

Chapter 3: Eastern Orthodox Teaching on Salvation

“Justification is not given once and for all, nor is it a guarantee of eternal salvation, but it depends on how much a man will live righteously or sinfully in the future. There exists no such thing judicially that instantly converts a sinful person into a righteous one.”¹

“I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.”²

“Therefore, it is no wonder that the Orthodox doctrine of justification plays such a minor role. The most common presentation of the Orthodox teaching on religion by John of Damascus³ does not mention the concept of justification at all.”⁴

Both the very beginning and the end of the previous chapter presented the claim that the systematic teaching of salvation as described in the Bible radically differs from what the Orthodox Church teaches. It is easy to determine which religious organizations do not teach the Biblical truth on this issue. In complete opposition to numerous quotes from Scripture that show that Christians can be assured of their eternal salvation with God now, Orthodox believers live in constant fear and insecurity. Of course, this stems from their belief that salvation is based on works of human merit, and thus they need to earn God’s favor in order to receive eternal life. Some of the works that Orthodoxy cites in order for human beings to attain the kingdom of Heaven include: baptism, communion, fasts, confession to the priests, prayers to dead saints and angels of God, prayer on behalf of the souls of dead people, and many other types of works.

Before we begin to study the issue of Eastern Orthodox doctrines of salvation, we will respond first to the criticism that Eastern Orthodox theologians hurl at evangelical Protestants. They accuse Protestants of propagating erroneous beliefs that are contrary to the Bible. Such criticisms are, of course, the result of unfounded and erroneous understanding of the texts of Scripture on the part of Orthodoxy, as will be proven.

The last chapter clearly demonstrated that the entire Bible, including both the Old and especially the New Testaments, strongly emphasizes that salvation comes only by the grace of God exclusively through faith in Christ the Savior (i.e. the birth of God in human flesh by the Holy Spirit). Despite such clear teaching, the Orthodox theologian Lazar Milin states the following complaint in his book. He uses a very narrow argument to persuade the “true believers” that Protestants (including those of evangelical persuasion) base their doctrine of salvation on an incorrect translation of the Epistle to the Romans by Martin Luther. Here is what Mr. Milin writes:

¹ *What Do Orthodox Christians Believe?*, (Lamp: 1996), 9.

² Gal. 1:6-7.

³ St. John of Damascus (c.a. 700-750 AD).

⁴ Ernst Benz, *The Spirit and Life of the Eastern Church*, 48.

“As a matter of fact, Luther argued, and other Protestants also affirmed, that a man is justified before God only through faith in Christ and the redemption that Christ brought to suffering humanity. This is called a material principle of the Reformation. Good works are not necessary for salvation... It is interesting to study the process how Luther translated the Holy Scriptures into the German language. In Romans 3:28, the verse reads: ‘We believe, namely, that a man is justified by faith independent of works of the Law.’ Luther added to the translation an extra word: “alone”. That word corrupted the Holy Scriptures to say what Luther declared as a material principle of the Reformation: ‘Man is saved by faith alone.’... **Regardless of the fact that such teaching is illogical and contrary to the Bible, it has infiltrated the entirety of Protestantism in all its forms.**”⁵

It is obvious that Milin and other Orthodox theologians, as well as ordinary Orthodox believers, believe that Protestants are wrong. They believe that Protestants are misled by Luther’s translation of the Holy Scriptures.

Is it truly possible to believe this accusation after reading the previous chapter? After we have provided scores of Biblical texts, which very clearly describe God's way of salvation, valid for every person? Well, is there anywhere else in the Bible that states that a man can only be saved (or justified) by God through **“faith alone”**?

Regarding this issue, we can give a very clear answer. Even if such wording existed nowhere else in Scripture, that is, the system of salvation by faith alone, the biblical text confirms everything (with the proviso that readers understand how they were written).

However, the Lord through the Apostle Paul ensured that once and for all that the biblical text would indeed uphold the doctrine of salvation through faith alone for those who wish to accept Him and obey His Word. The apostle Paul wrote Galatians, an epistle in which he fought strongly for the purity of faith and the correct understanding of God's gift of salvation, among other things. In describing his earlier interaction with the Apostle Peter, Paul said the following:

*“But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that **we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!**”⁶*

Perhaps you might be one of those Orthodox readers who believe that the quote cited above is simply taken from a Lutheran or other Protestant translation of the Bible. However, the source of this translation (and all others cited in this book, lest otherwise noted) come from a priest and professor in the Seminary of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade, the late Dr. Emilian M. Carnica. Besides Carnica’s translation of Galatians 2:16, he also translates other verses that clearly affirm that a person is justified by faith alone.

⁵ Lazar Milin, *A Systematic Apologetic of Religions, Cults, and Sects*, 52.

⁶ Gal. 2:14, 16-7. Author’s emphasis.

Dr. Carnica's translation is not unique. Other translations reveal the same teachings.

Dr. Dimitrije Stefanovic, a translator and professor with the Orthodox Theological Seminary in the first half of the 20th century, translated Galatians 2:16 in this manner:

*"However, knowing that a man is justified not by works of the law but **by faith alone** in Christ Jesus, and we are in Christ Jesus, having believed to be justified by faith in Christ, not works of law, because by the works of the law, no one will be justified."*⁷
(Author's emphasis.)

Vuk Karadzic translated this verse in a similar manner:

*"Since we know that a man cannot be justified by the works of the law, but **only through faith** in Jesus Christ, and we are believers of Jesus Christ to be justified by faith in Christ..."*⁸

The following quotes come from one more Serbian translation, two Croatian Catholic translations, and a Croatian Protestant translation:

*"But knowing that the law does not justify a man, but **only faith** in Jesus Christ, and to put faith in Jesus Christ, that man is justified by faith in Christ..."* (Translation of Dr. Louis Bakotic. Author's emphasis.)

*"And because we know that man is not justified by the deeds of the law, but **only through faith** in Jesus Christ, we who are believers in Christ Jesus are justified by faith in Christ..."* (Translation of Dr. Ivan Ev. Saric, the Archbishop of Upper Bosnia, 5th edition, Salzburg 1969. Author's emphasis.)

*"But as we know that man is not justified by the exercise of the law, but **only faith** in Jesus Christ, that we have embraced the faith in Christ Jesus, then we are justified by faith in Christ ... "* (Translation by Christian Bible Institute, Dr. Ljudevit Rupčić, Zagreb 1983. Author's emphasis.)

*"Knowing that man still is not justified by the works of the law or otherwise, but **only by faith** in Jesus Christ. Since we believe in Jesus Christ, we are justified by faith in Christ..."* (Zagreb edition, third edition, etc., Branko Jakovic, GBV 1994).

However, despite all these and other clear proofs (to be explained later), Orthodox believers remain stubbornly entrenched in their belief that salvation demands various pious works, even if the Bible emphasizes the contrary. The next section of this chapter will give a detailed analysis of the beliefs of Eastern Orthodox Churches and demonstrate their shortcomings to the truth of salvation as presented in God's Word.

BAPTISM AS A CONDITION FOR SALVATION

The Orthodox Church teaches that water baptism is necessary for the salvation of man. So we will first examine its claim that salvation comes through baptism and then to give a biblical response.

⁷ Author's emphasis.

⁸ Author's emphasis.

“The Holy Sacrament of Baptism: This sacrament is the gate to enter the Church of Christ, or the ingrafting of the wild olive branches onto the tree... Therefore, the sacrament of baptism is a precondition for man to have salvation from and spiritual union with God. **Without baptism, there is no salvation.** The sacrament of Baptism consists of a person dying spiritually and burying his old, sinful man and then being reborn as a new, sinless man.”⁹

“‘Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.’¹⁰ When He was teaching Nicodemus, Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God **unless he is born of water and the Spirit.**’¹¹ Spiritual ‘Rebirth’ or ‘Baptism by the water and the Spirit’ is the first sacrament of the Orthodox Church, that is, the holy sacrament of Baptism... The commandment of the Sacrament of Baptism - the baptism ‘by water and the Spirit’ – is contained in the first gospel, the first sermon which the Savior heralded to mankind... Christ issued the command about this sacrament specifically, as we have already noted, to His disciples,¹² who preached a new Divine doctrine to baptize people ‘of water and the Spirit’ in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit... According to our holy faith, the holy sacrament of Baptism cleanses the newly baptized person of the sin inherited from his parents and is spiritually reborn of God for eternal life... **Baptism is, therefore, the precondition for our salvation.**”¹³

“Eventually, when the faithful begin to baptize their children, they stopped teaching to those about to be baptized the catechumen.¹⁴ As a result of this change, the church leaders invented a new system called ‘godparents’. Children [infants] are baptized and that on the basis of the faith of their godfather, who in the process of the holy sacrament of Baptism becomes a spiritual father to that child – a status spiritually conferred by God... **The sacrament of Baptism is the most important ritual in the worldwide Church of Christ...** And the fact is that the name that the newly baptized child receives from his godfather during the baptism is recorded in the ‘Records of People Born and Christened in the Church of Christ’ and ‘the Book of Eternal Life’, a book possessed by the eternal Lamb of God, who was slaughtered from the foundation of the world.”¹⁵

From the quotations above, we can make the following conclusions about the teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy on baptism:

1. Baptism is a precondition for salvation. Without baptism, it is impossible to have salvation.
2. The Lord Jesus Christ preached the “baptism of water and the Spirit”.
3. The apostles were baptized “of water and the Spirit.”
4. Baptism is called a “sacrament” and named “the first sacrament” in “the first Gospel”.
5. Baptism cleanses a person from all his ancestors’ sins (and his own that he has committed).
6. Infants and small children are baptized on the basis of the godfather’s faith, who then becomes the spiritual father of the child.
7. The name of the child christened under the godfather is entered in the “Book of Life” that the Lamb possesses in heaven.

⁹ Rev. Zhivan M. Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher* (Belgrade, 1996), 246. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁰ Mk. 16:16.

¹¹ Jn. 3:5. Author’s emphasis.

¹² Mt. 28:19.

¹³ *Catechism in the Home* (Orthodox Religion Reader: Belgrade, 1991), 26-7. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁴ “Catechumen” – a course for adults that prepared them for baptism by teaching them the basic truths of Christianity. (Author’s note.)

