lord's voice and follow Him will never perish.

b) In the same chapter - Jn. 10 - He says, "*They will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers*" (Jn. 10:5). Therefore they did not hear the voice of the thieves and robbers who came before Him (Jn. 10:8). All this means that such good sheep do not submit to the devils nor to the wicked.

**This is goodness in both its positive and passive aspects: that these sheep follow the Lord, and not follow the strangers..; know the Lord's voice, discern it, hears it and follows it. At the same time they do not know the**

voice of the stranger nor follow him, but rather flee from him.. I wonder if there is an evidence for goodness more clear than this! Yet I'll give you another evidence:

### **Third:**

He says, "*My sheep hear My voice, and I know them*" It is a mutual relation" So, He says in the same chapter, "*I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father*" (Jn. 10:14,15). What a stronger relation there can be...! The Lord describes the extent of this knowledge by saying that "*He calls His own sheep by name*" (Jn. 10:3).

This knowledge distinguishes the righteous from the wicked whom the Lord addresses saying, "*I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!*" (Mt. 7:23). The Lord, then, does not know the wicked.. The same is asserted by the words of the Lord to the foolish virgins to whom He says, "*Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you*" (Mt. 25:12).

Then, since He knows those sheep who will never be snatched out of His or the Father's hand, they must certainly be pure in heart and righteous. For, if they were wicked He would say, "I do not know you"...

Let us now state in brief points the qualities of those believers who will not be snatched out of the Father's hand:

- They are sheep not goat i.e. they are good and righteous.

- They obey God's commandments, hear His voice and follow Him.

- They avoid evil and the wicked as they do not hear the voice of the stranger nor follow him but rather flee from him.

No doubt we all agree that such persons cannot perish.

#### Fourth:

What do the words, "*no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand*" signify?

They mean that no external power can snatch out of the Father's hand... But it is possible that a believer, while in the Father's hand and having full discretion, falls by his own will.

God never allows an external power to overcome you while you are in His hand... But, your own inner will can lead you to perdition if you allow it. If you say to Him, 'O Lord, give me help in my weakness', He will dismiss away any adversary powers fighting you... But, if you yourself want to depart from him, He will not force you to continue with Him.

What do you say of some sheep who were in the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ, but they deviated and fell and needed repentance.. Some were said to have a name that they were alive but they were dead!! An example of those are some of the angels of the seven churches mentioned in the Revelation.

St. John the visionary says that he saw the Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of the seven lampstands i.e. the seven churches and, *"He had in His right hand seven stars... The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches"* (Rev. 1:16,20). The Lord even starts the first message saying, *"These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand"*. **Then they were not only in His hand but they were even in His right hand. And the right hand symbolizes power as the psalm says, "The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted" (Ps 118:15,16).**

However, those who were in the right hand of the Lord, those mighty pastors of the churches, what does the Lord say to them? He says fearful words..

To the angel of the church of Ephesus He says, *"... Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place"* (Rev. 2:5). How terrible!

And to the angel of the church in Sardis He says, *"I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead"* (Rev. 3:1). Can you imagine that that great angel who was in the right hand of God was dead! He needed to hear the warning of the Lord, *"Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you"* (Rev. 3:3).

**May God have mercy upon us, my brethren, according to His loving kindness, for we are not more powerful than those seven angels.**

Listen also to the fearful words the Lord says to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans, *“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth”* (Rev. 3:16). It is a threat of perdition.. The Lord continues, *“Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’ -and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked”*.. , So, the Lord advises him to buy white garments that the shame of his nakedness may not be revealed.. Then He says to him, *“Therefore be zealous and repent”* (Rev. 3:17-19).

**Then, brother, do not rely on your being in the hand of the Lord and leave your first love.. For you may easily fall from God’s right hand by your own will. No one will snatch you out of His hand but you, by your own will, may leave God’s hand.**

## **THE SECOND OBJECTION**

### **EPH. 1:13,14**

**You were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise:**

Here is another verse said by St. Paul the Apostle which the protestants depend on in their arguments: *“.. having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of*

*promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance...".* They concluded from this verse that the seal of the Holy Spirit is a guarantee of an everlasting inheritance that cannot be taken away from a person.

**✓ The answer is very simple: that those who were sealed with the Holy Spirit still have a free will. ✓** Therefore the Bible says to them, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30), and also, "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). It is further said, "He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal condemnation" (Mk. 3:29).

**It is, then, in the power of the person since he has a free will.. According to his will, he can grieve the Spirit, quench the Spirit, or blasphemes against the Spirit.. So, in our prayer we say along with the psalmist, "Do not take Your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).**

Saul the King who was elected by the Lord, and anointed by Samuel the Prophet with the Holy Oil, and who prophesied and was turned into another man when the Spirit of the Lord came upon him that the people were amazed and said, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" (1 Sam. 10:6-11). However, the Lord rejected him afterwards and the Spirit of the Lord departed from him and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him (1 Sam. 16:1,14).. Thus Saul perished rejected by the Lord.

