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Volume 4 – Spirituality

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Volume 4 deals with the main themes of Christian Life: prayer, fasting, repentance, the virtues, witness in the world, and communion with God.

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Orthodox Spirituality

Spirituality [\(Top\)](#)

Spirituality in the Orthodox Church means the everyday activity of life in communion with God. The term **spirituality** refers not merely to the activity of man's spirit alone, his mind, heart and soul, but it refers as well to the whole of man's life as inspired and guided by the Spirit of God. Every act of a Christian must be a spiritual act. Every thought must be spiritual, every word, every deed, every activity of the body, every action of the person. This means that all that a person thinks, says and does must be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit so that the will of God the Father might be accomplished as revealed and taught by Jesus Christ the Son of God.

... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31).

Doing all things to the glory of God is the meaning and substance of life for a human being. This "doing" is what Christian **spirituality** is about.

God [\(Top\)](#)

Christian spirituality is **centred in God**; in fact, its very goal is communion with God, which is attainable through the accomplishment of His will. To be what God wants us to be and to do what God want us to do is the sole meaning of our human existence. The fulfilment of the prayer "Thy will be done" is the heart and soul of all spiritual effort and activity.

In the Old Testament law, it is written:

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy (Lev 11:44).

In the New Testament, the first letter of Saint Peter refers to this fundamental command of God.

... as He who called you is holy, be holy yourself in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).

That human beings should be holy by sharing in happiness of God Himself is the meaning of union with God. All are "called to be saints" (*Rom 1:7*) by becoming "partakers of the nature of God" (*2 Pet 1:1*). This is what Jesus meant when He said in Sermon on the Mount, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt 5:48*).

The teaching that man must be holy and perfect like God Himself through the accomplishment of the will of God is the central teaching of the Orthodox Christian faith. This teaching has been stated in many different ways in the Orthodox spiritual tradition. Saint Maximus the Confessor (7th Century) said it this way: "Man is called to become by divine grace all that God Himself is by nature." This means very simply that God wills and helps His creatures to be like He is, and that is the purpose of their being and life. As God is holy, man must be holy. As God is perfect, man must be perfect, pure, merciful, patient, kind, gentle, free, self-determining, ever-existing, and always, for eternity, the absolute superabundant realization of everything good in

inexhaustible fullness and richness ... so man must be this way as well, ever growing and developing in divine perfection and virtue for all eternity by the will and power of God Himself. The perfection of man is his growth in the unending perfection of God.

Christ ([Top](#))

Christian spirituality is centred in Christ. **Jesus Christ** is the divine Son of God who was born as a man of the Virgin Mary in order to give man eternal life in communion with God His Father.

In Jesus Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (*Col 2:9*). In Him is the "fullness" of "grace and truth" (*Jn 1:16-17*) and "all the fullness of God" (*Col 1:19*). When one sees and knows Jesus, one sees and knows God the Father (*Jn 8:19, 14:7-9*). When one is in communion with Jesus, one is in abiding union with God (*cf. Jn 17, Eph 2, Rom 8, 1 Jn 1*).

The goal of human life is to be continually "in Christ." When one is "in Christ," according to St John, one does God's will and cannot sin.

You know that He (Jesus) appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has either seen Him or knows Him. ... he who does right is righteous, as He is righteous. ... No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother (1 Jn 3:4-10).

Jesus Christ is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (*Jn 14:6*). He speaks the words of God. He does the work of God. The person who obeys Christ and follows His way and does what He does, loves God and accomplishes His will. To do this is the essence of spiritual life. Jesus has come that we may be like Him and do in our own lives, by His grace, what He Himself has done.

Truly, truly I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father (Jn 14:12)

The Holy Spirit ([Top](#))

A person can abide in Christ, accomplish His: commandments and be in communion with God the Father only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his life. Spiritual life is life in and by the Holy Spirit of God.

If you love me (says Christ), you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you (Jn 14:15-17). When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. ...He will glorify me, for He will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine ... (Jn 16:12-15).

The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent into the world through Christ so that human persons can fulfil God's will in their lives and be like Christ. The spiritual fathers of the Orthodox Church say that the Holy Spirit makes people to be "Christs," that is, the "anointed" children of God. This also is the teaching of the apostles in the New Testament writings:

But you have been anointed by the Holy One and you know all things ... and the unction [chrisma] you have received from Him abides in you ... His anointing teaches you about everything and is true and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him. [...] And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit which He has given us. [...] By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit (1 Jn 2:20-27, 3:24, 4:13).

This teaching of Saint John is the same teaching as that of Saint Paul.

... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. [...] Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you ... for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 5:5, 8:1ff; cf. 1 Cor 2, 6, 12-14; Gal 5).

It is the classical teaching of the Orthodox Church, made popular in recent times by St Seraphim of Sarov (19th c.), that the very essence of Christian spiritual life, the very essence of life itself, is the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God." Without the Holy Spirit, there is no true life for man.

In spite of our sinfulness, in spite of the darkness surrounding our souls, the Grace of the Holy Spirit, conferred by baptism in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, still shines in our hearts with the inextinguishable light of Christ ... and when the sinner turns to the way of repentance the light smooths away every trace of the sins committed, clothing the former sinner in the garments of incorruption, spun of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. It is this acquisition of the Holy Spirit about which I have been speaking. ... (St Seraphim of Sarov, Conversation with Motovilov).