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 32. Author’s emphasis.

8. The name of the baptized one is recorded in the annals of “Those Born and Christened in the Church of Christ”.

After reading these texts, any reader who is familiar with the Holy Scriptures will see immediately that these texts not only are not based on the teaching of the Word of God, but they also vastly distort the teachings of Christ and the New Testament apostles.

In contrast to His teaching on believer’s baptism by immersion in water, Christ never preached nor delivered something that remotely resembled the Orthodox doctrine on “baptism of water and spirit”. Neither did the apostles ever baptize someone “with water and spirit.”

Of course, neither are the other claims of Orthodoxy correct. Baptism is not a precondition for salvation, nor is it a “holy sacrament” that cleanses one of ancestral sin. Infant baptism on the basis of “faith of the godfather” is more than merely unbiblical. Writing the name christened to the baptized one by the godfather in the “Book of Life” simply does not exist in the eyes of God, nor does the church’s “Book of Those Born and Christened in the Church of Christ” have any validity.

All that the Orthodox Church teaches on this issue derived from the influence of the “Church Fathers” of centuries later than God’s Word. Their teachings have nothing in common with Christ and the apostolic doctrine. It is quite easy to prove the veracity of the claims I have just made.

In order to defend their position that baptism is a condition for salvation, Orthodox theologians cite as their proof only the one verse in Mark 16:16:

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

Because there is no support for its theology in the Holy Scriptures, the Orthodox Church resorts to pulling verses out of the overall Scriptural context and imposing interpretations foreign to that context. However, as we look at this verse, we realize that the **condition for salvation is faith and not baptism**. The Lord in uttering this sentence says, “Whoever does not believe will be condemned,” not “Who is not baptized.”

As a consequence, faith brings about salvation, and lack of faith results in lack of salvation. The New Testament defines Baptism as an ordinance that Jesus commands everyone who has put their faith in Him as Savior to receive.

It becomes perfectly clear that this has been the apostolic teaching and practice for all righteousness in the history of Christianity. With this in mind, we realize that God was thinking this: *“Whoever has believed and is not yet baptized, he has received salvation.”*

The Meaning of Baptism in the Church of the First Century

“Faith is the gift of God and acquired during baptism. Faith is a gift of God and is a sort of divine seed which the Holy Spirit sows in the soul of a person during baptism.”¹⁶

*“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel...”*¹⁷

*“Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”*¹⁸

The first quotation reveals to us the Orthodox belief that a man receives faith only at the time of his baptism. Consequently, we arrive at the conclusion that a person only becomes a Christian through the sacrament of baptism. Orthodox doctrine claims that one comes as a God-hating person before he is baptized, but afterward, the rite of baptism administered by the Orthodox Church in some miraculous way converts such a person to a faithful believer. It becomes almost unnecessary to see how far this doctrine has gone astray from the revelation of God’s Word. However, because I want to prove that Eastern Orthodoxy, which considers itself to have the “right doctrine”, does not possess the truth in its confession, let us examine the response of the New Testament to the first quotation from the Orthodox theologian.

Christ and the apostles taught the doctrine of baptism totally different from the view taught by Eastern Orthodoxy.

After his resurrection, the Lord commanded the disciples to go into all the world, preaching the gospel of salvation through faith, and teaching all people with the purpose of making them His disciples. The next step that the apostles were commanded to perform with people who had faith in Christ was baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

*“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*¹⁹

Water baptism is supposed to be an external sign of justification by faith (salvation) and a “funeral” for the old sinful way of life, similar to the external sign of circumcision in the Old Testament, which served as a sign of the “circumcision of the heart”, that is, a rejection of sin. The Lord God commanded namely Old Testament Israelites to prune all their male offspring, as a sign of their belonging and commitment to God:

*“This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you, the covenant you are to keep: **Every male among you shall be circumcised.**”*²⁰

¹⁶ Marinkovic, *The Greatest Teacher*, 10. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁷ 1 Cor. 1:17a. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹⁸ Rom. 10:17 (NIV)

¹⁹ Mt. 28:19-20. (NIV)

²⁰ Gen. 17:10. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

*“The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.”*²¹

The Apostle Paul in the New Testament emphasizes the fact that God did not save nor accept the Israelites in the Old Testament, and their father Abraham, based on their external physical circumcision. Rather, He saved them because of their sincere desire to serve and carry out the will of God. In fact, physical circumcision could only serve as a visible external sign of their sincere faith and readiness to obey the Lord’s will:

*“Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! **And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.** So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”*²²

This same apostle testifies that at the time of sincere faith and spiritual birth of the believer, God cleanses man from sin “not with a circumcision done by the hands of men”, that is, a rejection of previously committed sins, but rather by God giving man’s heart a desire to fulfill His will:²³

*“In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, **not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith** in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.”*²⁴

Unlike Orthodox priests who claim salvation comes through religious rites, the apostles held to the doctrines of justification and salvation through faith in Christ as taught through the Bible. The apostles taught that faith arises from hearing the preaching of God’s Word.²⁵ Consistent with this teaching, the apostle Paul was able to declare that the Lord did not send him to baptize, but rather to preach the gospel.²⁶ Nowhere in his letters did Paul leave even the slightest idea that water baptism could lead to anyone’s salvation. On the contrary, Paul always emphasized the importance of receiving the message of the gospel (“good news”) of Jesus' suffering and resurrection from the dead by faith:

*“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, **for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes**, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”*²⁷

*“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you **will be saved**. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. As the Scripture says, ‘Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to*

²¹ Dt. 30:6. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

²² Rom. 4:9-12. Author’s emphasis.

²³ Phil. 2:13 says, “For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”

²⁴ Col. 2:11-12. Author’s emphasis.

²⁵ Rom. 10:17

²⁶ 1 Cor. 1:17

²⁷ Rom. 1:16-7. Author’s emphasis.

shame.’ For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, for, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’”²⁸

Since it is clear that Paul recognized that the condition for giving a person baptism was his personal salvation, which only came from the conscious faith of a person, this servant of God certainly never would have wasted his time to organize the baptism of faithless pagans.

Examples of Baptisms Performed by the Apostles

These next examples show that the apostles always baptized people only after they preached the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ the Savior. They baptized only those people who received faith, or in other words, those who moved from a state of unbelief to a state of faith in Jesus Christ:

*“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call...’ **Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.**”²⁹*

*“Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there... **But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.**”³⁰*

*“Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, ‘Look, here is water. **Why shouldn’t I be baptized?**’ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.”³¹*

*““All the prophets testify about him that **everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.**’ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message... Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.’ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.”³²*

*“He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, **what must I do to be saved?**’ They replied, ‘**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.**’ Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family **were baptized.**”³³*

Therefore, based upon all these examples of apostolic baptism, we can discern the following sequence of events:

²⁸ Rom. 10:9-13. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

²⁹ Acts 2:38, 41. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

³⁰ Acts 8:4-5, 12. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

³¹ Acts 8:35-8. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

³² Acts 10:43-8. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

³³ Acts 16:30-3. Author’s emphasis.

- (1) Preaching the gospel of salvation through faith in Christ to those who do not believe.
- (2) Response of faith in the salvation message of the Gospel
- (3) Water baptism of new believers based upon their testimony of their adoption of faith in the Savior Jesus Christ and of their repentance.

This brief but detailed analysis ought to help us comprehend the apostolic practice of baptizing. We ought to realize that they never believed in the necessity of baptism for salvation. On the other hand, we also saw the obligation that every believer who dedicates himself to Christ by faith to be baptized soon afterward. This is in accordance with the Lord's commandment.

“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.” When we understand the doctrine the Lord Christ taught on the subject, it shows us that every believer ought to be baptized soon after he believes in Jesus. In other words, Christ spoke of those who believe currently will be saved in the future, and, naturally, will be baptized.³⁴

Water Baptism as Spiritual Birth

“When He was teaching Nicodemus, Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’”³⁵

Here we see a fundamental belief of Orthodoxy that is closely related to their understanding of the necessity of baptism for salvation. Although the previous section already demonstrated that this belief does not correspond to God's Word, this study will show additional proofs. The quotation mentioned above, which comes from a book blessed by the Serbian Orthodox Patriarch Pavle, shows that Orthodoxy misinterprets the text from the Gospel of John. If the Orthodox doctrine on the need for baptism for salvation were correct, then the actual words of Christ quoted in the Gospel of John ought to correspond totally with the Orthodox quote above. In order that we might all see the difference between the actual words of Christ and the Orthodox misunderstanding, let us look at the actual words of Jesus as recorded by the Apostle John:

*“Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, ‘Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.’ In reply Jesus declared, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.’ ‘How can a man be born when he is old?’ Nicodemus asked. ‘Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, **no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of***

³⁴ One needs to clearly understand this: the term “baptism” in the Bible has a wide range of meanings not limited to water baptism. Other meanings include the “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (see Acts. 1:5, 11:15-16, 1 Cor. 12:13) and “baptism of fire”, e.g., eternal punishment by burning the souls of the unrepentant in the eternal Lake of Fire (see Mt. 3:11-12). Jesus calls His suffering on the cross a “baptism” (see Lk. 12:50) and uses the same term with regard to the suffering of the apostles (Mark 10:38-39). Thus, it is possible that, in accordance with the entire biblical context of the message of eternal salvation, the Lord Christ in stating Mark 16:16 defines “baptism” not as water baptism, but rather the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”. This would certainly support His overall teaching on salvation, which the apostles then preached.

³⁵ *Catechism in the Home*, 26. Author's emphasis.

*water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.' 'How can this be?' Nicodemus asked. 'You are Israel's teacher,' said Jesus, 'and do you not understand these things?'"*³⁶

What we first notice about the God-inspired text is that Christ the Lord never mentions a “baptism of water and the Spirit” (but He did mention the word “birth”, but that does not equate to “baptism” as we have seen earlier). It is inexcusable to insert words into the mouth of the Lord Jesus that not only did he never speak but also he never even thought. In this passage from John, Christ speaks of the need for God to render a miraculous “intervention” with every sinner who accepts Jesus Christ as his personal Savior. The Lord calls this act of intervention “the birth from above” or “the birth from the Spirit.”