**It doesn't matter how a person begins, being sealed with the Holy Spirit or having the Lord's Spirit come upon him.. but the important thing is how does he end...?**

This answer can be addressed also to those who object depending on the words of the Lord, *"And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever"* (Jn. 14:16).

**The Spirit is ready to abide with us, but if we continue to grieve the Spirit and quench Him or blaspheme against Him, He will be taken from us..**

### **THE THIRD OBJECTION**

**LK. 10:20, PHIL. 4:3, REV. 21:27**

**Your names are written in heaven:**

Some of those who object to the possibility of the perdition of a believer, take as evidence the words of the Lord to the seventy disciples when He said to them, *"Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven"* (Lk. 10:20).

St. Paul the Apostle also says in his Epistle to the Philippians, *"... and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the Book of Life"* (Phil. 4:3).. Likewise, the divine inspiration says in the Revelation,



*"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life" (Rev. 21:27).*

How easy it is to say that by these holy texts, and in particular the last one, is meant *"The elect"*.. But we ought to say expressly the obvious thing which is that: **It is possible that someone's name be written in the Book of Life, then be blotted out.** \*

This is evident in the reply of the Lord to Moses the Prophet in Exodus when Moses said to the Lord, *"Yet now, if You will forgive their sin - but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written"*. The Lord answered him, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book" (Ex. 32:32,33).

And in the Revelation the Lord says, *"He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments, and I will not blot out his name from the Book of Life"* (Rev. 3:5)..

Then, there is a possibility that a person's name be blotted out from the Book of Life: who overcomes, his name will not be blotted out... but who is overcome, the Lord will blot out his name from the Book of Life.. as He previously said, *"Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book"*.

At the end of the Revelation, the Lord says also, *"And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book"* (Rev. 22:19).

## THE FOURTH OBJECTION

### GAL. 4:7

#### **We are God's sons and heirs through Christ:**

Their objection is based also on the words of St. Paul, *"Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ"*.

This objection calls us to search together into the spiritual meaning of the word "son":

St. John the Apostle defines the word "son" as follows: *"If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him" (1 Jn. 2:29).*

**So, brother, if you say that you are God's son and thereupon an heir of God through Christ, you have to prove that you are son by your righteousness. But if you do not practice righteousness, then you are not born of Him.**

**Are you then, a son according to the definition expressed by St. John the Apostle? If so, blessed are you.. No doubt you are an heir of God through Christ. But if - when anyone discusses with you a text relating to the subject of salvation - you quarrel and revile, cry out and make a fuss; and in spite of all this you say 'I am God's son'!! know then, that God's sons do not revile because it is written that no revilers will inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:10).**

**Do not boast vainly, brother, as the Jews boasted before of their being sons of Abraham but the Lord Jesus Christ put them to shame by saying to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (Jn. 8:39).**

So, if you say that you are a son of God and an heir through Christ, you ought also "to walk just as He walked" (1 Jn. 2:6).

**Being born of God is not just a privilege to boast of, but it has certain signs that show it. The apostle says, "For whatever is born of God overcomes the world" (1 Jn. 5:4), and, "Everyone who loves is born of God and knows God" (1 Jn. 4:7). Are these two conditions fulfilled in you? Are you steadfast in love? Do you overcome the world?**

Another essential sign of being born of God is found in the words of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans, "*For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God*" (Rom. 8:13,14).

Here, the apostle sets as a condition for being born of God: to be led by the Spirit of God.. Who is, then, the son of God? It is he who is led by the Spirit of God. Do you satisfy this condition, you who say you are an heir through Christ and sure of attaining the Kingdom? Ask yourself...

**Another basic condition to be born of God is to be born from high, of water and the Spirit as the Lord Jesus Christ Himself says to Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God” (Jn. 3:5).**

**Do not say rashly, ‘I am a son of God and an heir through Christ. I am sure that I’ll attain the Kingdom’. But rather test yourself.. Are you born of water and the Spirit? Do you keep yourself and the wicked one does not touch you? Do you overcome the world? Do you have love and practice righteousness? Is it not possible for you to sin? Are you led by the Spirit of God?... If all these conditions are satisfied in you, then truly you are a son of God and your works manifest you as it is said, “By their fruits you will know them” (Mt. 7:20).**

As for the words of St. Paul, “.. you are no longer a slave but a son” (Gal. 4:7), you should put beside them the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, “Whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (Jn. 8:34-36).