Man [\(Top\)](#)

Man, according to the scriptures, is created "in the likeness of God" (*Gen 1:26-27*). To be like God, through the gift of God, is the essence of man's being and life. In the scriptures it says that God breathed into man, the "**breath [or spirit] of life**" (*Gen 2:7*). This divine teaching has given rise to the understanding in the Orthodox Church that man cannot be truly human, truly himself, without the Spirit of God. Thus Saint Irenaeus (3rd c.) said in his well-known saying, often quoted by Orthodox authors,

that "man is body, soul, and Holy Spirit." This means that for man to fulfil himself as created in the image and likeness of God -- that is, to be like Christ who is the perfect, divine, and uncreated Image of God -- man must be the temple of God's Spirit. If man is not the temple of God's Spirit, then the only alternative is that he is the temple of the evil spirit. There is no middle way. Man is either in an unending process of life and growth in union with God by the Holy Spirit, or else he is an unending process of decomposition and death by returning to the dust of nothingness out of which he was formed, by the destructive power of the devil. This is how the Orthodox spiritual tradition interprets the "two ways" of the Mosaic law:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord, obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for that means life to you (Dt 30:19-20).

It is this same teaching that the Apostle Paul gives in his doctrine of the "two laws" at work in the life of man.

For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. [...] For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. [...] For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, hut those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom 7:14-8:17).

Every human being is confronted with these two possibilities, ultimately the only two possibilities of human existence. Either a person chooses life by the grace of God and the power of the Spirit -- the "abundant" and "eternal life" given by God in creation and salvation through Jesus Christ -- or the person chooses death. The whole pathos of human existence consists in this choice, whether a person is aware of it or not. Christian spiritual life depends on the conscious choice of the "way of life." To "choose life" and to walk in the "way of life" is the way that man shows himself to be in the image and likeness of God.

For by the hands of the Father, that is by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not merely a part of man, was made in the likeness of God ... for the perfect man consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the Spirit of the Father and the fleshly nature which was also moulded after the image of God ... the man becomes spiritual and perfect because of the outpouring of the Spirit, and this is he who was made in the image and likeness of God.

If in a man the Spirit is not united to the soul, this man is imperfect. He remains animal and carnal. He continues to have the image of God in his flesh, but he does not receive the divine likeness through the Holy Spirit (St Irenaeus, 2nd C., Against Heresies).

Sin [\(Top\)](#)

Sin, according to the scriptures is "**lawlessness**" and "**wrongdoing**" (*1 Jn 3:4, 5:17*). To do wrong and to be unrighteous is to sin. In the Greek language the word **sin** originally meant "missing the mark," that is, moving in the wrong direction, toward the wrong aims and goals. It means choosing and going in the way of death, and not the way of life.

There are many scriptural expressions for sin, all of which presuppose a primordial rightness and goodness. The word **fall** indicates a movement down and away from an original high and lofty state. The word **stain** reveals that there was once an original purity that has been defiled. The word **transgression** means a movement against that which is primarily right. The word **guilt** reveals prior innocence. The words **estrangement** and **alienation** indicate that one was first "at home," living in a sound and wholesome condition. The word **deviation** means that one has gone off his original way.

There are no words for sin which do not reveal in their very utterance that sin is an unnatural state of man, a condition brought about by the destruction, distortion, and loss of something good which was originally present. Every sin and wickedness exists only because man's being and life are naturally positive and good. Every evil and sin act only as "parasites" on that which is primarily perfect and whole. Thus, in the Orthodox tradition, sin is not considered to be a normal and natural part of human being and life. To be human and to be a sinner is contradictory. Rather, to be truly human is to be righteous, pure, truthful, and good. Spiritual life, in this sense, consists of only one thing: not to sin. Not to sin is to be like God and His Son Jesus Christ. It is the goal of human life.

*Everyone who commits sin is guilty of lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. You know that Christ appeared to take away sins, and in Him there is no sin. No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has either seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who does right is righteous, as He is righteous. He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sin; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin because he is born of God. By this it may be seen who are children of God, and who are children of the devil; whoever does not do right is not of God, nor he who does not love his brother (*1 Jn 3:4-10*).*

Not to sin is the goal of human life. But in fact all people do sin. It is for this reason that the possibility to be freed from sin and to overcome sin comes through the saving work of Christ, who forgives the sins of the world.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous; and He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ... by this we may be sure that we are in Him: he who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked (1 Jn 1:8-2:6).

The Devil [\(Top\)](#)

The scriptures and the lives of God's saints bear witness to the existence of the **devil**. The devil is a fallen bodiless spirit, an angel created by God for His service and praise. Together with the devil, are his hosts of wicked angelic powers who have rebelled against the goodness of God and seek to pervert and destroy God's good creation.

How are you fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, Day Star, son of Dawn!

And the angels which did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day. ... (Jude 6, Cf. 2 Pet 2:4). ... the devil and satan, the deceiver of the world -- he was thrown down to the earth, and his úangels were thrown down with him (Rev 12:9).