At the beginning of his gospel, when he still has not begun to describe specific events from Christ’s life, the apostle John summarizes the implications of Christ’s first coming to be with humankind by saying:

*“The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. **Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God** - children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but **born of God.**”*³⁷

Many Jewish people did not accept the Lord Jesus Christ even though they personally saw Him, yet a number of pagans heard about Him through the preaching of the Apostles and accepted Christ by faith. God gave them the power to become His children. The first category of Jewish people, whether they believed Christ or not, comprise people who are born only in the natural way - from earthly parents. However, those who believed Jesus, be they Jew or Gentile, were born in the spiritual way – from God Himself.

The Nature of Spiritual Birth

After Nicodemus expressed his astonishment and misunderstanding of spiritual birth, Jesus asked him, “You are Israel’s teacher and do you not understand these things?” This Pharisee who knew the Scriptures of the Old Testament ought to have understood the truth which Jesus spoke. Yet, it is obvious that this was not the case. However, regardless of Nicodemus’s ignorance of one of the most important spiritual messages from Jesus, he should have known that the “new spiritual birth from God” was written in several clear places in the books of the Old Testament. The clearest text that speaks about this “new spiritual birth” is found in the book of the prophet Ezekiel that was written five hundred years before Christ:

*“I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and **put a new spirit in you**; I will remove from you your*

³⁶ Jn. 3:1-10. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

³⁷ Jn. 1:9-13. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

*heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”*³⁸

This text says exactly what we learned in the study of the life of Abraham and his justification by faith. If you pay attention to what Ezekiel has said, you will notice that the Lord makes these promises to some people:

- (1) He will cleanse them by “bathing” them in pure water.
- (2) He will regenerate them by providing them a new heart and spirit.
- (3) He will make their hearts a sanctuary (“temple”) for His Spirit.
- (4) He will move them to follow His laws and decrees.

The birth of God “from water and the Spirit” includes all the points mentioned above. After a person puts his faith in Christ and is “born from above”, he receives a new nature which avoids sinful living and seeks to please God on a daily basis (see Ezek. 36:27).

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*³⁹

*“No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.”*⁴⁰

*“We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.”*⁴¹

The new birth also makes the believer a temple of the Holy Spirit (per Ezek. 36:27):

*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - **the Spirit of truth**. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and **will be in you**.”*⁴²

*“The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.”*⁴³

*“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”*⁴⁴

This fulfillment of the Holy Spirit is also referred to as the “baptism of the Holy Spirit”⁴⁵. According to the Bible, this fulfillment occurs before water baptism and in fact is a

³⁸ Ezek. 36:25-7. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

³⁹ 2 Cor. 5:17. (NIV)

⁴⁰ 1 Jn. 3:9. John here is not referring to occasional sinning that happens in every believer's life and which the true believer will regret. Rather, he refers to the conscious and deliberate disobedience of God's revealed will. See James 3:2.

⁴¹ 1 Jn. 3:18.

⁴² Jn. 14:16-17. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

⁴³ Rom. 8:16. (NIV)

⁴⁴ 1 Cor. 3:16. (NIV)

⁴⁵ When the Apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 12:13 and Gal. 3:27 speaks of baptism, he very clearly defines it as of the Holy Spirit and not of water, contrary to the misunderstanding that Orthodox theologians use to justify their doctrine of baptism.

precondition before water baptism.⁴⁶ Despite the Orthodox accusation that “the idea of the second birth as a religious experience, independent of water baptism, is a recent invention and has no biblical basis,”⁴⁷ just the opposite is true. The new birth from God signifies the establishment of fellowship with the Lord on the basis of sincere and firm belief. This fellowship was never based upon ancestral sin or spiritual deadness of the Orthodox teaching of baptism.

“Orthodox Baptism symbolizes the actual union of human beings with Christ through spiritual rebirth.”⁴⁸ Such a claim is very easy to refute even from personal experience. Scripture testifies that all of us who are born of God no longer live a sinful lifestyle and do not keep on sinning before the Most High, as mentioned before. One can look at the lives of many baptized people in Orthodox churches (and in many other churches, for that matter) around the world. It becomes apparent that there exist many who are blasphemers, adulterers, liars, disobedient to parents, drunks, and transgressors with other sins among such people who are pronounced “born again and united with Christ” by Orthodoxy. This contradiction shows us clearly that they were not “born again” nor “united with Christ,” despite the claims of Orthodox theology that they were spiritually regenerated. It would be utter blasphemy to even imagine, let alone declare as church dogma, that anyone who curses God’s name (as the great majority of baptized Serbs do) could ever be accepted by God as His child and united with Christ. The facts speak for themselves and no other comment is needed.

The Godfather As a Spiritual Parent of the Newly Baptized Person

From an Orthodox work earlier cited, we learned that children are baptized in the Orthodox Church based upon the faith of the godfather, an adult who becomes their spiritual parent.⁴⁹ This spiritual father of a little child gives “birth” to his godson “for God and eternal life”. Orthodoxy emphasizes the notion that such spiritual connection between the godfather and godchild is vital and almost as thick as blood.⁵⁰

What Does God’s Word Say about Godfathers?

The shortest answer to this question would be quite simple: NOTHING!

The New Testament knows nothing about the Orthodox system of godfatherhood, e.g. the spiritual father of the baptized child. In fact, as we have seen earlier, the Bible permits baptism only for those persons who believe in Christ the Savior. Small children and babies are excluded from the list of those who may be baptized, because they cannot take responsibility nor can they consciously accept the Christian faith. The Holy Scriptures do not contain one single example of baptizing infants and small children, although it does

⁴⁶ See John 1:32-4, Acts 10:43-8, 11:15-16, Rom. 6:3-4, and Gal. 3:26.

⁴⁷ *What Every Orthodox Christian Believes* (The Lamp), 8.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹ *Catechism in the Home*, 30-1.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

not exclude the possibility that older children (perhaps around 7 years old) could be baptized. Orthodox historian Eusebius Popovic asserts the following:

“During the time of the holy Apostles, **anyone who sincerely believed in Christ** and thus entered into His kingdom, His church, was **baptized without any additional preparation**, apart from the fact that they heard strong preaching... Certainly, children were baptized, because we know that Peter baptized the Roman officer Cornelius in Caesarea along with his whole house, as Paul baptized the jailer of Philippi along with his whole house and Stephen in Corinth, again with his whole house. Thus, as the Bible states people were baptized with their whole house, so that must include children as well.”⁵¹

Although Eusebius Popovic wants to justify the Orthodox code of baptizing young children and infants, yet he tells us that the apostles baptized only those people who believed with sincere hearts. The evangelist Luke confirms this point for us in Acts, when he stresses that Peter baptized Cornelius and those in his house who **heard** his message and **put their faith in Christ** (which certainly could include children old enough to understand, but definitely not little children and infants who were too young to hear and believe):

“While Peter was still speaking these words, **the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message...** For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God. Then Peter said, ‘Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? **They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.**’”⁵²

“They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.’ **Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.** At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because **he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.**”⁵³

However, the very text that *Catechism in the Home* cites in support of the baptism of babies and the system of godparents comes only from times much later than the time of Christ’s apostles. Data from church history tells us that, for example, a church father from the second century, Tertullian of Carthage (160-220 A.D.), an opponent of baptizing young children, taught that this practice was introduced very slowly under the auspices of the church. In terms of baptizing infants, he advised and taught the following:

“According to circumstance and disposition and even age of the individual person, it may be better to delay Baptism; and especially so in the case of little children. Why, indeed, is it necessary - if it be not a case of necessity - that the sponsors to be thrust into danger, when they themselves may fail to fulfill their promises by reason of death, or when they may be disappointed by the growth of an evil disposition? Indeed the Lord says, ‘Do not

⁵¹ Eusebius Popovic, *A General History of the Church*, Vol. 1, 430. Author’s emphasis.

⁵² Acts 10:44, 46-7. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁵³ Acts 16:31-34. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

forbid them to come to me' [Matt 19:14; Luke 18:16]. So as some grow up, some will come to learn, and some will become Christians when they are able to know Christ.”⁵⁴

Eusebius Popovic confirmed the historical fact that church authorities in the second half of the second and early part of the third century condemned infant baptism, in contrast with later church leaders, who felt that children should still be baptized and alleged that even the earlier apostles practiced it:

“The post apostolic era of Tertullian (202 – 240 A.D.) opposed infant baptism, but Origen (died 254 A.D.) defended the practice of baptizing children from his interpretation of the Apostles.”⁵⁵

Various church fathers held different views on this important issue. Some of them decided to completely abandon the Bible’s teaching on baptizing only those who truly believe in Christ according to the apostolic practice. Nevertheless, many official church circles held to the biblical teaching on baptism until the fifth century. Specifically, several centuries after Christ and his first disciples, many church fathers adhered to the teachings of the Holy Scriptures and kept Tertullian’s instructions to baptize children only when on the basis of their understanding of the spiritual lessons learned, as shown in their acceptance of faith in Jesus as their personal Savior and conversion into true followers of the Lord:

“Both the East and the West held to the **custom that the children of Christian parents were baptized only when they became adults later in life**. This custom arose from different motives, which were attacked by Cyprian, such that it held through the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. **But the church teachers fiercely opposed this custom, and finally they supplanted it.**”⁵⁶

From just the above text we see clearly that the church fathers from later centuries managed to “supplant” the custom of the regular church practice of baptism. In contrast, they set out to introduce another custom alien to the Bible: the practice of baptizing young children based on the faith of another, an adult man (godfather), and then in addition, to even call him his "spiritual father".

On the other hand, the very notion of "spiritual father" was unknown in biblical terminology in the way that Orthodox theology defines it. Specifically, the Lord said:

“*And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven.*”⁵⁷

Of course, the Lord's commandment does not forbid calling "father" of our male parent, but refers to the absence of other spiritual fathers apart from our God in heaven.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Treatise on Baptism*, (c. 200-206 A.D.), 18, 4, cited in Simo Ralevic, *Biblical Baptism*, (House of Prayer: Pech, unknown date), 20. Author’s emphasis. See also <http://www.bringyou.to/apologetics/a110.htm> .

⁵⁵ *A General History of the Church*, Vol. 1, 430.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 649. Author’s emphasis.

⁵⁷ Mt. 23:9.

