

“A wise man fears and departs from evil, but a fool rages and is self-confident.” (Prov 14:16)

✠ **Lecture VII: Confidence in Salvation** ✠

Salvation depends on the grace of God, **“by grace you have been saved” (Eph 2:8)**, and it also depends on the response of our free will to the call of God’s grace, **“have a walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph 4:1)**, **“If you would hear His voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 3:8)**. Therefore, when we speak of confidence in salvation we ought to speak about confidence in God and about self-confidence.

✠ **Confidence in God:**

A believer should have an unlimited trust and hope in God. Since God’s mercy is unlimited, hope in such mercy should likewise be unlimited. Hope is one of the three great virtues mentioned in **(1Cor 13:13)** and, like any other virtue, grows in a person until it reaches its relative perfection in him/her. Perfect hope is void of any doubt and is confirmed with all certainty. It is founded on faith in God’s attributes, His previous dealings with us, the unlimited atonement of His precious blood and His true promises. God’s mercy, compassion, forgiveness, and love are unlimited. The atonement of His blood is sufficient for the remission of the sins of the whole world from the beginning of the ages to the end of time, not only once but an unlimited number of times.

✠ **Self-confidence:**

Although we should have an unlimited trust in God, we should not trust our free will, which may deviate towards evil, **“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1Jn 1:8)**. It is foolish **(Prov 14:16)** to think that one had done away with sin and that he/she is renewed and sanctified leading a new life in which he/she **can never sin**. We are not stronger than those who fell before, but perhaps we are in a lower level than they before their fall. St. Paul said, **“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 power of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance” (Heb 6:4-6)**. Did you, who trust that you will attain the Kingdom, reach this high level that those have reached? However, those who received such gifts fell away and perished being compared to a land that is **“rejected and near to being cursed, whose end is to be burned” (Heb 6:8)**. St. Paul said, **“I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1Cor 9:27)**. This great saint, who was chosen from his mother’s womb and was called through grace **(Gal 1:15)**, who was caught up into Paradise **(2Cor 12:4)**, disciplined his body lest he himself should be disqualified and we are talking about self-confidence!

✠ **Conditions for self-confidence:**

St. John said, **“If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence towards God**, and whatever we ask we receive from Him, **because we keep His commandments** and do the things that are pleasing in His sight” **(1Jn 3:21-22)**. The condition is that our consciences have nothing to blame us for, in other words we do not do anything wrong for which our hearts might reproach us. St. John also said, **“Little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence** and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” **(1Jn 2:28)**. What does abiding in our Lord Jesus Christ mean? St. John said, **“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1Jn 2:6)**, **“Whoever abides in Him does not sin” (1Jn 3:6)**. Who dares, after reading these verses, to say that he/she is abiding in the Lord? Now if we cannot say this, how could we say that we have confidence? Finally, St. John said, **“Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness** in the Day of Judgment; because as He is, so are we in the world” **(1Jn 4:17)**. Let us ask ourselves, have we attained this perfect love? Do we love the Lord from all our hearts, minds, power, and thoughts? Are we in the world in the same way our Lord was? **If so, blessed are we. We can have confidence!**

✠ **Passages that require clarification:**

(1)→ **Our Lord said**, “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**” (Jn 10:27-28).

(✠) First of all, these people were called ‘*sheep*’, which means that they are among those who will be set on our Lord’s right hand in the day of judgment, since the ‘*goats*’ will be set on His left (Mt 25:32-33). They hear the Lord’s voice and follow Him (i.e. keep the commandments), and “they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him” (Jn 10:5). Certainly, this kind will never perish. Secondly, being in the hand of the Lord doesn’t mean that the sheep lost their free will. In the Holy Book of Revelation, we read about the seven angels (bishops) of the Churches being in the Lord’s **right hand** (Rev 1:16; 20). The term ‘*right hand*’ represents the Lord’s power (Ps 118:15-16). Yet, one of these angels fell and needed repentance (Rev 2:5), another had a name that he is alive but he was dead (Rev 3:1), the third was lukewarm and the Lord was about to vomit him out of His mouth (Rev 3:16), he was wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). Indeed, no one can snatch the sheep out of the Lord’s hand, but the sheep are free to depart, “Therefore, let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he falls” (1Cor 12).

(2)→ **St. Paul said**, “Having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is **the guarantee of our inheritance**” (Eph 1:13-14).

(✠) St. Paul also said to the Ephesians, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30), and to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1Thess 5:19). Moreover, one can blaspheme against the Holy Spirit (refuse repentance) and never receive forgiveness (Mk 3:29), because he/she “insulted the Spirit of grace” (Heb 10:29). Therefore, the Church teaches us to pray humbly with King David saying, “do not take your Holy Spirit from me” (Ps 51:11).

(3)→ **St. John said**, “There shall by no means enter it (Heavenly Jerusalem) anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only **those who are written in the lamb’s Book of Life**” (Rev 21:17). Our Lord said to His disciples, “Rejoice because **your names are written in heaven**” (Lk 10:20). St. Paul said, “...my fellow workers, **whose names are in the Book of Life**” (Phil 4:3).

(✠) Having our names in the Book of Life is not a guarantee for salvation. The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My Book” (Ex 32:33). Notices that Judas was among the disciples whose names were written in heaven (Lk 10:20) and likewise Demas, St. Paul’s fellow worker (Phil 24), both of who perished! We need to overcome in order to keep our names in the Book of Life, “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).

(4)→ **It is written**, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for **He who promised is faithful**” (Heb 10:23).

(✠) Indeed God is faithful in His promise of salvation. Therefore we should have confidence in such promise. But concerning ourselves, it is written, “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). Truly, “If we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2Tim 2:12). Therefore, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), and “Conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear” (1Pet 1:17). Finally, have all the confidence in God and at the same time “do not be haughty, but fear” (Rom 11:20).

*This lecture is adapted from, ‘*Salvation in the Orthodox Concept*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.