In the New Testament the Lord Jesus speaks of the devil whom He called him "prince of this world" (*Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11*) in this way:

He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies (Jn 8:44).

The devil and his multitude of evil spirits, "the principalities ... the powers ... the world rulers of this present darkness ... the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places" (*Eph 6:12*) war against man seeking to destroy him by ensnaring him in sin.

Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (*1 Pet 5:8*).

Christ has destroyed the power of the devil. He came into the world precisely for this reason. If one is "in Christ" he is led out of temptation and delivered from the evil one. If one is in Christ, the evil, who is also called Satan, which means the Adversary who "disguises himself as an angel of light" (*2 Cor 11:14*), cannot deceive or harm him. To be victorious over the alluring and deceiving temptations of the devil is the goal of spiritual life.

The World and the Flesh [\(Top\)](#)

In the scriptures and in the spiritual tradition of the Church, the expression "the world" has two different meanings. In the first, "the world" is the expression of all of God's creation. As such it is the product of God's goodness and the object of His love.

According to the scriptures, God creates the world and all that is in it. He creates the heavens and the earth as the declaration of His glory (*Ps 19:1*). He creates an living things, crowned by the formation of man in His own image and likeness. According to

the scriptural record, God called His creation good ... very good" (*Gen 1:12, 18, 25, 31*). And according to the Gospel, Christ has come as the "saviour of the world" (*Lk 2:11, Jn 4:42*).

For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent His Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him (Jn 3:16-17).

In addition to this positive scriptural understanding of "the world," there is also a negative use of the expression, which has caused confusion about the proper understanding of Christian faith and life. This negative use of the term "the world" is presented not as God's object of love, but as creation in rebellion against God. Thus Christ spoke:

If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you (Jn 15:18-19; Cf. Jas 4:4).

Saint John continues to speak of the enmity between Christ and "the world" in his first letter where he gives the following commandment to Christians.

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever (1 Jn 2:15-17).

The same ambiguity as that concerning "the world" exists with the expression "the flesh." In some instances, the term flesh is used in a positive sense meaning the fulness of human existence, man himself. Thus it is written about the incarnation of Christ that the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (*Jn 1:14*). It is also written that on the day of Pentecost, God poured out His Holy Spirit "on all flesh" (*Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28*). The word "flesh" in this sense carries no negative meaning at all. Rather it is the affirmation of the positive character of created material and physical being, exemplified by Christ who "became flesh" and commands men to "eat of my flesh" (*John 6:53-56*).

In the scriptures again, particularly in the writings of Saint Paul, the expression "the flesh" is used in the same negative way as "the world." It is employed as the catchword for godless and unspiritual existence.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's Law, indeed it cannot please God (Rom 8:5-8).

Here, for Saint Paul, the term "flesh" is not a synonym for man's body which is good, and the apostle makes this perfectly clear in his writings.

The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. [...] Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? [...] Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1 Cor 6:13.20).

In the spiritual tradition of the Church the ambiguity about "the world" and "the flesh" is treated carefully. It has been explained without confusion by the spiritual teachers and proclaimed clearly in the Church's sacraments. God's good creation is not evil. Material existence is not evil. Man's fleshly body is not evil. Only sinful passions and lusts are evil. They are evil because they treat the created world and the fleshly body of man as ends in themselves, as objects of idolatrous adoration and godless desire. They are evil because, as St Augustine puts it, they express the "worship of the creature rather than the Creator."

By nature the soul is without sinful passion. Passions are something added to the soul by its fault ... The natural state of the soul is luminous and pure through absorbing the divine light ...

The state contrary to nature ... is found in passionate men who serve passions.

When you hear that it is necessary to withdraw from the world ... to purify yourself from what is of the world, you must understand the term world. "World" is a collective name embracing what are called passions. When we speak of passions collectively, we call them the world. ... the world is carnal life and minding of the flesh (St Isaac of Syria, 6th c., Spiritual Training).

The Church [\(Top\)](#)

The new and abundant life given by God to man through Christ and the Holy Spirit in creation and redemption is the life of the Christian Church. The life of the Church is the life originally willed for man and his world by God. It is the life of God Himself originally given in creation. It is the spiritual life.

One should not think of the spiritual life of the Church as some particularly special kind of "religious life" different from life itself as we have received it in our creation by God. There are not "two lives," one "natural" and one "religious." There is only one life that is real, genuine and true. It is life with God, the life of the Church. Any other life is not life at all: it is the way of death.

What differentiates the life of the Church from the life of "this world," also called life "according to the flesh," is only evil and sin. Everything positive is created life, which God has called "good ... very good," is what is saved and sanctified in the life of the

Church. Only falsehood and wickedness are excluded -- certainly -- not creation itself.

In the Orthodox tradition, the Church is called the Kingdom of God on earth, "the re-creation of the world" (Saint Gregory of Nyssa, 4th c., *On the Canticles*). In the New Testament it is also called the "**new creation**" (*2 Cor 5:17*), the Body and Bride of Christ Himself (*Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:27; Eph 5:23ff; Rev 21:1ff*).

... God has put all things under the feet of Christ and has made Him the head over all things for the Church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all (Eph 1:22-23).