Establishing the truth of the above questions about salvation through baptism, we will now switch to study another theological error taught by the dogmas of the Orthodox Church. This error also was never included in the confession of the church of the first century.

SALVATION THROUGH COMMUNION ⁵⁹

“May Christ live forever in the Orthodox Christian Church! **The high priestly ministry of the redemption of Jesus Christ** continues without interruption. This continuation is performed in a visible way, specifically through the external rites. The sum of all forms of Orthodox worship makes its essence Christian. The foundation of Orthodox worship was laid down by Jesus Christ Himself, because he established the Holy Eucharist and its effectiveness in the form of bread and wine... For every Holy Liturgy is produced the consecrated bread (the Holy Lamb of God) and wine, which become the righteous Body and Blood of Christ, the Savior. **This faith that the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord comprise the entire structure of the Orthodox Church.**” ⁶⁰

“The Mystery of the Holy Eucharist. It is the greatest expression and proof of God's love for His people... And the Son of God so loved His people that He sacrificed Himself for the salvation of people of His own will once at Calvary and **on a daily basis in the sacramental sacrifices in Orthodox temples**. He did this to enable us to have spiritual union with him in the Sacrament of the Eucharist... **Holy Eucharist - the greatest treasure a Christian can possess**. In the light of Communion, a Christian receives, in addition to eternal life, all other good things from God... **The Holy Communion gives spiritual rebirth to a person**. This is the experience for Christian saints. They all experienced it, but out of modesty they never wanted to tell or write about it. The one exception among these saints is the Holy Father, John of Kronstadt. His famous diary *My Life in Christ* (which was translated into many languages) states: ‘After the sacrament of the Holy Eucharist of the Lord, with the prayers of his Mother Most Pure, who Herself was Immaculate, by the goodness of the Lord, it gave me such a new spiritual nature, clean, good, beautiful, bright, wise, gentle, in the place of one that was unclean, lazy and dead, faintheartedly, dark, dull, evil.’” ⁶¹

According to the teachings of the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the “Divine Liturgy” is the most important worship service performed in Orthodoxy. Within these services, consecrated bread and wine is literally transformed into the body and blood of Christ, and every person who receives them receives eternal life and salvation through them. It is especially noteworthy to read the Orthodox statement that “This faith that the bread and wine are transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord comprise the entire structure of the Orthodox Church.” So, the evidence on the basis of Scripture and church history

⁵⁸ Titles such as Father, Patriarch, and Pope translate as "father." The apostle Paul, however, in several places mentions himself as "father" in the Gospel who gave "birth" to some of the faithful - but that term is used only as a picture of the person through whom some come to salvation through faith (see 1 Cor. 4:14 - 15; Gal. 4:19; Phil. 1:10). Paul and the other apostles were never called "spiritual fathers" by anyone, and especially not in the sense of "godfathers" as is the case in Orthodoxy.

⁵⁹ "Communion" means "Lord's Supper". (Translator's note)

⁶⁰ *Catechism in the Home*, 45, 47. The text cited above informs us that Orthodoxy, via rituals, is the continuation of the time of Jesus's ministry of redemption. In contrast, the New Testament reveals that Christ's redemptive ministry was finished once and for all after He ascended to Heaven. Regarding rites that Christ's ministry are "continued without interruption", the Lord and His apostles never wrote or spoke about them. (See Heb. 7:27, 9:11, 10:10, 12, 14.)

⁶¹ *The Greatest Teacher*, 254-6. Author's emphasis. This text mentions "the sacramental sacrifices in Orthodox temples" in the liturgy. Nowhere does the New Testament teach this doctrine, as I cited before.

teaches us that “Transubstantiation” (the literal transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ - despite the remaining external forms of bread and wine) was introduced in the Church many centuries after the first apostles. Furthermore, this teaching presumes that the first disciples did not understand this word of the Lord – the “word” that allegedly comprises the very foundation of the Orthodox Church!

A further explanation of this issue of sacraments based on the facts of church history will be given in detail in Chapter Seven. For now, we will examine this issue from the texts of Holy Scripture.

What Did the Lord Say during the Last Supper?

*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of **this fruit of the vine from now on** until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”*⁶²

*“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them. ‘I tell you the truth, I will not drink again **of the fruit of the vine** until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”*⁶³

*“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, ‘I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.’ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, ‘Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again **of the fruit of the vine** until the kingdom of God comes.’ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”*⁶⁴

Before beginning a detailed study of this broad topic, I want to emphasize that Christ’s message was given during the last Passover supper, so that we can appreciate his symbolic manner of speaking in metaphors. Jesus used metaphors in many other statements: “I am the door,” “I am the good shepherd,” “I am the way,” “I am the true vine,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the offspring of root and branch of David, a great star,” etc. However, before diving into a closer study of Christ’s speaking, let us observe a few striking facts that are apparent from the text:

- (1) This event occurs the night before Jesus is arrested.
- (2) In addition to other food prepared for the Passover holiday on the table in front of the Lord and His disciples, there were also placed unleavened bread and wine.
- (3) Christ draws a comparison of the bread to His body: “This is my body.”
- (4) Christ takes the cup of wine and states, “This is My new covenant with you in My blood, which will be shed for you.”

⁶² Mt. 26:26-9. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁶³ Mk. 14:22-5. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁴ Lk. 22:14-20. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

- (5) Christ commanded His disciples to keep this ordinance regularly and repeatedly (in remembrance of Him, that is, His sacrifice on Calvary).
- (6) Christ affirms that the cup is “the fruit of the wine”, that is, wine.
- (7) Nowhere does Christ discuss the transformation of the bread and wine into His physical body and blood, nor does He command His disciples in the future to render such “transformation”.

The Significance and Practice of the Lord’s Supper in the Early Church

*“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took **bread**, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; **do this in remembrance of me.**’ In the same way, after supper he took the **cup**, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, **in remembrance of me.**’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, **you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.**”⁶⁵*

This text from Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians is the first record of the Lord’s Supper with regard to its practice in the early Church. This epistle was written before any of the New Testament Gospels, including that of Mark, the oldest Gospel. Thus, the report of this apostle is very important to having the correct understanding of the topic we are studying.

Paul mentions the same elements as we saw in previous passages (even though Paul personally was not present at the Last Supper, for the simple reason that he was not one of the original apostles taught during Christ’s earthly ministry). Paul then explains the proper meaning of the procedures in the Lord’s Supper:

- (1) Jesus took the bread and stated, “This is my body, which is for you.”
- (2) Jesus took the cup of wine and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”
- (3) The bread and the wine are to be partaken by Christians as a periodic sign in memory of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. (“Do this in remembrance of me.”)
- (4) Whenever the Christians would reenact the Lord’s Supper by eating the bread and taking the wine (until His Second Coming), their observance reveals the Lord’s death, that is to say, they testify both to believers and unbelievers of their faith in the redemptive work of Christ for their salvation.

Did the Apostles Believe in the Transformation of the Bread and the Wine?

*“Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one **loaf.**”⁶⁶*

The text just mentioned above, along with those mentioned earlier, clearly demonstrate that the apostles taught the bread and the wine were symbolic metaphors of Christ's death

⁶⁵ 1 Cor. 11:23-6. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁶⁶ 1 Cor. 10:16-7. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

– and not transubstantiation (i.e., their conversion into the literal body and blood of Christ). However, the next passage gives us a more detailed explanation of the meaning of the “Lord's Supper.” Namely, when talking about the consequences of Christ's vicarious death, the Scripture says this:

*“...of the church of God, **which he bought with his own blood.**”*⁶⁷

*“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and **with your blood you purchased men** for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.’”*⁶⁸

God's revelation says that the Lord Jesus has purchased many people from eternal damnation and led them to eternal life through His death by pouring out His own blood. God's will for all people who are saved by faith in the shed blood and broken body of the Savior is to be united into a unique Christian fellowship with an abundance of love for one another:

*“Instead, speaking the truth **in love, we will in all things grow up into him** who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, **joined and held together** by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”*⁶⁹

*“Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.”*⁷⁰

As the Church consists of Christ's followers and members of His spiritual body, believers need to remember the events on Calvary, which opened the way for them to become children of God. Precisely for this reason, the Apostle Paul reminds Corinthians that the cup (of wine) they share with each other serves as a metaphor for fellowship with the blood of Jesus (in other words, a communion of believers with Christ and each other, which was created thanks to His blood that was poured out for them). Similarly, taking the bread and breaking it symbolizes the mutual fellowship they have in His body broken for them and fellowship in His sacrifice. The main emphasis in this explanation of the meaning of the “Lord's Supper”, e.g., “Communion” is its symbolism of Christian unity within the church community.

It is particularly important to note that even the Apostle utters not one word that compels the faithful to believe that the bread and wine change into Christ himself. Rather, he speaks of literal bread and a literal cup (with wine obviously) that represent the symbol of unity of believers who trust in Christ's saving work. There is no text in the entire Bible, neither this text, nor any other passage in the New Testament, that teaches that a person acquires eternal life merely through partaking of the bread and wine.

In fact, completely contrary to the teachings of the Orthodox Church, the Holy Scriptures show that no person who is not saved by faith and born of God has no right to participating in this holy rite. For an unbelieving person, the Lord's Supper has no

⁶⁷ Acts 20:28. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

⁶⁸ Rev. 5:9. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

⁶⁹ Eph. 4:15-16. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

⁷⁰ 1 Cor. 12:27. (NIV)

meaning. The bread and wine, as well as the remembrance of Christ's death, have meaning only for people who have experienced redemption from sin and death through faith and trust in Jesus on a daily basis.