**Another sign then for being born of God is to be free from sin and not a slave of it.. So, if you still sin, you are a slave of sin and the words of St. Paul “You are no longer a slave but a son” do not apply to you.**

The Lord Jesus Christ settles the matter by His explicit words, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord’

*shall enter the Kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21) and, “For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother” (Mt. 12:50). This is the person indeed who will be an heir through Christ.*

- The same refutation applies to another verse of the same meaning used sometimes by those Pratestants i.e. *“And if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if ineed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together ” (Rom. 8:17).*

## THE FIFTH OBJECTION

### JN. 6:37

**The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out:**

**It is true that who comes to Christ, Christ will by no means cast out.. But what about a person who comes out by his own will?! Christ is the door, if anyone enters by Him, he will be saved and will find pasture (Jn. 10:9).**

All those who came out of the holy den, came out by themselves, due to their own works, their rashness and their going astray.. They chose perdition for themselves.. St. John the Apostle says of them, *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us” (1 Jn. 2:19).* They went out of their own accord.

**An example of those are some disciples who could not bear to hear the words of the Lord Jesus Christ about partaking of His flesh and blood..** The Bible says, *“From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. Then Jesus said to the twelve, ‘Do you also want to go away?’ ”* (Jn. 6:66,67). Those were not cast out by the Lord, but they left Him by themselves unlike the twelve who continued with Him.

**Even Judas Iscariot was not turned out or cast out by the Lord..** He left the company of the disciples, left the Lord’s supper and went out to carry out his conspiracy.

## **THE SIXTH OBJECTION**

**1 JN. 5:11,12**

### **He who has the Son has life:**

Some argue that St. John the Apostle says, *“And this is the testimony; that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life”*. So, since a person has life, an eternal life, how would he perish then?!

**The key to this verse is to understand the intended meaning of the expression “who has the Son”** What does it mean? Does it mean “whoever believes in Him”? No, of course. For the Son Himself says, *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of*

heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Mt. 7:21) and He proceeds, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them ‘I never know you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Mt. 7:22,23).

Those were not only believers, but they worked miracles also.. yet, they did not have the Son, “He never knew them” because they practised lawlessness and iniquity.

Likewise were the foolish virgins. They had faith and called Him, “Lord, Lord, open to us!” (Mt. 25:11). But He answered them, “Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you”.

They also had not the Son in spite of their faith and though they waited him the same as the wise virgins did. They kept their virginity and wanted to enter with Him to the wedding.

Then the expression, “he who has the Son” does not mean that a person just has faith only.. what does it mean then? It means:

#### **First: To know the Son:**

This is evident from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to the Father, “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent” (Jn. 17:3).

**Again what is the meaning of "know the Son"? and what is the evidence that we know Him?**

St. John the Apostle gives the answer in the same Epistle, he says, "*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, 'I know Him' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him*" (1 Jn. 2:3-5).

This is the answer. For how can we have the Son if we do not know Him? Or how can we know Him if we do not keep His commandments? If we do keep His commandments, this will be an evidence that we know Him. And if we know Him, we shall have life.. In other words, who keeps the commandments of the Son, will have the Son and will have life.. And keeping the commandments is proved by works.

#### **Second: Abiding in the Son:**

He who has the Son, abides in the Son as the Son Himself says, "*Abide in Me, and I in you... I am the vine, you are the branches... If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned*" (Jn. 15:4-6).

**Thus, to abide in the Son is necessary for life. As the branch does not have life unless it is fixed in the vine and which branch does not abide in the vine is withered**



**and will be burnt. So, who abides in the Son will have life.**

**But, how can we abide in Him?**

The Son continues His speech, *"Abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love"* (Jn. 15:9,10).

Then the matter is related to keeping the commandments i.e. doing good works. This is asserted by St. John the Beloved again in his first Epistle; he says, *"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked"* (1 Jn. 2:6).

What does the expression "he who has the Son" mean also? It means:

**Third: Fellowship with the Son:**

He who has the son, has fellowship with Him. In this regard St. John the Apostle says, *"... and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"* (1 Jn. 1:3). And St. Paul, speaking about this fellowship says that we died with Him, were buried with Him, raised with Him and been glorified with Him (Rom. 6) and he says also, *".. that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings"* (Phil. 3:10), and *"I have been crucified with Christ"* (Gal. 2:20)... etc.

**But how can we have fellowship with Him? St. John**

gives the answer in the same Epistle, *“If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”* (1 Jn. 1:6,7:).

Here also, the matter is related to conduct i.e. to works...

#### **Fourth: To love the Son:**

No doubt, he who has the Son has love for Him.. How would we love Him, then?.

**The Lord Jesus Christ Himself answers this question; He says, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. An he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him”** (Jn. 14:21).

Here also, it is a matter of keeping commandments which implies works.