The Apostle Paul also refers to "**the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth**" (*1 Tim 3:15*).

Genuine life, true and real life in perfection and abundance, is found only in the Church of Christ. People who are not formally in the Church are living truly and genuinely only to the extent that they follow the law of God "written on their hearts" by the Spirit of God in creation (*Rom 1:12-16*), which is the same law clearly revealed and given in Christ and the Church. And those people who are formally members of the Church are living truly and genuinely only to the extent that they actually live the life of the Church. For the sad fact exists that one may be formally a member of the Church and still live according to the law of the: flesh, the law of sin and death, and not of Christ. The spiritual life, therefore, consists in actually living the life of the Church.

The Sacraments [\(Top\)](#)

The spiritual life of the Church is given to men in the sacraments. The sacraments are called the holy mysteries, and the entire life of the Church is considered to be mystical and sacramental.

The new life in Christ, the genuine life of God, is given to man in baptism, the new birth and new creation of man in Christ by the Spirit of God. In baptism the person who rejects Satan and all of his evil works and accepts Christ and the gift of eternal life, dies and rises again with Jesus to "newness of life."

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. [...] So you also must consider yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom 6:3-11; Cf. also Col 2-3, Gal 3).

The new life in Christ Jesus given in baptism -- a perpetually dying and rising daily with Jesus -- is made possible in man by "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the mystery of chrismation (*Cf. 2 Cor 1:22, Eph 1:13*). Chrismation follows baptism, and is essentially connected to it, as the Holy Spirit comes with Christ, Pentecost comes with Easter, and life comes with birth. There is no new life in the new humanity of divine childhood in Jesus without the life-creating Spirit of God. It is the Holy Spirit in chrismation who makes possible and powerful the spiritual life into which men are born in Christian baptism.

The new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit in the Church is nourished and sustained in the mystery of the eucharist -- Holy Communion. The "mystical supper of the Son of God" is the center of the spiritual life. For Christians there is no life at all without it:

I am the bread of life ... if any one eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh. Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me ... he who eats this bread will live forever (*Jn 6:32ff*).

When a person falls away from the life of God in the Church, he or she may be reunited to Christ by the mystery of reconciliation through penitential confession. The abundant mercy of God abides in the Church by the presence of Christ, and the Lord who "desires not the death of a sinner" but that he might "turn from his wickedness and live" (*Ez 18:32, 33:14*) will forgive those who come to Him in repentance (*Cf. Jn 6:37*). Continual repentance for sin is a central element in the spiritual life of men who choose life in God, but continue, inevitably, to sin.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, Christ is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us (1 Jn 1:8).

In this life still bound by the sin of the world, man inevitably suffers and dies. His outward nature is wasting away while his new nature in Christ is being perfected. The mystery of the anointing of man's suffering soul and body is the sanctification of man's "perishable nature" that his "mortal nature" might "put on immortality" (*1 Cor 15:51ff*). Through holy unction a person is given the grace of the Spirit to make his suffering and death an act of victory and life.

If we have died with Him, we shall also live with Him; if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him ... (2 Tim 2:11; Cf. Jas 4:13ff).

In this life as well, God has created human beings in His divine image and likeness as male and female. The union in love between one man and one woman forever is the created expression of the perfect love of God for His creatures. The mystery of marriage is the human image of the "great mystery" of "Christ and the Church" (*Eph 6:21-33*). In the sacrament of marriage, human love is made eternal and divine by the grace of Christ's Spirit. There is no parting in death, but fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

All of the sacramental mysteries of the Church are effected in the Church through the sacrament of the ordained priesthood. The bishops and priests are the ministers within the community who guarantee the reality of the mystical life of the Church in all times and places. Through the ordained ministers within the communion of the Church, Christ Himself is present and powerful in the fullness of His saving activity.

The Kingdom of God [\(Top\)](#)

God's gift of eternal life in Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Kingdom of God. Jesus has brought the **Kingdom of God** to the world through the Spirit in the Church. Spiritual life is life -- already now -- in the Kingdom of God.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also (Lk 12:32-34).

To live already now in the Kingdom of God is to live in freedom from sin and death in the gracious life of Christ and the Church. A person who has died to sin with Christ in baptism and has been sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit in chrismation and who participates in Christ's Body and Blood in the eucharist is already a member of the Kingdom of God.

... for through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built into it for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph 2:18-22).

The Church is called the Kingdom of God on earth; and the presence and power of the Kingdom is identified with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who abides in the faithful bringing to them the presence and power of God the Father through His Son Jesus Christ.

Thus the Apostle Paul has said, "The Kingdom of God is ... righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men" (*Rom 14:17-18*). And Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4th c.) citing the earlier tradition of Christians said simply: "The Kingdom of God is the Holy Spirit. ... The Kingdom of the Father and the Unction of the Son." It has always been understood in the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church that to the measure with which one is filled with the Spirit of God, to that same measure he is united with Christ and is in communion with the Father, becoming His child and a member of His Kingdom. Thus it is the teaching that the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" in "seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (*Mt 6:33*) is the sole purpose and content of man's spiritual life. It is for this, and this alone, that man has been created by God.

... Walk by the Spirit, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other. ... Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and the

like. ... those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God (Gal 5:16-21).

