

“Clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart” (2Corinth.3: 3)

+ Lecture VI: Are you an Epistle of Christ? +

One time, St. Serapion went to Alexandria and in the marketplace he found a naked poor man. He said to himself, “How come I, who is called a monk, am dressed up and this poor man is naked? This is truly My Lord Christ who said, ‘I was naked and you clothed me’ (Matt.25: 36). Moreover, he is suffering from the cold weather”. Immediately, he took his garment off and gave it to the poor man. He then sat down holding his Bible in his hand...a rich man from the city passed by him and said, “Who took your garment Anba Serapion?” The saint pointed to his Bible and said, “This is who took my garment”. After they clothed him, he departed from there and found another person who is being dragged to the jail since he couldn’t pay his dept. So Anba Serapion sold his bible and paid the dept of the man. As he was walking in his way he found another poor man begging and again he took his garment off and gave it to him and returned to his cell naked. His disciple saw him and asked, “Teacher, where is your garment?” He replied, “I gave it away”. The disciple then said, “What about your Bible my father; the book that comforted us”. The saint replied, “Everyday it said to me ‘go and sell all you have and give to the poor’, so I sold it”. (Paradise of the monks, P 89)

I) The Cookbook:

Let’s assume that you have a wonderful cookbook that is full of delicious recipes. You love your book and every day you read in it and you have even memorized parts of it. But you never took your book to the kitchen and you never actually tried any of these beautiful recipes; just admiring the nice pictures of the dishes that your book illustrates satisfies you. This is the same as reading the Holy Bible that contains many recipes for holiness, peace, wisdom, self-control, etc... The stories of the saints are like the beautiful illustrated dishes in the cookbook. Your heart is the kitchen where these holy recipes should be applied. Before reading the Holy Gospel in the Church, the Coptic priests pray saying, ‘...may we be worthy to hear and to act according to your Holy Gospels’. St. James said, “Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1: 22). So stop deceiving yourself and **start cooking!**

II) Be Wise:

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt.7: 24). Notice the close relation between doing the word of God and wisdom. That means that those who act and do what they read in the Holy Bible are considered wise. On the other hand those who don’t act and don’t apply the Holy words of the Bible are simply foolish. Of course you remember what happened to the foolish virgins (Matt.25: 1-12); **do you get the picture?**

It is written, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting...” (Jam.1: 5,6). Here is a Holy and blessed recipe so **start cooking.**

III) Becoming an Epistle of Christ:

In lecture 2 we discussed the doctrine of inspiration and we concluded that the Holy Scriptures are at the same time perfectly divine and perfectly human. Now when we talk about becoming an epistle of Christ we need to understand the role of the divine grace and our human role.

St. Paul said, “Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure”(Phil.1: 12,13). This verse exemplifies the Orthodox concept of good works and grace:

- 1) The divine grace works in my heart initiating the will to act.
- 2) I have a free will and can accept or refuse to work with the divine grace.
- 3) My good works are the fruit of the acceptance of the grace of God in my heart. This is the communion of the Holy Spirit mentioned in (2Cor.13: 14).
- 4) Our Lord Jesus Christ said, “without Me you can do nothing”(Jn.15: 5). Our salvation is at the same time perfectly divine and perfectly human just as Holy Scriptures are and Just as our Lord Jesus Christ Himself is perfectly divine and perfectly human.

+ H.H Pope Shenouda III refuted the heresy of salvation by ‘grace alone’ in his books “The Heresy of Salvation in a moment” and “Salvation in the Orthodox Concept”.

IV) Conclusion:

Our Lord said, “You are the salt of the earth...you are the light of the world” (Matt.5: 13,14). St. Paul also said, “ That you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Phil.1: 15, 16).

You need to realize that God would not ask you to do something impossible, He is going to help you and support you in your spiritual life; **your job** is to accept his help and work with His divine grace. If you stumble He will not ask you why you stumbled on the way. But He will ask why you didn’t get up and why you didn’t ask for His help.

So, Go and do a good Job!