Thus, the expression “he who has the Son” requires keeping the commandments in order that a believer may have eternal life, whether the meaning of this expression is to know the Son, to abide in the Son, to have fellowship with the Son or to love the Son.

Then, eternal life requires a person to walk continually in righteousness. If he deviates from this righteousness, he loses eternal life because, *“If we say that we have*

*fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth..” (1 Jn. 1:6).*

The first Epistle of St. John has a certain spirit that encompasses the whole Epistle. So, if the Protestants try to argue, depending on one verse alone, they would find the answer in the rest of the Epistle.

## THE SEVENTH OBJECTION

EX. 12:23,7

### The Passover Lamb:

*“... and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the doorposts, the Lord will pass over the door and not allow the destroyer to come into your houses to strike you”.*

**The protestants use this verse to prove that those who were behind the doors stricken with the blood felt complete safety and peace whatever their personal condition was or their default and iniquity.. That was because their salvation depended on the blood... the blood of the passover lamb which was a symbol of Christ.. Their salvation did not depend at all on their works.**

*But you  
had to  
get the  
blood*

They say that we should have full confidence in the effectiveness of the blood of Christ and depend on the deserts of this blood not on our own works.

**We do not deny that salvation is realized by the blood of Christ alone.. and that the unlimited atonement of His blood is capable of giving peace to the self.. But our confidence in the blood of Christ does not mean that we can live in sin, or fail to do good works on the grounds that our salvation depends on the blood not on our righteousness and purity.**

We notice in this example (of the passover lamb and the door stricken with blood) something very important which indicates the symbolic meaning properly: It is that the passover lamb was to be eaten with unleavened bread (Ex. 12:8). and no leaven would be kept in all the quarters for seven days as the Bible says,

*“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the Lord. Unleavened bread shall be eaten seven days, and no leavened bread shall be seen among you, nor shall leaven be seen among you in all your quarters” (Ex. 13:6,7).*

**The Lord emphasized strongly on removing leaven from the houses and set as punishment, cutting off anyone who would eat leavened bread. He said, “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel” (Ex. 12:15).**

Again He stressed the same point, He said, “... you shall eat unleavened bread... For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses, since whoever eats what

*is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your habitations you shall eat unleavened bread” (Ex. 12:18-20).*

**What is the reason of all this? What does it symbolize?**

**Any person who searches into the Holy Bible can clearly distinguish that leaven is a symbol of evil and sin, while unleavened bread is a symbol of righteousness and purity.**

St. Paul the Apostle makes this point very obvious when he says, *“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7,8).*

**Thus, the picture becomes obvious before us: The door is sprinkled with blood outside, in the inside leaven is removed and all are eating unleavened bread.. So, the blood of Christ cannot be a permission to us to eat leaven.. And even though a person escapes from the sword of the destroyer through the blood, he may be cut off from the congregation if he eats leaven.. Thus, he loses the salvation he attained through the blood due to his eating of the leavened bread.**

Many people were saved from the original sin through the blood of Christ and escaped from the sword of the

destroyer, yet they lost this salvation afterwards and were cut off from the body of the church because they ate leavened bread.. Those *“Whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame - who set their mind on earthly things”* (Phil. 3:19).

**Would you dare, after all this, to say ‘I am in peace inside, behind the doors sprinkled with the blood whatever way I walk’?!**

**I say to you, ‘No, if there exists leaven within your doors, you cannot have peace, for “whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation”’.**

Therefore purge out the old leaven and feast with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

The seven days of the unleavened bread represent the whole life which ought to be pure.. because “7” is a number which symbolizes perfection.

Then, brother, since you actually live within the doors sprinkled with the blood, be careful all your life to remove leaven from your house, for the rule is evident.

## **THE EIGHTH OBJECTION**

### **Christ satisfied God’s claims:**

The protestants argue that the death of Christ satisfied the claims of the divine justice in all aspects.. Would God then require us to satisfy them again?

**No, God does not require us to do so.. besides, we haven't the ability to satisfy the divine justice..** The Lord Jesus Christ has paid off all the claims of the divine justice. He made an unlimited atonement sufficient for the remission of all the sins of all people in all ages.

**However, we repeat here what we have already said before that the blood of Christ is one thing and the deserts of this blood is another thing.. All we have to do is not to satisfy the claims of the divine justice, but to be worthy of the deserts of the blood of Christ.**

We do not try to satisfy the divine justice, for this has been performed on the cross when the Lord shed His blood on our behalf... But we have only to be worthy of the blood of Christ.

### **THE NINTH OBJECTION**

**He who hears My word... has everlasting life:**

Their objection is also based on another verse in which the Lord says, *"He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life"* (Jn. 5:24).