The Beatitudes [\(Top\)](#)

In the Gospel writings, the **beatitudes** introduce the teachings of Jesus and are traditionally considered to contain the most concise summary of the spiritual life of man. In the Orthodox Divine Liturgy, the beatitudes are chanted when the Book of the Gospels is carried in solemn procession to the sanctuary to be proclaimed as the Word of God to the faithful. Thus it is the clear teaching of the Gospel and the Church that one enters into the mysteries of Christ and the Kingdom of God only by way of following the Lord's teachings in the beatitudes.

And He opened His mouth and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for

righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven (Matthew 5:2-12; Cf Luke 6:20-26)

Poverty in Spirit [\(Top\)](#)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3)

This first beatitude is the fundamental condition for all man's spiritual progress and growth. Before everything else, if a person wants to live the life of God, he must be poor in spirit.

To be poor in spirit is to recognize clearly that one has nothing which he has not received from God, that one is nothing except by the grace of God. This blessed poverty is called "spiritual" in Saint Matthew's Gospel because first of all, it is an attitude of mind and heart, a conviction of the soul. It is the condition of man in total emptiness and openness before God, primarily in relation to the things of the Spirit, that is, to understanding and insight, to will and desire.

To be poor in spirit is to be devoid of all pride and trust in the power of one's own spirit. It is to be freed from all reliance on one's own ideas, opinions and desires. It is to be liberated from the "vain imaginations" of one's own heart. (*Jeremiah 23:17, Romans 1:21*) For as the holy Virgin Mary, the perfect model of poverty in spirit, has sung in her magnificent song:

God has shown strength with His arm,

He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts,

He has put down the mighty from their thrones,

And has exalted the humble and meek,

He has filled the hungry with good things,

And the rich He has sent away empty. (Luke 1:51-54)

Jesus Himself was poor, not only in body but in spirit. Not only was the Lord a poor man, without "place to lay His head" (*Matthew 8:20*) but His physical poverty was the direct result of His perfect poverty of spirit.

Truly, truly I say to you, the Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing . . . I can do nothing on my own authority ... (*John 5:19,30*)

If a person wishes to embark on the spiritual life, he must abandon all things and follow Christ in poverty of spirit To be poor in spirit is simply to be wholly set free from the sinful lusts of this world.

If anyone loves this world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (I John 2:15-17)

The first revelation of the will of God is that His creatures must be poor in spirit. The violation of this spiritual attitude is the original sin and the source of all sorrows.

Blessed Mourning ([Top](#))

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (*Matthew 5:4*) This is the second beatitude, and it logically follows the first. If one is poor in spirit, liberated from the spiritual and physical lusts of this world, he will necessarily mourn and weep over the conditions of man.

The poor in spirit know how foolish and sad it is to be caught by sin, to be victimized by falsehood and evil, to be wedded to destruction and death. Viewing the realities of this world without God, the world captivated by its own vain imaginations, the world thinking itself rich and prosperous and needing nothing but in fact **"wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked"** (*Revelation 3:17*), the spiritually poor man can only mourn. Knowing what could be from God, and what is actually with God, he will

mourn and weep like the prophets over sinful Israel, like Jesus over the corpse of Lazarus and the city of Jerusalem, (*John 11:35, Matthew 23:37*) like Jesus Himself in the garden, confronted by His own cup of suffering which was so senseless and cruel.

Blessed mourning for sin is essential to the spiritual life. But in the victory of Christ, it is not morbid or joyless. On the contrary, it is filled with hope, with gladness and with light.

As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting; for you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you ... (2 Corinthians 7:9-11)

In his writings, Saint John Climacus (7th c.) follows this teaching of Saint Paul. It is the classical teaching of the Christian spiritual tradition. The end of blessed mourning is not despondency or remorse, it is repentance and salvation. It is the "mourning which causes joy."

Mourning, according to God, is sadness of soul and the disposition of a sorrowing heart which ever madly seeks for that which it thirsts ...

Mourning is a golden spur in a soul which is stripped of all attachment and all ties ...

Keep a firm hold of the blessed joy-grief of holy mourning and do not stop working at it until it raises you high above the things of this world and presents you pure to Christ.

The fruit of morbid mourning is vain glory and self-esteem, but the fruit of blessed mourning is comfort.

He who is clothed in blessed and grace-given mourning ... knows the spiritual laughter of the soul.

My friends, God does not ask or desire that man should mourn from sorrow of heart, but rather out of love for Him he should rejoice with spiritual laughter.

When I consider the actual nature of compunction, I am amazed at how that which is called mourning and grief should contain joy and gladness within it, like honey in the comb. (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 7)

"So do not make a passion the remedy against passion," says Saint Nilus of Sinai, "lest you anger ... Him who granted you this blessing (of mourning and tears). For in shedding tears for their sins many people forget the purpose of tears, and getting into a frenzy, they go astray." (*Saint Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts of Prayer*)

Meekness [\(Top\)](#)

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (*Matthew 5:5*) Meekness is an essential possession of the spiritual person. Jesus Himself was meek.

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son, and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him. Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:27-30)

The apostles of Christ taught meekness. Saint Paul mentions it in all his writings and Saint James insists upon it.