Spiritual Truth from John 6

Jesus has always demanded and still does demand full commitment and loyalty from His disciples. He also requires His disciples to obey fully all of his commandments:

*“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”*⁷¹

*“If you love me, you will obey what I command... Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him.”*⁷²

*“This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome...”*⁷³

However, during His ministry on earth, Christ received many followers who came after Him out of greed – not out of a desire for true discipleship. Although Christ was crucified at the end of His three year ministry with the approval of a great part of the people of Israel, it is an undeniable fact that the preaching of Jesus was very popular amongst the Jews. Perhaps His popularity gained the most from His working of miracles (including the resurrection of dead people, healing the sick, expelling demons from the demonized people, etc.). This happened in spite of Jesus’ request, even prohibition, that news of His miraculous work would be proclaimed.⁷⁴ At one point, a great mass of Jews wanted to drag Jesus away by force and declare Him Messiah, just because of His miraculous feeding of them by multiplying bread and fish.⁷⁵ However, the Lord wanted the people, where he was, to turn to God in truth and experience spiritual revival. By this, they would gain new fellowship with the Almighty God, the God of their ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jesus wanted to bring about genuine fruits worthy of true heartfelt repentance. He rejected mere outward religious pomp with a shallow trust in the piety of their ancestors, yet at the same time living against the will of God. Before Christ’s appearance, John the Baptist instructed the people with the following words:

*“John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, ‘You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.”*⁷⁶

However, the Jews labored in a formal religiosity that did not satisfy God. Although they boasted in their virtuous ancestors, the Israelites of Jesus' time and generations before

⁷¹ Lk. 6:46. (NIV)

⁷² Jn. 14:15, 21.

⁷³ 1 Jn. 5:3. (NIV)

⁷⁴ See Lk. 8:52-6.

⁷⁵ See Jn. 6:15

⁷⁶ Lk. 3:7-9. (NIV)

them did not worship God in a way that pleased Him.⁷⁷ Finally, Jesus was forced to reject the claim of that generation to be children of God just like their faithful ancestor Abraham. Christ responded to their boast by calling them the children of the devil.⁷⁸ As a result of this exchange, the Jews lashed back by calling Jesus a Samaritan, which was considered a deep insult and betrayal to the nation, and their eventual plot to murder Him.⁷⁹

The very same people who wanted to proclaim Jesus as King quickly changed their mind about the Lord and tried to assassinate Him. The same people who on Palm Sunday shouted, “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, the King of Israel!” and then only a few days later screamed in a loud voice, “Crucify Him!”⁸⁰

In contrast to such “followers” who vacillate from one extreme to another and lack a durable spiritual foundation and endurance, the Lord has always desired to have with Him faithful and loyal people. People like Job in the Old Testament or the Apostle Paul persevered in faith versus major challenges and dangers. These two spiritual giants are two examples of men with faith in God.

When it comes to the righteous Job, his sincere godliness is reflected in the fact that Job praises God even after the worst catastrophes ever to occur in his family, including the death of their children and the loss of his entire property:

*“And [Job] said: ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.’ **In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.**”⁸¹*

*“**Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face. Indeed, this will turn out for my deliverance...**”⁸²*

Another example is Paul:

*“To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight **in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties.** For when I am weak, then I am strong.”⁸³*

For the same reason, to distinguish the wheat from the tares and to separate the real from false followers, Christ pronounced a beautiful, spiritual instruction, which, as we shall

⁷⁷ Mk. 7:6-9.

⁷⁸ Jn. 8:39.

⁷⁹ Jn. 8:30-59.

⁸⁰ See: John 12:12-13 and Mt. 27:21-6.

⁸¹ See: Job 1:13-22. Author’s emphasis.

⁸² Job. 13:15-6. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁸³ 2 Cor. 12:7-10. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

see, the Orthodox quoted incorrectly in their misapplication of the "Lord's supper" and their false doctrine of misappropriating/stealing/grabbing eternal life:

*“Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.’ Then they asked him, ‘What must we do to do the works God requires?’ Jesus answered, ‘**The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.**’ So they asked him, ‘What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’” Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘from now on give us this bread.’ Then Jesus declared, ‘I am the bread of life. **He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.**”⁸⁴*

Jesus Christ, who had intimate knowledge of the sinfulness of human nature and people personally, knew that most of his followers came to Him out of selfish interest. Some of them were there because He fed them every day. Others followed Him because He easily and quickly healed them of various diseases. But the Lord was aware that the material benefit from His physical presence among the people would be temporary. His work consisted of serving His Father to open people's eyes to the spiritual reality of the Kingdom of Heaven. It was for this reason that Jesus commands His audience not to labor for the food that does not last, but rather for the food which yields eternal life (v.27). This speech is a critical turning point. By this time, the crowd had resolved to proclaim Jesus as Messiah.⁸⁵ However, after Jesus gives this spiritual lesson, the crowd begins to express doubt about the validity of the teachings of Jesus (30-34). Although the Lord spoke of eternal life and heavenly food, the Jews could only think in physical terms. The Jewish crowd was under the impression that they could receive daily bread and never go hungry.

The Samaritan woman at the well showed similar logic. After her Savior pointed to the possibility of obtaining water, which would never run out, the woman asked Him where she could find it, as she was under the impression He meant physical, fresh water.

*“Jesus answered her, ‘If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water.’ Jesus answered, ‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. **Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**’ The woman said to him, ‘Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.’”⁸⁶*

Like the Jews, the Samaritan woman did not grasp the spiritual message. The Apostle Paul explains the reason for this misunderstanding:

⁸⁴ Jn. 6:26-35. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁸⁵ Jn. 6:15.

⁸⁶ Jn. 4:10, 13-15. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

*“The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*⁸⁷

In this case, the water which never runs out is the Holy Spirit, and the bread which will never leave one hungry is Jesus Christ.

*“On the last and greatest day of the Feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, ‘If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.’ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.”*⁸⁸

*“Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.”*⁸⁹

John in his gospel reveals a conversation between Jesus and His disciples:

*“I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.’ Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’”*⁹⁰

It is quite obvious that, although Jesus speaks of himself as bread from heaven, he does not consider the message to be literal. Rather, He is speaking it as a metaphor. If we carefully follow Christ's statements clearly, we will notice that He frequently refers to faith as a means of spiritual "feeding", i.e. eating bread, which gives eternal life (in verses 29, 35, 40, 47). While, therefore, that message was obvious, the Jews began to argue amongst themselves. At that moment, the Lord decided to unveil the false believers that were with him to this point. Christ pronounced these words in order to offend many of these so-called “followers”, and which today are misunderstood by others who have fallen into spiritual darkness by taking these words of Christ literally.

*“Jesus said to them, ‘I tell you the truth, 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 last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever.’”*⁹¹

⁸⁷ 1 Cor. 2:14. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁸ Jn. 7:37-9. Author's emphasis.

⁸⁹ Jn. 6:35. Author's emphasis.

⁹⁰ Jn. 6:47-52. Author's emphasis.

⁹¹ Jn. 6:53-58. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

If understood literally and not figuratively, this statement would sound truly repulsive and astonishing. In that case, the words of Jesus would compare with the worst kind of pagan worship in which the participants drank the blood of their victims and thus considered themselves to have received the life of another person. However, it is impossible to imagine that Christ would have commanded His audience to eat His literal righteous body and drink His literal blood in order to gain eternal life (though many in His audience misinterpreted it that way, even though Jesus did not say that). However, the Lord spoke this entire message with gravity. It was intended to demonstrate that His disciples implicitly believed in His words, even if they could not understand them fully at the time, or even if other listeners did not trust Jesus. Of course, the message was more than clear to those who were seeking spiritual truth. What happened next was a perfectly logical outcome:

“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, ‘This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?’... From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.”⁹²

The key to understanding this dialogue with Christ is the correct spiritual application of His metaphors for His body as “real food” and His blood as “real drink”. Emphasizing this principle, the Lord said:

*“This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but he who feeds on this bread will live forever... The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. **The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.**”⁹³*

Putting one’s faith in Who Christ is and what He has done along with obeying Him in accordance with God’s will is the core message of Jesus’ speech. Every believer, who from the heart is one in accord with the Lord, is nourished by spiritual bread from heaven and never starves. Whoever puts the hope of his heart in Christ’s redemptive sacrifice and follows him as his Lord is like one who partakes of a drink from heaven and will never thirst. Jesus clearly asserts that His words are akin to bread from heaven that we should eat, just “as your forefathers ate in the wilderness.” The manna from heaven that the Israelites of the Old Testament ate in the wilderness could prolong their life only for a short time, because it was mere physical bread. In contrast, the words of the Son of God are “spirit and life” (that is, the words of Christ should not be understood as literal food, but rather contemplated in a spiritual way). Instead, Jesus gives New Testament believers the opportunity to receive faith in Him and thus gain eternal life. According to the Lord, every one who believes and trusts in Him is found in Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ This truth proves the unbreakable bond of Christian fellowship with the Lord for all eternity.

Seeing it from this perspective, we can conclude that the texts regarding the Lord’s Supper, or “Communion”, utterly contradict official Orthodox teachings. The Son of God never instructed his listeners to understand this ordinance in the way Orthodoxy depicts it. Thus, St. John of Kronstadt concludes:

⁹² Jn. 6:60, 66. (NIV)

⁹³ Jn. 6:58, 63. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁴ See Jn. 14:16-20, 23, 17:22-23.

*“Instead of the tree of life - the bread of life, instead of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - the same bread that gives life. As He said, ‘Do not eat of that tree so you will not die,’ (Gen. 3:3), but now He says, ‘Eat, and you will live.’ (Jn. 6:51, 58)”*⁹⁵

Orthodox doctrine that dictates eternal life can be acquired through actually eating of the body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist is wrong. Orthodox teaching on the Lord’s Supper is only one of many theological inaccuracies that find no basis in God’s Holy Scriptures.

Further information from church history on the origin of the Eastern Orthodox (and Roman Catholic) teaching on transubstantiation, i.e. the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, follows in the following chapter on the seven holy sacraments.

SALVATION THROUGH ASCETICISM (MYSTICISM?)

“Saint Dositheus... While he was looking at a picture of the Dreadful Judgement in some church, a woman in purple robes came up and explained many things to him. Finally, at parting, she told him that, **if he sought salvation, he must fast and not eat meat**, and pray frequently to God. This was the most holy Mother of God.... This young saint lived early in the sixth century.”⁹⁶

“Fasting is obligatory to receive salvation. Speaking about the necessity of fasting for salvation after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, St. John Chrysostom states: ‘Both Moses and Elijah were pillars of the Old Testament prophets. They abounded in other virtues and had great freedom before God. Yet, when they wanted access to God and to be able to speak with Him, how were they, mere men, able to do it? They resorted to fasting and raised their hands to God. That is why God, when He created man, gave man the tradition of fasting, **for man’s salvation is obtained through fasting...** as man’s best teacher.’”⁹⁷

Eastern Orthodoxy presents yet another wrong path to salvation: fasting and asceticism. According to the statements cited above from Orthodox sources, which cannot be proven by any biblical text, it appears that in order for one to receive salvation, fasting is very important, even absolutely necessary.

