

“How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation.” (Heb 2:3)

✠ Lecture VIII: Salvation in The Orthodox Concept ✠

I) The Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ & Salvation:

Salvation is **only** available **through the blood** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Heb 9:22**). The Passover lamb was a symbol of our Lord, “For indeed **Christ, our Passover**, was sacrificed for us” (**1Cor 5:7**). Through the blood of the lamb, the Israelites were saved from death, “Now **the blood** shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see **the blood**, I will pass over you and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt” (**Ex 12:13**). Through this precious blood sins are remitted and we enter in a new covenant with God, “This is My **blood of the new covenant** which is shed for many for the **remission of sins**” (**Mt 26:28**).

✠ Some Biblical References ✠

- “Shepherd the Church of God which He purchased **with His own blood.**” (**Acts 20:28**)
- “Having now been **justified by His blood**, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” (**Rom 5:9**)
- “In Him **we have redemption through His blood.**” (**Eph 1:7**) & (**Col 1:14**)
- “In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been made near **by the blood of Christ.**” (**Eph 2:13**)
- “Having made peace through **the blood of His cross.**” (**Col 1:20**)
- “Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with **His own blood** He entered the most Holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.” (**Heb 9:12**)
- “...How much more shall **the blood of Christ**, who through the eternal spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” (**Heb 9:14**)
- “Therefore brethren having boldness to enter the Holiest **by the blood of Jesus.**” (**Heb 10:19**)
- “Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will 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**)
- “...To Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to **the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel**” (**Heb 12:24**)

→ The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ *speaks better things than that of Abel* because the blood of Abel was seeking revenge as God said to Cain, “The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (**Gen 4:10**). On the other hand, the blood of Lord Jesus Christ was seeking forgiveness of sins, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” (**Lk 23:34**).

- “Now may the God of peace ... **through the blood of the everlasting covenant**, make you complete in every good work to do His will.” (**Heb 13:20-21**)
- “You were not redeemed with corruptible things ...but with **the precious blood of Christ** as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (**1Pet 1:18-19**)
- “There are three that bear witness on earth: the Spirit, the water, and **the blood**; and these three agree as one.” (**1Jn 5:8**)
- “... The **blood of Jesus Christ** His Son cleanses us from all sin.” (**1Jn 1:7**)
- “... To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins **in His own blood** ...” (**Rev 1:5**)
- “... You were slain, and have redeemed us to God **by Your blood** ...” (**Rev 5:9**)
- “These are the ones who came out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white **in the blood of the lamb.**” (**Rev 7:14**)
- “And they over came him **by the blood of the lamb** ...” (**Rev 12:11**)

✚ **Application of the above concept:**

1. The sins of the people in the Old Testament were not forgiven until the day of the crucifixion of our Lord Jesus Christ. All the sins of the Old Testament were merely “put away” as Nathan the Prophet said to King David, “The Lord also has **put away your sin**; you shall not die” (2Sam 12:13). He didn’t say ‘*has forgiven your sin*’ because “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Heb 9:22). Hence, the Paradise was closed in front all the righteous people of the Old Testament until the day when our Lord Jesus Christ shed His Blood on the cross and sins were remitted. The term “put away” means that the sin is transferred from one’s account to the account of the Savior.
2. When our Lord said to the paralytic “your sins are forgiven you” (Lk 5:20), He merely gave him a promise of forgiveness or a check so to speak, which would be cashed on the cross. This applies to all the instances where forgiveness and salvation were mentioned before the crucifixion (the sinful woman, the tax collector, Zacchaeus, and others...).

✚ **Conditions for Salvation:**

Our Lord said that His blood is shed for **many** (Mt 26:28) but in reality only **few** are saved (Mt 7:13-14).

→ This sad reality is due to the fact that there are certain conditions (prerequisites) for salvation:

1. Faith.
2. Saving Sacraments:
 - a) Baptism.
 - b) Confirmation.
 - c) Repentance & Confession.
 - d) Eucharist.
3. Good Works.