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as it comes down from above from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits ... (James 3:13-17)

To be meek means to be gentle and kind, to be empty of all selfishness and earthly ambition. It means, in a word, never to return evil for evil, but always in everything to overcome evil by good. (*Cf. Romans 12:14-21*)

Meekness means to distrust and reject every thought and action of external coercion and violence, which in any case can never produce fruitful, genuine and lasting results.

Meekness is to have the firm and calm conviction that the good is more powerful than evil, and that the good ultimately is always victorious.

To refer once more to Saint John Climacus:

Meekness is an unchangeable state of mind which remains the same in honor and dishonor. Meekness is the rock overlooking the sea of irritability which breaks all the waves that dash against it, remaining itself unmoved. Meekness is the buttress of patience, the mother of love and the foundation of wisdom, for it is said, "The Lord will teach the meek His way." (Psalm 24:9) It prepares the forgiveness of sins; it is boldness in prayer, an abode of the Holy Spirit. "But to whom shall I look," says the Lord, "to him who is meek and quiet and trembles at my word." (Isaiah 66:2) In meek hearts the Lord finds rest, but a turbulent soul is the seat of the devil. (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 24)

Hunger and Thirst for Righteousness [\(Top\)](#)

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied." (*Matthew 5:6*) Strictly speaking, this beatitude of the Lord blesses, not the righteous, but the seekers of righteousness. It is those who are hungry and thirsty for what is just and good who receive the blessings of God who also says:

Do not be anxious, saying "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we wear?" For the heathen seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and its righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well. (Matthew 6:31-33)

Man's life consists in seeking, in hungering and in thirsting for righteousness. This is the spiritual teaching of the scriptures and the saints. The satisfaction and rest comes from God, but is a satisfaction and rest which itself always and for eternity becomes the basis of a new hunger and thirst. This is not in contradiction to Christ's teaching that **"he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst."** (*John 6:35*) It is rather the affirmation that the "inquiet" of man's heart, as Saint Augustine (*5th c.*) has said, is created "toward God," and that the "rest" which is found in Him is itself, as Saint Maximus (*7th c.*) has said, an "ever-dynamic rest," always growing and developing in ever greater union with the uncontainable and inexhaustible richness and fullness of divine being and life.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa (*4th c.*) said it this way:

... the human mind . . . constantly flowing and dispersing to whatever pleases the senses ... will never have any notable force in its progress towards the True Good. (i.e. God)

For it is impossible for our human nature ever to stop moving; it has been made of its Creator ever to keep changing. Hence when we prevent it from

using its energy on trifles, and keep it on all sides from doing what it should not, it must necessarily move in a straight path towards truth. (On Virginity)

Thus, in a certain sense, it (our humanity) is constantly being created, ever changing for the better in its growth in perfection; along these lines no limit can be envisaged, nor can its progressive growth in perfection be limited by any term. In this way, in its state of perfection no matter how great and perfect it may be, it is merely the beginning of a greater and superior stage. (Commentary on the Song of Songs)

This spiritual teaching means that the truly spiritual person will not merely move from unrighteousness to righteousness, but will move for all eternity in God to ever-greater righteousness and perfection. The hunger and thirst in this way is an essential characteristic of the living soul of the righteous person; it is the essential dynamic of spiritual life. The Apostle Paul has given this very doctrine:

... But one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind, and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded . . . (Philippians 3:13-16) And we all, with unveiled faces, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

There is no satisfaction for man's spirit but God. It is the satisfaction of perpetual growth in union with God. To hunger and thirst for God, "for the living God" (*Psalms* 42:2) is spiritual life. To be filled and contented with anything else is death for the soul.

Mercy ([Top](#))

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (*Matthew* 5:7) To be merciful is to be like God, for **"The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."** (*Psalms* 103:8)

The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin . . ." (*Exodus* 34:6-7)

This also is the teaching of Christ in His Sermon on the Mount:

... love your enemies and do good and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:35-36)

To be merciful does not mean to justify falsehood and sin. It does not mean to be tolerant of foolishness and evil. It does not mean to overlook injustice and iniquity. God is not this way, and does not do this.

To be merciful means to have compassion on evil-doers and to sympathize with those who are caught in the bonds of sin. It means to forego every self-righteousness and every self-justification in comparison with others. It means to refuse to condemn those who do wrong, but to forgive those who harm and destroy, both themselves and others. It is to say with utter seriousness, **"forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."** (*Matthew* 6:12)

According to Jesus, the spiritual person will be merciful because he himself is in need of mercy. The spiritual person will be merciful because he knows that he himself is a sinful man in need of God's mercy and help. There is no one without sin, no one who can claim righteousness before God. If one claims to have no sin, says Saint John, he is a liar, and makes God a liar as well. (*I John* 1:10,2:4) The spiritual person, because he is in union with God, acknowledges his sin and his need for forgiveness from God and from men. He cannot condemn others for he knows, but for the grace of Christ, that he himself stands unworthy and condemned.