**We notice here that He does not speak about faith alone, but rather more about works.. For He says, "who hears My word" i.e. who carries out My commandment... So, we believe that, only a believer who carries**

out God's commandments until the end, the same will be saved. If we consider the rest of the Lord's speech on the same occasion, we notice that He says, "... *and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life*" (Jn. 5:29). He does not say, "those who believed" but "who have done good" thus stressing on the importance of works for salvation.

## THE TENTH OBJECTION

### HEB. 10:23

#### **He who promised is faithful:**

It is true that God promised, and He who promised is faithful.. but this must not lead us to blind confidence.. St. Paul himself warns us in the same Epistle saying, "*Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it*" (Heb. 4:1). He says also, "*If we deny Him, He also will deny us*" (2 Tim 2:12).

My brethren, remember always the danger of using one single verse separate from others.



## WHEN SHALL WE ATTAIN SALVATION

Since a believer is liable to fall and perish, and since some people have begun in the Spirit but were made perfect by the flesh... **when can we say, then, that a person is completely saved?**

We can only say this when he completes the days of his sojourning on earth peacefully.. That is because we are in a fight and struggle as long as we are in the flesh (Eph. 6:10).

**We are in a war which result is not yet known. A person may win the first battle and lose the twelfth one.. who can be sure of the result? A person who is fighting in a war cannot say he has won except after the end of the war.. i.e. after one puts off the flesh.**

So, the apostle says, *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* (Phil. 2:12), and also, *“.. considering the outcome of their conduct”* (Heb. 13:7).

### **Holy texts on our waited for salvation:**

- St. Paul says, *“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body”* (Phil. 3:20).

**This is the true savlation, when we put off this mortal body and put on the glorious body... which matter will take place after the second coming of Christ and the general resurrection.**

• **He says also, “So Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation” (Heb. 9:28).**

Here also, the apostle is speaking about the final salvation which will take place after the second coming of Christ.

• **St. Peter the Apostle also says, “... you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet. 1:5).**

• **The same fact is declared by St. Paul when he ordered that the Corinthian sinner should be delivered to Satan, “For the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5).**

• **Referring to this coming salvation, St. Paul says to the Romans, “For now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).**

• **And to his disciple St. Timothy the Bishop, St. Paul says, “Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save yourself and those who hear you” (1 Tim. 4:16). Even that saint needed to take heed to himself, to his ministry and to continue in that in order to be saved..**

- Regarding the waited for salvation, St. Peter the Apostle says, *“If the reighteous one is scarcely saved...”* (1 Pet. 4:18).

- And St. Paul says about the angels, *“Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?”* (Heb. 1:14).

- This last salvation requires patience and striving so that we may attain it with glory as St. Paul says, *“Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory”* (2 Tim. 2:10).

It is obvious then, that the elect did not obtain that salvation which is accompanied by eternal glory though they obtained salvation through the blood of Christ in baptism.. It is just a guarantee (Eph. 1:14) which we may lose if we stop striving or if our will deviates...

But how can we attain such final salvation? The apostle gives the answer; he says, *“Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us”* (Heb. 12:1) for he who endures to the end shall be saved (Mt. 24:13).



**CHAPTER 6**  
**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS BEARING**  
**ON THE SUBJECT**

**[1] Had God chosen certain  
people to be saved?**

**A. Salvation is offered to all people:**

We find in the Holy Bible a clear answer to this question.. for it is stated, *“For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4).*

God Wants all people to be saved, not a certain group. His love encompasses the whole world.. So, He says, *“I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live” (Ezek. 33:11).*

**This is very obvious in the redemption, for the Bible says, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (Jn. 3:16).** His love here

is for all people, for the whole world.. Salvation also is offered publicly to whoever believes in Him as redeemer not only to a certain group.

St. John the Beloved, while speaking about the atoning sacrifice of Christ, repeats the same meaning. He says, ***“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world”*** (1 Jn. 2:2). The Lord Jesus Christ then, offered salvation to all people, sacrificed Himself for all, is the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, and He wants all people to be saved..

This generality is explained by St. Peter the Apostle; he says, ***“In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him... He is Lord of all”*** (Acts 10:34-36).

This conforms with what St. Peter himself said on the day of the Pentecost, ***“Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved”*** (Acts 2:21).

**God then wants all people to be saved.. and if not all of them are saved, the cause will not be due to God but to people. They themselves do not want to be saved and not God.**

#### **B. God left option to people:**

God, being good and loving does not have pleasure in the death of even one sinner but wants that every sinner would turn from his way and live.. However, He left the

option to people... He gave everyone freedom to choose for himself. He says to man, *"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil... I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live"* (Deut. 30:15,19).