According to the account of Bishop Nikolai Velimirovic who tells about a “vision” of the girl Milka Charlovic about life after death, people who do not fast on Wednesdays and Fridays will definitely go to Hell. Here is an excerpt:

“Pay close attention to the vision of the girl Milka Charlovic of the village of Borchia near Kragujevac, which occurred in 1922, the night before the Feast of the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos [Mary] into the Temple... Her testimony has been completely documented, and conforms to the doctrine of the Holy Church... This is the third book, the Book of the Dead, because those souls are in Hell, which means they have died in the sight of God⁹⁸... She knelt down and kissed St. Peter on his hand. He said to her: ‘God be with you, Milka! And tell it there just like it is here...’ We came to the fourth door. He showed me sinners who are condemned to eat the grubby worms from dead animal intestines

⁹⁵ *The Greatest Teacher*, 255. Original author’s emphasis.

⁹⁶ St. Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ochrid*, (Lazarica Press: Birmingham, UK, 1985), 120. Author’s emphasis. (See also <http://www.pomog.org/prologue/March/4.htm> – translator’s note.)

⁹⁷ *The Greatest Teacher*, 277-8. Author’s emphasis.

⁹⁸ “St. Peter” is alleged to be speaking with the girl Milka. Author’s note.

for eternity. **They are being punished for not fasting on Wednesday's and Friday's.** Do not open the door so that you won't hear their torment!"⁹⁹

Eusebius Popovic stated: "In the third century, fasting not only was a positive teaching of the Church, but even more so, if people did not observe fasting, **the Church would come and punish them.**"¹⁰⁰

As an expert of the great teaching of the "Holy Fathers" in response to the beliefs of the Church which he wished to reform, the Serbian educator Dositej Obradovic said:

"Therefore, oh thinking man, think, judge, consider, and know! The whole world says you are blind, even though you have eyes that see clearly. Do not believe everything what the whole world says! The whole world says that two plus two equals four. Do not trust the whole world, it goes against reality! **The whole world says God will give you eternal torment with His very own hands if you eat fish and meat on Wednesday's and Friday's.**¹⁰¹ **Do not believe them! It is impossible for God to do such a thing, not even the Turkish emperor could commit such cruelty!** It is simply crazy and blasphemous to say that the just God could commit such a terrible and outrageous injustice. Yet the Holy Fathers pronounced anathema and eternal damnation to those who refused to keep the fast and ate fish and meat. In this the Holy Fathers taught wrongly, for neither did they have the power to damn people and the creation, nor will a single hair of your head receive their senseless and unfair curse."¹⁰²

The apostle Paul, in the middle of the first century, warned his young associate Timothy about the arrival of false teaching that prohibits eating certain foods in order to gain salvation. Such teachings did not come from God:

*"The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and **order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.**"¹⁰³*

According to the Biblical text cited above, all the "visions" and "mandates" from different people who present themselves as Christian saints and who teach doctrine foreign to what is recorded in Scripture, fall under the domain of deceptive Satanic activity.¹⁰⁴ The apostle confirms this, saying:

⁹⁹ St. Nikolai Velimirovic, *Is There a Soul?*, (The Lamp), 11-12. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁰ Eusebius Popovich, *General Church History*, Vol. 1, 429. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰¹ According to some ancient church teachers, the practice of fasting on Wednesday's and Friday's was introduced in the Second Century AD in memory of the decision to arrest Christ and crucify Him. Other ancient teachers believed that the days chosen to fast were based upon pagan Roman holidays: the Day of Mercury (Wednesday) and the Day of Venus (Friday). Eusebius Popovic asserts that nowhere in Scripture do we find a command to fast on specific days. See *General Church History*, 428.

¹⁰² Dositej Obradovic, *Chosen Works*, 140. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰³ 1 Tim. 4:1-5. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁴ Much more about the impossibility of communicating with deceased "saints" and "the Virgin Mary" will be discussed in the chapter on "Veneration of the Saints". Scriptures view such "communication" as occultism in a domain that the Bible categorically condemns.

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve.”¹⁰⁵

However, even though the Orthodox claim to possess the Scriptures that sanction what they deem necessary for salvation, even from the days of the Garden of Eden,¹⁰⁶ the Orthodox Church forces its members to fasting as yet another requirement for their salvation.

Dositej Obradovic explains why Orthodox people ignore the fact that the Bible condemns their religious practices:

“The Apostle Paul clearly stated: ‘My son, Timothy, times of trouble will come when they keep you away from legal marriage and eating meat.’ **The monks will say that these warnings do not apply to themselves but to the Manicheans.** But pay no attention to their fictitious biographies or commentaries. It is best to **speak the truth in everything** that is dear to you.”¹⁰⁷

The texts which are quoted at the beginning of this chapter and upon which the Eastern Orthodox Church bases its belief are only teachings of the “Fathers” of the Church, but they are not doctrine inspired by God and taught by our Lord and His apostles. However, before examining the true meaning of fasting in God's Word, let us examine some of the statements of Orthodoxy that are quite shocking, deceptive, and contradictory to the Bible:

“Fasting enlightens the soul and allows the mind to receive the illumination of the Holy Spirit. Both St. Basil the Great and St. John Chrysostom utter almost the same truth about the wise prophet Daniel. He would not have been able to receive divine revelation, had Daniel not fasted and thus made his soul sanctified and receptive to the illumination of the Holy Spirit. **Fasting cleanses us of heavy and fatty foods which acted as dirty fumes and a thick cloud preventing access to the light of the Holy Spirit in the soul.** The unity of the saints in their thoughts and words clearly indicates that the Holy Spirit inspired them.”¹⁰⁸

“**Fasting makes a man into an angel,**’ stated St. John Chrysostom.”¹⁰⁹

“**Fasting attracts the Holy Spirit and makes a person a sanctuary for the Holy Trinity...** If fasting has such a beneficial effect, and it makes us God's sanctuary, then it demands that one receives it with joy, according to the teaching of St. Theodore the Studite.”¹¹⁰

“‘Since we do not fast, we are expelled out of Heaven. Therefore, fast so that you might be able to return to Heaven,’ advised St. Basil the Great.”¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵ 2 Cor. 11:13-15. (NIV)

¹⁰⁶ Orthodox teachers consider the prohibition from eating fruit of the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” as the first command to fast. See *The Greatest Teacher*, 277.

¹⁰⁷ Dositej Obradovic, *Chosen Works*, 592. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁸ *The Greatest Teacher*, 282-3. Author's emphasis.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 283. Original author's emphasis.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 283. Author's emphasis.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 283.

In light of previous studies on the doctrines of salvation in the Scriptures, it is easy to see how the Orthodox doctrines are far away from the apostolic teachings of eternal life through faith in the Savior. In opposition to the beliefs of the Orthodox “Fathers”, the inerrant Word of God reveals to us an entirely different meaning of fasting.

Fasting in the Scriptures

“But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and ‘sinners’?”

Jesus answered them, “It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

They said to him, “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.”

Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.”

He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”¹¹²

This passage is a dialogue with the Savior by outwardly religious but spiritually dead members of the main religious group in Israel - the Pharisees. The Pharisees came to the conclusion that Christ and his disciples rarely practiced fasting. The Lord, in that sense, answers one of their questions:

“For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and ‘sinners.’” ‘ But wisdom is proved right by her actions.”¹¹³

The only text in the Old Testament, the only Bible in the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, that commanded the Israelites to fast is located in Leviticus and relates to the Day of Atonement (which will be described in detail in a later chapter on “The Virgin Mary and Queen of Heaven”):

*“The tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Hold a sacred assembly and **deny yourselves**¹¹⁴, and present an offering made to the LORD by fire.”¹¹⁵*

¹¹² Lk. 5:30-9. (NIV)

¹¹³ Mt. 11:18-9.

¹¹⁴ Some translations have “fast”. See Amplified Bible and also several Slavic translations, such as the Croatian Christian Bible and Serbian translations by Djuro Daničić and Lujo Bakotic. The latter authors do not directly use the word “fasting”, but they imply it with their use of “denial”.

¹¹⁵ Lev. 23:27. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

On this Day, members of the people of God should show their humility and regret for sins committed. The state of their souls should be accompanied by denying themselves food and drink, i.e. fasting.

Undoubtedly, the Lord Jesus and His disciples observed the provisions of the Old Testament Law. However, during the rest of the year, God did not require them to fast, yet the Pharisees invented such requirements, such as fasting twice a week.¹¹⁶ (The times of forty days of fasting by Jesus Christ and Moses and Elijah in the Old Testament¹¹⁷ are not given in the Bible as an example for regular fasting by Christians. Almost no one would survive fasting for so long without food and water. In contrast, the Orthodox Church claims that the Lord Jesus Christ established fasting as a requirement for salvation by citing His personal example of fasting in the wilderness.¹¹⁸)

Dositej Obradovic writes about his attempts to emulate the aforementioned biblical figures and of the Son of God regarding fasting:

“It is incredible to believe how I spent my time in fasting. After three days of tasting no food, however I would go hide somewhere in the attic and would bow down in prayer, **beating my breast while my head spun**. Hunger would be standing at the foot of my grave. I found in some of the hagiographies a tale that some travelers survived seven whole days without food, and even some others fasted for forty days, without putting a single morsel in their mouth. I could not force myself to fast, and my efforts to hold out for seven days were in vain. **I could not fast for more than three days**. The fourth day brought me down to my knees. I felt strong pain in my stomach and nearly fainted.