If Thou O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayst be feared. (Psalm 130:3-4)

The merciful person is merciful toward himself as well as others. This does not mean that he makes light of his sins and takes God's forgiveness for granted. It means rather that he does not plague himself with neurotic guilt and remorse, surrendering to sinful scruples which are the death of the soul. It means that he trusts in the loving-kindness of God and knows, as Saint Paul has said, that no works of his own will ever deliver him from the need of God's mercy and love.

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this not your own doing, it is the gift of God - not because of works, lest any man boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Thus it is the continual reception of the mercy of God and nothing else, which empowers the soul to good works. And it is only the merciful who attain mercy from God. For all eternity man will be at the disposal of God's mercy. At whatever stage of development he will reach, man's prayer will always remain the central prayer of the Church: Lord have mercy on me a sinner! The holier the person, the greater is his sense of sinful unworthiness, the stronger is his dependence on the mercy of God, and the more he is merciful to the weaknesses of others.

Purity in Heart [\(Top\)](#)

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (*Matthew 5:8*) Purity of heart means to be free of all wicked motivations and sinful intentions, and to have no unworthy interests and self-seeking desires. It means to be totally free from anything which blinds and darkens the mind so that it cannot see things clearly and honestly. It means to be totally liberated from anything which captivates and darkens the soul so that it cannot reflect and shine with the pure light of God.

In another place in His Sermon on the Mount, the Lord has said.

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is sound, your body will be full of light; but if your eye is not sound, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 7:22-23)

The pure in heart are those whose eyes are sound. The pure in heart are those who can say with the psalmist:

The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after;

that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

Thou hast said, "Seek ye my face!" My heart says to Thee,

"Thy face, O Lord, do I seek."

Hide not Thy face from me. (Psalm 27)

To seek but one thing, the face of the Lord, is purity of heart. To will but one thing, the light of the Lord in the depth of one's soul, is to live in utter purity. It is for this reason that Christ's mother Mary is the image of perfect purity. The holy Virgin is "**all-pure**" not merely because of her bodily continence, but also because of her spiritual soundness. Her heart was pure. Her mind was sane. Her soul magnified the Lord. Her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. Her body was His spiritual temple. For this reason God regarded her humility and did great things for her. For this reason all generations call her blessed. For this reason she is "**full of grace**" and the Lord is with her. For she, in her simple purity could say to God: "**Let it be to me according to Your word.**" (Cf. Luke 1)

In the spiritual tradition of the Orthodox Church, purity of heart is an essential condition for union with God. When man's heart is purified from all evil, it naturally shines with the light of God since God dwells in the soul. This is the doctrine of the saints as expressed by Saint Gregory of Nyssa.

... the man who purifies the eye of his soul will enjoy an immediate vision of God ... it is the same lesson taught by the Word (i.e. Christ) when He said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:21) This teaches us that the man who purifies his heart of every passionate impulse will see the image of the divine nature in his own beauty.

You must then wash away, by a life of virtue, the dirt which has clung to your heart like plaster, and then your divine beauty will once again shine forth. (On the Beatitudes, Sermon 6)

The Apostle Paul has said the same thing in his pastoral letters.

To the pure all things are pure, but to the corrupt and faithless nothing is pure; their minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God, but they deny Him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed. (Titus 1:15-16)

If anyone purifies himself from what is ignoble, then he will be a vessel of noble use, consecrated and useful to the master ... ready for any good work. So shun youthful passions and aim at righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call upon the Lord from a pure heart. (2 Timothy 2:21-22)

Peacemakers [\(Top\)](#)

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."
(Matthew 5:9)

Christ, the "**prince of peace**," (*Isaiah 9:6*) gives the peace of God to those who believe in Him.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. (John 14:27) I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. (John 16:33)

This is the peace which Saint Paul lists as one of the "**fruits of the Holy Spirit**" (*Galatians 5:22*); the "**peace of God which passes all understanding**." (*Philippians 4:7*) It is peace understood as "the liberation from passions, which cannot be attained without the action of the Holy Spirit." (*Saint Mark the Ascetic, 4th c., Two Centuries on Spiritual Law*) The peacemakers are those who have the peace of God in themselves and spread this peace to those around them. This peace, first of all, is the freedom from all anxiety and fear. It is the peace of those who are not anxious about their lives, about what they shall eat and drink, about what they shall wear. (*Cf. Matthew 6:25-33*) It is the peace with which men's hearts are not troubled nor afraid of anything. (*Cf. John 14:27*) It is the peace which exists in men even in the most terrible of human situations, in suffering and in death. It is the peace which is in the one who can say:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution or famine, or nakedness, or peril or sword? As it is written, "For Thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." (Psalm 44:22)

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:35-39)

The inner peace of God is not the absence of external conflict. The peacemakers of God are not those who are freed from terrific struggles in life, or those who can cause the absence and disappearance of strife among men. Christ Himself did not do this. On the contrary, the Prince of Peace Himself, the Lord who gives strength and peace to His people (*Psalm 29:11*), has claimed that He Himself will be the cause of much conflict among men.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man's foes will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and he who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. He who finds his life will lose it; and he who loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 10:34-39; Luke 12:49-53)

The blessed peacemaker is the one who bears witness to Christ and takes up his cross and loses his life for the Lord without fear or anxiety. He is the one who enters every human conflict until the end of time, fortified by the peace of God. He is the one who does not deny the Lord or compromise His truth by the exercise of violence, but bears witness by his own peace in the midst of conflict, the peace which is "**not as the world gives.**" (*John 14:27*) Thus, the peacemaker does not provoke others to irritation or violence, except by the truth and love of his life, and leaves all vengeance to the Lord. He is the one who follows Jesus in overcoming evil only by good.