→ Each of these conditions will be discussed separately after we clarify certain points:

1. Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist don’t apply to the people of the Old Testament because they acquire their saving efficacy from the blood of our Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit, which pertains to the New Testament. Nevertheless, the people of the Old Testament had symbols of these Sacraments like Circumcision being symbolic for Baptism (Col 2:11-12).
2. The above conditions for salvation apply to normal responsible adults. Whenever these conditions are mentioned, people come up with all sorts of scenarios to question them. For instance, mentally challenged individuals and infants don’t possess the intellectual ability to understand and believe and therefore the condition of faith doesn’t apply to them.
3. The Sacrament of the Priesthood administers to us the saving Sacraments and therefore plays a major role in our salvation and even though we don’t have to become priests to be saved, we do need them for our salvation as “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1Cor 4:1).

✚ **Salvation is the story of the whole life:**

St. Paul said that, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God” (1Cor 1:18). Salvation in the Orthodox concept is seen as comprehending all of life; it is not a historical event that took place during a moment in the past. As the subject of salvation is addressed in Holy Scripture, the Orthodox Christian would see it in at least three aspects:

- a) I believe that I **have been** saved, having put on our Lord Jesus Christ in baptism.
- b) I believe that I **am being** saved, growing in our Lord Jesus Christ through the sacramental life of the Church.
- c) I believe that I **will be** saved, by God’s mercy in the Last Day of Judgment.

The story of salvation starts by faith, repentance and baptism, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” (**Mk 16:16**), “Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (**Acts 2:38**), this remission includes the original sin as well as all actual sins committed before baptism. Baptism provides us with salvation, forgiveness and regeneration. In baptism we are buried with our Lord Jesus Christ (**Col 2:12**), we die and rise with Him in the newness of life (**Rom 6:4**), “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (**Rom 6:6**). Through baptism, we become children of God and members of His body (the Church). Moreover, St. Paul said, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (**Gal 3:27**).

In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, “you have an anointing from the Holy One” (**1Jn 2:20**), and we become a temple of the Holy Spirit, “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” (**1Cor 6:19**). As a result of our response to the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we grow spiritually and bear the fruits of the Spirit (**Gal 5:22-23**).

Unfortunately, we still sin after being baptized and confirmed, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (**1Jn 1:18**). Even though our nature was renewed, we did not become infallible. The nature we receive in baptism is pure, yet liable to sin, as was Adam’s nature before the fall. The gift of regeneration that we receive in baptism does not cancel the gift of free will. Nevertheless, there is a difference between people who sin without being baptized, while living the life of wickedness and those who sin after baptism. The later have the Holy Spirit to rebuke and lead them to repentance, sin is temporary unless a person, with his/her free will, decides to reject repentance insulting the spirit of grace (**Heb 10:29**) and thus blasphemes against the Holy Spirit (**Lk 12:10**).

Through repentance and confession we are being saved, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (**Lk 13:3, 5**), “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1Jn 1: 9**). Additionally, we obtain salvation during Holy Eucharist, as the priest says in the Divine Liturgy, “... given for us salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it”, “whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (**Jn 6:54**).

Our life on earth is a test of our faith, “Now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (**1Pet 1:6-7**). Indeed, “We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (**Acts 14:22**). Moreover, we are subject to spiritual warfare, “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” (**Eph 6:12**), “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a raring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (**1Pet 5:8**).

Our Lord said, “He who endures **to the end** will be saved” (**Mt 10:22**), “He **who overcomes** shall inherit all things” (**Rev 21:8**). St. Paul said, “Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (**1Cor 9:27**), therefore, he also said, “Work out you salvation in fear and trembling” (**Phil 2:12**) and St. Peter exhorts us, “conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (**1Pet 1:17**). The outcome of our life and struggle will be revealed in the last day, “...you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” (**1Pet 1:5**). Therefore, our Lord said, “Be faithful **until death**, and I will give you the crown of life” (**Rev 2:10**).

Since the spiritual struggle and warfare takes up our whole life, therefore salvation is indeed the story of the whole life.

* This lecture is adapted from ‘*The Heresy of Salvation in a Moment*’ by H.H. Pope Shenouda III.