Unless choice had been in the hands of man, why would God have sent the apostles and prophets then? Why would He have set for us the commandments and warned us? Why would He have set priests and teachers? What would be the use of all this if there were certain people predestined for salvation and others for perdition?

### **C. Many texts prove that man has a free will:**

Many of God's holy commandments begin with the words, "If anyone desires", "If you want" or "If anyone hears".. and other similar expressions. This proves that man has the option to choose for himself what he wants and determine his own end according to his works.. Now we shall give you some examples of all this:

- Our lord Jesus Christ said, *"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it"* (Mt. 16:24,25).

- And to the rich young man He said, *“If you want to enter into life, keep the commandments... If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor”* (Mt. 19:17,21).

- To the angel of the church of the Laodiceans He said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me”* (Rev. 3:20).

As for God, He stands at the door and knocks; as for man, he has the choice either to open or not... and accordingly, his end will be determined.

**How often God wills, but man is not willing ... God wants good for man, but man does not want good for himself. Thus God leaves him to his free will, to have the end which he desires.**

- An example of this is the speech of the Lord when He was lamenting over Jerusalem, He said, *“How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate”* (Mt. 23:37,38).

- The Lord also rebuked the Jews saying, *“But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life”* (Jn. 5:40).

- The same is evident in the parable of the wedding feast and those who were invited.. The Lord said that the king who arranged the wedding feast, *“sent out his*



*servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come” (Mt. 22:3).*

They were invited to the feast, not predestined for perdition... God opened to them His Kingdom but they refused to enter.. In the said parable, the invitation was repeated once and twice and each time the king (the Lord) sent other servants to them but they were not willing to come.. So, the sad end appeared in the words of the Lord to His servants, *“The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy” (Mt. 22:8).*

- Among the most profound examples that demonstrate how God is interested in making man choose his own end are the cases in which the Lord Jesus Christ asked the patients before healing them, *“Do you want to be made well?” (Jn. 5:6).* The great divine Physician is ready to heal, but the problem is that those who perish do not want to be healed.

#### **D. God is willing to revoke His judgment:**

Is there a proof more evident than this to show God’s strong desire to give us salvation?! God is willing to revoke His judgement if a person turns from his evil ways and seeks his own salvation. This fact is declared by God; He says,

- *“Again, when I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die’, if he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right... and walks in the statutes of life without committing iniquity, he shall surely live; he shall not*

*die. None of his sins which he has committed shall be remembered against him; he has done what is lawful and right; he shall surely live” (Ezek. 33:14-16).*

Again, God repeats the same meaning in the Book of Jeremiah the Prophet, He says,

- *“The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it” (Jer. 18:7-10).*

- **We have a clear practical example in the story of Nineveh:** God declared His word against it.. but its people repented at the preaching of Jonah, so it is stated, *“Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it” (Jon. 3:10).*

Then, it all depends on man. So St. James the Apostle says, *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you” (Jas. 4:8).. God Himself says in the Book of Malachi the Prophet, “Return to Me, and I will return to you” (Mal. 3:7).*

### E. Answers to some objections:

Let us begin with the words of St. Paul the Apostle in the Epistle to the Romans:

*“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son...” (Rom. 8:28-30).*

We want here to give some important remarks:

- We notice that the apostle said, *“all things work together for good to those who love God”* and did not say, “to those whom God loves”.. It depends, then, on them not on God..

The same applies to St. Paul’s words, *“But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him’ ” (1 Cor. 2:9)*.. Again, he did not say, “whom He loves”.. because their salvation depends on their own will.

*“The second remark is that God’s predestination is not due to His choice but to His foreknowledge, as it is stated, “whom He foreknew, He also predestined”*.. It is then, that God through His foreknowledge and recognizing what would take place in the future, knew who would do the things that please Him in righteousness and goodness of their own accord. Therefore, those whom He foreknew, He also predestined.

**The same can be said regarding the story of Jacob and Esau, "As it is written, Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated" (Rom. 9:13).** God, through His foreknowledge knew that Esau would be an impudent person and a murderer. He would despise the birthright and sell it for a stew of lentils. God knew also that Jacob would be meek and love good.

**Therefore, God loved Jacob for what He saw in him through His foreknowledge, and hated Esau for what He knew would happen from him.**

But, we can never say that God predestined Esau for perdition and Jacob for salvation.. or in other words that He decided that Esau was to perish notwithstanding what choice he makes!!, and that Jacob was to be saved notwithstanding what works he may do!! God forbids.

• Now, let us consider the words, "*Will the thing formed say to him who formed it 'Why have you made me like this?'. Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?'*" (Rom. 9:20,21).

Nay, a potter has power over the clay to make whatever he wants from it whether a vessel for honor or for dishonor... and the clay cannot say to him 'why have you made me like this?'. But the potter is wise and just.