My good and wise abbot, seeing that all of my efforts were **total foolishness**, told me simply not to suffer when it is revealed that I myself am a murderer when I eat during the time appointed to fast on behalf of other brethren. If I did not fast, he told me to go somewhere else to die of hunger, only not his place. I replied that I am not the first person to fast for seven whole days. Moses, Elijah, and our Savior fasted for forty days. My old abbot suddenly became angry in a way I had never seen with him (he had never been so angry in the 3 years I was with him). In the midst of all his anger, he preached at me: ‘**What an outrage you have committed by comparing yourself to Moses, Elijah, and Christ? You do not have enough wisdom to understand what miraculous things God worked** such that He made it possible for people to fast 40 days and survive! Moses on Mount Sinai and Elijah’s flight to the wilderness – they needed God to do a miracle in those situations! **How dare you mention the Savior, this is your ultimate act of nonsense.**’¹¹⁹

The text above cited the wise words of the abbot of the Hopovo Monastery, Teodor Milutinovic. What he told Obradovic was very wise because (perhaps unwittingly) the abbot expressed the truth that the fasts of people in the Bible came as a result of God’s miracles. God never intended for us to imitate them today.

¹¹⁶ See Lk. 18:9-14, particularly 12.

¹¹⁷ See Mt. 4:1-11, Ex. 34:28, 1 Ki. 19:8.

¹¹⁸ See Bishop Nikolai, *Lives of the Saints*, 132.

¹¹⁹ Obradovic, *Chosen Works*, 124-5. Author’s emphasis.

Examples of Fasting in the Old Testament

In addition to fasting on the Day of Atonement, which God commanded the Jews in the Old Testament, there were other situations when people fasted, or abstained from eating food and drinking. Generally, such situations consisted of times for deep repentance, grieving over sin, or undergoing great trial in life, when people persevered in petitioning God with intensified prayer. Here are some examples:

*“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with him in prayer and petition, **in fasting**, and in sackcloth and ashes. I prayed to the LORD my God and **confessed**: ‘O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled; we have turned away from your commands and laws. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. Lord, you are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame...”¹²⁰*

*“On the twenty-fourth day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, **fasting** and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners. They stood in their places and **confessed their sins** and the wickedness of their fathers.”¹²¹*

*“Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. They repay me evil for good and leave my soul forlorn. Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with **fasting**. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.”¹²²*

All of these passages show that fasting, which consists of partial or complete abstinence from food and drink, is closely linked to prayer and sincere remorse for sins committed by a person and for those of other people.

Contrary to this understanding by God’s servants in the Holy Scriptures, a large part of the Serbian population is obligated by the Serbian Orthodox Church to hold fasts, mostly by preparing “Fasting Dishes” prepared in oil or, in extreme cases, water. Regarding remorse for sins committed and prayer during the time of “fasting”, Serbs care very little about those activities. The wise Dositej Obradovic wrote this about fasting:

“So what about fasting? O, my brothers, God sees and hears everything, let the way of truth speak forth! No one truly fasts except for people living in extreme poverty off barren land for several months in a year when they just had regular bread and cornbread, as if it were the last meal given to one about to be executed by the imperial government. These poor people will have greater honor in their life of fasting, but at the expense of being victims of trouble. **But regarding people who have various recipes, which they call ‘Fasting Dishes’, such as grapes and wine, such people never truly fast.** (It is important to note that I do not consider it fasting when a man merely skips lunch but eats dinner, but a real fast is man abstains from lunch and dinner; **neither does fasting merely mean abstaining from meat but loading up on beans and spices that shoot out your guts and pour sweat from your forehead.**)”¹²³

¹²⁰ Dan. 9:3-7. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹²¹ Neh. 9:1-2. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹²² Ps. 35:11-14. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹²³ Obradovic, *Chosen Works*, 269-70. Author’s emphasis.

Today's Serbia closely resembles Old Testament Israel, whose people abided by the rules of fasting, yet at the same time completely lacked any interest in obeying God's will. The Lord rebuked them for their lawlessness:

*“‘Why have we fasted,’ they say, ‘and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?’ **Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter - when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the LORD will be your rear guard.**”*¹²⁴

Examples of Fasting in the New Testament

After the Pharisees accused Christ and His disciples of neglecting to fast, the Supreme Teacher of the Word of God told His disciples to fast when He will be kidnapped and arrested by the Pharisees. Jesus knew that fasting in the past had been practiced in situations of sorrow and mourning. Thus He reminded His followers of that fact.

The disciples still had no reason to mourn because the spiritual presence of Christ gave them peace and joy. However, the Lord told them that after his arrest, the disciples ought to fast as an external expression of true sorrow. The Gospels show us that Jesus' closest disciples did not believe the news of His resurrection when the women told them about it, for they were in deep grief:

*“When Jesus rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had driven seven demons. She went and told those who had been with him and who were **mourning and weeping**. When they heard that Jesus was alive and that she had seen him, **they did not believe it.**”*¹²⁵

The sad and tearful apostles certainly did not even think nor care about food. “*On that day,*” in the words of the Savior, the disciples fasted. The next example of fasting within Christianity occurred with the educated Pharisee Saul, the former persecutor of the Church:

*“Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. **For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.** In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, ‘Ananias!’... Then Ananias went*

¹²⁴ Is. 58:3-8. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

¹²⁵ Mk. 16:9-11. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

*to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, and **after taking some food**, he regained his strength.”*¹²⁶

In this case, we can confirm that fasting was actually the result of great shock and mental anguish by a man who just discovered that he wrongly opposed God out of completely wrong teaching. In spite of that, God called this man to serve Him.

Of course, in the New Testament and the Old, there are different types of and purposes for fasting. Acts 13:2 and 2 Corinthians 11:27 mention the practice of abstinence from food (fasting) by the first century disciples. Fasting was done to enhance one's devotion to God and effective prayer for knowledge of God's counsel and guidance. Also, the Lord Christ taught that fasting associated with prayer can bring much spiritual fruit (Matt. 17:21). However, what is common to the teaching on fasting by the Lord and His apostles is that neither the Teacher nor His disciples ever mentioned or assumed fasting to contribute to anybody's salvation, nor is fasting considered an obligatory prerequisite for eternal salvation.

Nowhere in the New Testament is there a specific command for Christians to fast, let alone a mandate as to how many days or weeks one must fast. Indeed, the New Testament Scriptures show that the only true fasting that can glorify God is done by people who are already saved by faith in the Savior and born of God through the Holy Spirit. Regarding mandatory fasting by people who are not spiritually reborn, the Lord does not approve such activity. God makes it clear that such asceticism is worthless to Him. The following sections will confirm this statement.

Who Were the Pharisees?

The religious faction of the Pharisees (Hebrew translation “separated ones”) was founded in the second century BC during the efforts of men of Israel to protect Jewish monotheism and religion from the influence of Hellenistic (Greek) culture. This religious group was composed primarily of "ordinary" people from Jewish society and not from the priests (who mostly belonged to the Pharisees archrivals, the Sadducees). Pharisees strictly observed God's laws given to Moses and widened their provisions to extremes to which the laws were not originally implied. Thus, they “extended” the law to such an extreme extent that it became virtually impossible to follow. Thus, Jesus condemned the Pharisees for putting an excessive yoke on people. On the other hand, members of this party were proud of their piety and religiosity that most people could never imitate. Pharisees looked down on the mass of Jewish people. They considered themselves perfect, the only true believers and defenders of the people and its interests.¹²⁷

Christ the Lord once told this story:

¹²⁶ Acts 9:1-10, 17-19. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

¹²⁷ See Phil. 3:4-6 and Jn. 11:45-53.

*“To some who were **confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else**, Jesus told this parable: ‘Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘**God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.**’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.’”*¹²⁸

Obviously, the way the Pharisees thought about themselves came nowhere close to God’s assessment of them. Namely, Nicodemus, an esteemed member of the Pharisaical party, in a conversation with Jesus showed his ignorance of the basic teachings of the Holy Scriptures regarding spiritual birth from God in John 3. Jesus also accused them of hypocrisy, ambition, greed, and formalism, as well as misguided leadership and religious education of the whole nation. Jesus called them blind guides, fools, sons of hell, and decorated graves:

*“‘Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces.** You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, **you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are** ... Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. **Blind Pharisee!** First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! **You are like whitewashed tombs**, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness.’”*¹²⁹

According to these words of the Son of God, though very pious, the Pharisees were worldly, carnal, and above all, people who served Satanic desires, not God's plans and intentions.

Who Were John’s Disciples?

This group consisted of people who followed John the Baptist. Before the public appearance of Jesus of Nazareth by the river Jordan where John was to baptize Him, this prophet of God gathered around himself a group of like-minded people and their companions. During his entire prophetic ministry, John the Baptist proclaimed that the Messiah would come soon:

*“Now some Pharisees who had been sent questioned him, ‘Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?’ ‘I baptize with water,’ John replied, ‘but among you stands one you do not know. He is the one who comes after me, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.’”*¹³⁰

After the Holy Spirit descended upon his cousin from Galilee, John said:

¹²⁸ Lk. 18:9-14. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹²⁹ Mt. 23:13, 15, 25-8. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹³⁰ Jn. 1:24-7. (NIV)

*"I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."*¹³¹

After they heard his testimony, two of John's disciples, Andrew and his brother Simon Peter, joined Christ and became His disciples. However, John himself continued to baptize people who came to him. Some of John's disciples still remained with him, even though John had said, *"He must increase, and I must decrease."* It is not clear why some still chose to remain with John. It is quite possible a grain of doubt regarding Christ's mission remained in the heart of John, son of Zechariah. Even though it seems totally incredible, it is possible that John had doubts about the Messianic mission of Jesus, even though he had witnessed his baptism.

*"John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?' When the men came to Jesus, they said, 'John the Baptist sent us to you to ask, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'"*¹³²

The problem for John the Baptist certainly resulted from his incomplete understanding of God's plan of salvation. Like other Jews, He thought that the Messiah's appearance would automatically usher in the kingdom of God on earth. However, since this did not take place and months passed after Jesus' appearance (in the meantime, John was arrested and thrown into prison), John was confused. Twenty years later, the Apostle Paul wrote epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians and revealed that God's plan of salvation in its totality was unknown (dark) for all previous generations searching the Holy Scriptures.¹³³

Based on the questions that John's disciples asked Jesus about fasting (Matt. 9:14-17), it appears clear that they themselves felt closer to the Pharisees than the disciples of the Messiah. Precisely for this reason, the Lord told them two parables with a similar spiritual meaning, whose literal meaning is very well known.