**One of the beautiful commentaries that I heard on this subject is that a potter, in spite of the full discretion and**

**power he has, tests wisely the lump of clay and examines it.. If he finds it good, smooth and soft, suitable to be a vessel for honour, certainly he will make it so. It is absurd that a wonderful lump of clay comes into the hands of the potter but he makes from it a vessel for dishonour, for he is a wise potter. But if it is rough and bad and not fit to be a vessel for honour, the potter will be forced, due to its bad state, to make from it a vessel for dishonour.**

**Thus it depends, before anything else, upon the condition of the clay and whether it is fit or not. But we do not deny the power and the discretion which the potter has..**

**A potter tries, as far as he can, to make of the clay which he has vessels for honour as long as the clay helps him. Hence, the Lord said: *“Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand, O house of Israel! The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it, if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good which I said I would benefit it”* (Jer. 18:6-10).**

**This reminds us of the parable of the sower who went out to sow (Mt. 13:3-8). The sower is the same, and the**

**seeds are the same.. but according to the kind of the soil on which the seeds fell, the result came whether decay or fruitfulness.** The sower did not prepare the seeds to wither away or be scorched, chocked or devoured by the birds but the kind of the soil determined the result.

Man likewise is free to choose his own end, *“For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”* (Gal. 6:8).

#### **F. A theological treatment of the subject:**

**The principle of election implies injustice and partiality and does not conform with God’s justice who gives everyone “according to what he has done” (2 Cor. 5:10).** If God has mercy on whomever He will have mercy, and has compassion on whomever He will have compassion leaving the rest to perish, how will this agree with God’s justice?!

And those whom God has predestined for perdition what is their fault?! Would not this lead sinners to despair, feeling that their striving is useless since they are vessels predestined for dishonour? As for the righteous, this would certainly lead them to slackness and negligence, being sure that they will certainly be saved whether they strive or not...!

**Besides, what is the use of rewarding since there are persons predestined for perdition before they are born?!.. and others predestined for salvation before they are**

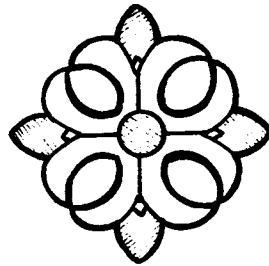
born?! what virtue do the elect have so that they may be rewarded, and what fault do the wicked do so that they may be punished?

**What is the need for the commandment**, then, as long as one's end is determined whether one obeys the commandment or not! Besides, is not the principle of election against man's free will?

**And why would the devil test man's will?** why would he toil in tempting the elect if they will certainly be saved however hard he tempts them? Why would he toil to trap the others since they are not elected and will certainly perish even though he does not fight them?

**What is the need also for evangelizing, preaching, pastoral work and teaching** since all this will not change man's destiny whether he is among the elect or the rejected?.

The idea of election leads the world into confusion and contradicts with God's justice and man's free will.



## **[2] WHAT WAS THE STRIVING OF THE THIEF THAT MADE HIM GAIN SALVATION?**

Those who argue that salvation can be attained through faith alone, inquire what good works the thief that was on the right hand of the Lord did, and what the striving that brought him salvation was.

We say in reply that the thief did many things, the most important of which are the following:

### **A. The thief believed on the Lord in very hard circumstances:**

Just to believe was not an easy thing for the thief. Had he believed on the Lord while He was raising the dead, healing the sick, walking on the water, rebuking the wind and working supernatural miracles, we would have said that such deeds were evident proofs that cannot be doubted.. But he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ while He was on the cross! He believed on Him while He was humiliated and despised, while He was in a weak state in front of all! People struck Him, spat on Him and sneered at Him saying, "Prophecy! Who is it that struck You?"!...



The hindrances that faced such faith were numerous and from every side.. So, if that thief had not believed, people would have given him excuse; for how would he believe on a person who was despised and on the cross that He was God?! Certainly, that thief needed to strive hard against himself in order to believe. He had to fight the various doubts that hindered that faith and were about to do away with it...

Anyone who says that the thief did not strive, seems to have no idea about the situation that encompassed the thief, which situation many stumbled at, even the disciples, for the Lord said to them, "*All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written, 'I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'*" (Mk. 14:27). And it happened that the sheep were all scattered! No one could stand by the cross except the Marys and John the Beloved.. and .. that thief!

The veil of the temple was torn in two, the sun was darkened and the rocks were split... but was all this sufficient to make one believe? We know well that in spite of all, **the chief priests, the priests, the elders, the scribes and Pharisees did not believe, nor did the other thief...** It was not an easy matter for the thief on the right hand of the Lord to believe.