Parable of Sewing New Cloth onto an Old Garment

*"He told them this parable: 'No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.'"*¹³⁴

In this comparison Christ speaks of the practice of fasting as a very natural way of life for people who are born again (born of God and a saving faith). At the same time, he stressed that fasting is not only unnecessary but also results in extremely negative consequences for anyone who has not been born again by God through faith in the Savior.

At the time when Christ preached and performed miracles, people rightly asked:

¹³¹ Jn. 1:33-4. (NIV)

¹³² Lk. 7:18-20. (NIV)

¹³³ See Col. 1:25-7 and Eph. 3:1-13.

¹³⁴ Lk. 5:36. (NIV)

*“The people were all so amazed that they asked each other, ‘What is this? A **new teaching**—and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him.’”*¹³⁵

What Jesus is saying greatly differed from the official religious teachings of the Scribes of Israel. Although, actually, Jesus taught the only correct interpretation of divine truth, the Jewish people viewed His teaching as a novelty, for they were immersed in the false teachings of the Pharisees. Like the Orthodox Church today, the false religious leaders in Jesus’ day considered fasting a very important step on the path to salvation. Contrary to this belief, Jesus attributed any significance to fasting only for those people who already have found salvation and eternal life.

*“In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. **While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ So after they had **fasted** and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.”*¹³⁶

This text describes the early Christian prophets and teachers who, since they were already saved through faith, served the Lord and fasted before God in order to seek His will. As a result of prayer and fasting, the answer soon arrived. The New Testament paints a clear picture that every believer who accepts Christ on the basis of the testimony of the Holy Spirit through the written word in the Bible – he becomes a new creature. The vivid saying to “Put off the old man and put on the new man” refers to a believer’s transformation to become more like the Son of God:

*“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, **he is a new creation**; the old has gone, **the new has come!**”*¹³⁷

*“Do not lie to each other, **since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self**, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.”*¹³⁸

“No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one.” With these words, Jesus calls the disciples of John the Baptist as well as the Pharisees to come to Him so He might forgive their sins and grant them eternal life. In this way, one can “put on a new garment” of which fasting is a normal component of the new life in Christ. There is no reason to “patch holes” in the “old garment”, a life fallen away from God and unable to receive in its unregenerate human nature the Holy Spirit, since the “old garment” would “tear” away the parts given rebirth in Christ. Efforts for sinners to earn salvation from God with strict religiosity (which is based on mere human tradition and misinterpretation of the Holy Scriptures) along with fasting are equally inappropriate today as they were in the time of Christ’s earthly ministry. But if someone wanted to fast, the Word of God advises him to accept Christ by faith and receive salvation as a gift from God first. Only afterwards should he fast, and only then will fasting have true

¹³⁵ Mk. 1:27. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹³⁶ Acts 13:1-3. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹³⁷ 2 Cor. 5:17. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

¹³⁸ Col. 3:9-10. (NIV) Author’s emphasis.

spiritual fulfillment and an aid to help his daily life to separate himself from a sinful lifestyle.

Parable of Pouring New Wine into Old Wineskins

*“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.”*¹³⁹

In another metaphor that speaks of fasting, the Lord compares fasting, along with all His teaching, to new wine. The message of this parable is the same as the previous one. Fasting is a sincere act of dedication for all those believers who are already born of God and belong to Him. Yet for other people who have not surrendered their hearts to the Savior, the practice of fasting not only cannot help them spiritually, but it can even cause them great damage. Christ states that all people, as represented by the “old wineskins”, will destroy themselves by opening themselves up to that which does not belong to their nature.

At the time when the Lord lived in Israel, Jews stored wine in wineskins that were made out of specially processed leather skins. New wine (that is, wine before alcoholic fermentation – when grape sugar is converted to alcohol) is always poured into new wineskins that were not used until that time. The reason was simple. During fermentation, the skin of the wineskin was thinned out because it stretched and expanded its volume up to a limit due to the release of gas produced in the process. After the alcohol from the wine was produced, the wineskin was considered old and worn out. It could no longer be used for another process of fermenting alcohol. If one put new wine into this old wineskin, even before completing another new process of fermentation, this time the amount of fluid was significantly higher. In the new process, the skin, which was not rolled up, became overstretched. The wineskin burst, and the wine spilled out. In that sense, damage was done both by losing the wine and the wineskin. Thus, new wine must always be poured into new wineskins, while the old wineskins must be thrown away.

People who are not born of God (such as atheists and those who try to worship God but in ways contrary to His will) represent the “old wineskins.” The Pharisees and John’s disciples fell into that category. Although they were respected as very good and faithful religious travelers by the uneducated people, they did not belong to Jesus’ followers. Thus, these people were far from God. Christ spoke to people like them:

*“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, **yet you refuse to come to me to have life.**”*¹⁴⁰

He also said this:

*“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.”*¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Lk. 5:37-8. (NIV)

¹⁴⁰ Jn. 5:39-40. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁴¹ Mt. 12:30. (NIV)

It is clear that in the passage just mentioned, the Pharisees and disciples of John represented a kind of opposition to Jesus of Nazareth. The Pharisees undoubtedly were more hostile to Christ than the confused disciples of John the Baptist. People like these are convinced that they are serving God but in reality are very far away from Him. Such is the case with the majority of our Serbian people. They believe they can show how smart and familiar they are with information about the Christian faith by their fasting. If instead they were to read Scripture, they could easily come to the true knowledge of the Savior and eternal life. However, they settled only for external religiosity and formalism by following the teachings of their blind leaders:

*“That servant **who knows** his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants **will be beaten with many blows**. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, **much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.**”¹⁴²*

The verse above makes it clear that people who know something of the Word of God yet still refuse to respond to Jesus' call to become His disciples will suffer a worse judgment at the Day of Judgment than those (among others) who neither knew about nor had obligation to keep Christian fasting. The Heavenly Judge will punish the “ascetics” much worse based on their words and works.¹⁴³

So this is the answer to the question, “How can fasting harm someone who practices it?” Jesus compares people who are not born of God and practice fasting to the old wineskin that is filled with new wine. The wineskin will eventually burst.

Conclusion

From all the previous studies concerning the doctrine of salvation in the Orthodox Church, one certainly has to come to the conclusion that in its totality and details goes far astray of the revelations from Holy Scripture. The majority of the church in Serbia, unfortunately does not have the truth on this issue, **so no wonder that even its adherents (including bishops) do not know whether, in the end, they are saved or not**. Let us read some direct quotations from Serbian Orthodox bishops, including the patriarch himself, which very clearly confirm the fact that **no one in the “Only Saving Church,” not even the Orthodox theologians, has any assurance that they will be saved. They assert that it is very possible in spite of all one's efforts and striving toward salvation, a person could still end up in the Lake of Fire!**

The first statement comes from the Diocesan Bishop Dr. Porphyria Peric from an interview published in the magazine *MTS CLUB – The Mobile Telephony User Club of Serbia*. The title of the article is “Porphyria, Our Representative Before God.” Amongst other things, here is the Bishop's answer to some journalists' questions about the security of salvation in the framework of the Ecumenical Orthodox Church:

¹⁴² Lk. 12:47-8. (NIV) Author's emphasis.

¹⁴³ See Mt. 12:37.

“Bishop Porphyry, is known for his many professional articles in which he stands for the purity of the Orthodox faith and also very harshly criticizes the cults. I wonder if Orthodox believers themselves will be saved. He responded, **‘Even just belonging to the Orthodox Church does not guarantee salvation. No one, not even a Patriarch or a Bishop, can find any certain sign that they are saved themselves.** Who know how much closer a so-called ‘sinner’, so far as he can understand, is to God compared to some ‘righteous person.’”¹⁴⁴

Another example comes from Pavle, the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. In one of his letters, he responds to the criticism by the Bishop Artemije of Raska Prizren. The Bishop criticized the Patriarch’s declaration that Muslims and Christians in Bosnia are all God’s children, i.e., “Brothers in God”. Patriarch Pavle expressed uncertainty about his own salvation in citing verses from Mt. 10:22 and 25:41:

“To address our people as brothers in God is always meant in the potential sense, in other words, the potential for it exists. But will this potential be realized? And as for Christians, whether they are truly honest sons and daughters of God, will they hold on until death? **For only they who endure to the end that will be saved.**”¹⁴⁵

Further on, Patriarch Pavle adds:

“I only know that our Lord, in His Day of Judgment, will judge us according to how we commiserated and behaved before His ‘little brothers,’ and did works, but if I failed to love, even though my duty was to do so, **may I not be found on the side of those to whom the Righteous Judge will say: ‘Get away from me, you evildoers!’**”¹⁴⁶

These quotations clearly recognize the fact that even the highest dignitaries of the Orthodox churches do not have assurance as to whether or not God would accept them. All this stems from the unbiblical theology of the Orthodox Church. However, the allegation of Mt. 10:22, when read together in context with verse 23, clearly states a warning that Christ addressed to the Jews. They would endure a time of great tribulation (during the reign of Antichrist). This warning only applies to the preservation of mere survival (staying alive) in Israel to endure these tragic events and persecutions. This warning has nothing to do with eternal salvation that is taught in the doctrine of the whole Bible. Such faith in Christ and birth given by God results in eternal life, as discussed in the previous chapter.

The next chapter examines what duties “ordinary” believers who live in a sinful world are expected to perform in the Orthodox Church, those people who reverence the leaders in

¹⁴⁴ *MTS Club – Customer Club of Mobile Telephony of Serbia 064*, May 2005, 21. Author’s emphasis. On the other hand, Bishop Justin Stefanovic of the Diocese of Timočki gave a lecture held in a building in 1995 or 1996. (I personally attended this lecture.) The Bishop said he was unsure whether he was saved or not. He explained his current involvement in ‘political activity’ (those years saw much activity in terms of major opposition rallies and demonstrations in Serbia which frequently were lead by clergy) and expressed his hope that one day before the end of his life that he would return to the monastery, and thus receiving the credit of salvation.

¹⁴⁵ *Holy Prince Lazar*, Vol.1 (5), 1994, 108. Author’s emphasis.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.* Author’s emphasis.

the church with titles such as “Your High Grace” and “Your Holiness”, yet those very leaders are not sure whether they will end up in Hell or not!