**B. The thief declared a complete confession of the Lord:**

The words, "*Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom*" (Lk. 23:42) imply many meanings viz:

**He confessed that the Crucified Christ was a Lord and king and that He had a Kingdom.** He confessed that Christ was coming into His kingdom which means that the thief believed that death had no power over Him. The thief believed also that Christ was able to let him enter the Kingdom or in other words that his salvation would be through that person crucified with him.

**Besides, that thief had great hope..** For in spite of the awful evils he did throughout his life he believed that a person like him can be saved and can enter the Kingdom through the Lord Christ.

**Moreover, that thief did not only believe but he also declared this faith publicly before all, without being ashamed...; a matter which St. Peter the Apostle and most of the disciples and apostles could not do.**

### **C. The thief confessed his sins:**

He did not stop at the point of declaring his faith but he was filled with holy zeal when he heard his companion blaspheming against Christ, saying, “ *‘If You are the Christ, save Yourself and us’*, But the other (the thief who was on the right hand of the Lord) answering, rebuked him saying, *‘Do you not even fear god, seeing you are under the same condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong.’* ” (Lk. 23:39-41).

**Thus, the thief confessed his sins, confessed that he deserved to be punished and confessed that his death on**

the cross was the due reward of his deeds.. He did not think the punishment greater than what he deserved but said, 'we receive the due reward of our deeds'.

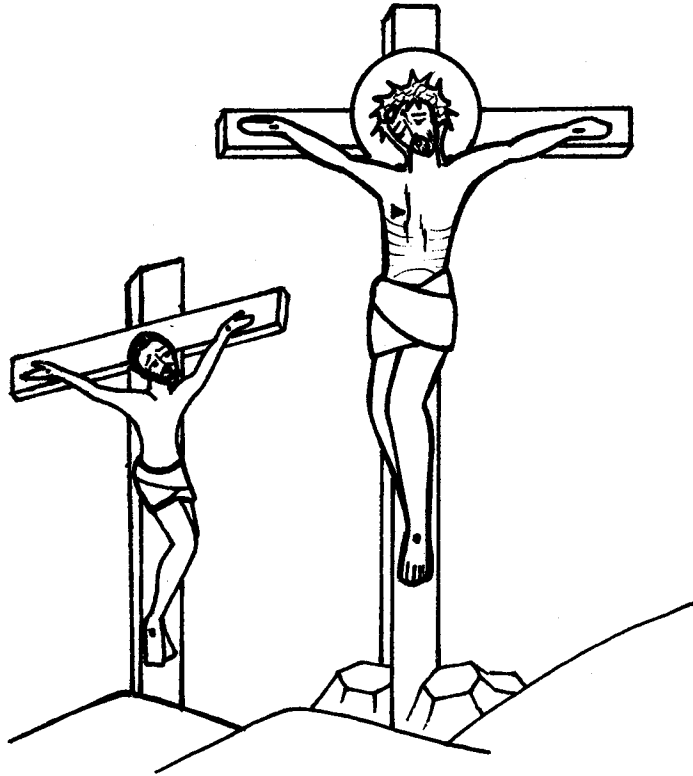
**The conduct of that thief was also spiritual; for while the other thief was thinking of a means to escape from death and crucifixion, saying to Christ save Yourself and us', the thief who believed was concerned about his eternity and the Kingdom He implared the Lord for his eternal salvation not for saving him of the carnal death. He accepted that death as a punishment for his sins and found that those last moments must be given to thinking about his eternity. His mind was occupied with the Lord and His kingdom. This made him defend the Lord...**

#### **D. The thief defended the Lord:**

The Lord Jesus Christ stood alone; no one defended him of those who enjoyed His gifts and benefits from His miracles.. No one of His apostles or His followers defended Him except for few names. But the voice of this thief came out loud to put to shame the ungrateful thousands; he said, "This Man has done nothing wrong".

What a wonderful defence, from a person embracing death! It showed that there remained some good in human nature.. So, he deserved to hear from the Lord the words, "*Today you will be with Me in Paradise*" (Lk. 23:43).

**Would people now ask, 'What was the striving of the thief, and what did he do?'; I ask them in return, 'What was int he power of the thief, to do more than that and he did not do?! I'd like to hear their answer to this question...**



### **[3] How were they saved without being Baptized**

Some people inquire, 'Since baptism is necessary for salvation, how were the martyrs saved without being baptized, and how was that thief likewise saved?

**The answer is:**

We have explained before that baptism - in its essence - is death with Christ.. So, St. Paul the Apostle said, "*... as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*" (Rom. 6:3-8).

**Then, since baptism is death with Christ, we say expressly and plainly that that thief actually died with Christ...**

Likewise the martyrs, we say that they died with Christ, shared His death and shed their blood with Him... Therefore, the church calls this baptism, "Baptism of blood".. because had those martyrs lived more, they would have been baptized with water also...

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