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourself, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." (Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 32:35) No, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head." (Proverbs 25:21- 22) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:18-21)

In making peace, the peacemaker himself is a son of God like the Lord Jesus Himself, who paradoxically and inevitably is the cause of much scandal and strife. (*Cf. Luke 2:34-35, 7:23, 21:18*)

Persecuted for Righteousness' Sake [\(Top\)](#)

"Blessed are they who are persecuted for righteousness' sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you, and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake." (*Matthew 5:10-11*) In saying these words, Christ promised that those who would follow Him would certainly be persecuted. This is a central prediction of the Gospel and an essential condition of those who accept it.

Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecute me, they will persecute you; if they have kept my word, they will keep yours also. But all this they will do to you on my account, because they do not know Him who sent me. (John 15:20-21)

True Christians will always be persecuted for Christ's sake. They will be persecuted with Christ and like Christ, for the truth that they speak and the good that they do. The persecutions may not always be physical, but they will always be spiritual and psychological. They will always be mindless, unjust, violent, and "**without cause**" (*Psalm 69:4, John 15:25*) They will always be painful and the cause of much suffering. For "**indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.**"

(*2 Timothy 3:12*) A person embarking on the spiritual life must expect persecution and slander. He must be wary, however, of any false persecution complex, and must be absolutely certain that the suffering he meets is solely "for righteousness' sake" and not because of his own weaknesses and sins. The apostolic scripture makes this precise warning:

For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it, if when you do wrong and are beaten for it, you take it patiently. But if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval. For to this you have been called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps.

If you are reproached for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or a thief, or a wrongdoer, or a mischief-maker; yet if one suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but under that name let him glorify God. (I Peter 2:19-21, 4:14-16)

The suffering of Christians must be accepted gladly, with mercy and love to those who inflict it. Here once again is the Lord's own example, as well as that of His prophets, apostles, martyrs and saints. As Christ said, "**Father, forgive them...**" (Luke 23:34), while hanging on the Cross; and as the first martyr Stephen prayed, "**Lord, do not hold this sin against them.**" (Acts 7:60), while being stoned, so all those who follow God's righteousness must forgive their offenders "from their hearts." (Cf. Matthew 18:35)

But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To him who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from him who takes away your cloak do not withhold your coat as well ... Love your enemies, and do good, and give, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you ... (Luke 6:27-38)

The generous and loving forgiveness of the persecuted for the persecutors is an essential condition of the spiritual life. Without it, all suffering "for righteousness' sake" is in vain, and does not lead to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Rejoice and Be Glad [\(Top\)](#)

"**Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven...**" (Matthew 5:11) Joy is an essential element of the spiritual life, and is one of the "**fruits of the Holy Spirit.**" (Galatians 5:22) There is no genuine spirituality without joy. From the first pages of the Gospel, until the very end, the apostles of Christ, with Mary His mother and all of the Christians, are continually rejoicing in the salvation which Jesus has given.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. (John 15:8-11) ... your hearts will rejoice,

and no one will take your joy from you ... ask and you will receive that your joy may be full. (John 16:22-24)

Christian joy is not earthly happiness, pleasure or fun. It is the "**joy in believing.**" (*Romans 15:13*) It is the joy of knowing the freedom of truth in the love of God. (*Cf. John 8:32*) It is the joy of being made worthy to "**share in Christ's sufferings.**" (*I Peter 4:13*)

By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Without having seen Him, you love Him, though you do not now see Him you believe in Him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. (I Peter 1:3-8)

Spiritual joy goes together with spiritual suffering. It is wrong to think that joy comes only at the end when the suffering is over. Joy in Christ goes together with suffering in Christ. They co-exist and are dependent on each other for their power and strength. As blessed mourning over sin is the mourning that comes with the joy of salvation, so suffering in the flesh, in this world, is consonant with - and in a real sense is even caused by - the unspeakable joy of salvation. Thus Saint James can say that Christians should "**count it all joy**" when they "**meet various trials,**" knowing that the "**full effect**" of their steadfast faith is that they may be "**perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**" (*James 1.2-3*) And this is the firm conviction of Saint Paul as well.

... we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. (Romans 5:2-5)

It is the spiritual joy of Christians, the joy of the martyrs, which more than anything else, is the invincible witness to the truth of the Christian faith and the genuineness of the Christian spiritual life.

The Virtues [\(Top\)](#)

In addition to the beatitudes of Jesus, there are many fruits of the Holy Spirit enumerated in the apostolic scriptures and referred to in the writings of the saints of the Church. These fruits of the Spirit are often called the Christian **virtues**, which literally means those powers and possessions of the mind and the heart which all men should have if they are truly human, fulfilling themselves as created in the image and likeness of God.

Generally speaking, all of the human virtues are attributes of God Himself. They are

the characteristics of Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God in human flesh. They are the divine properties which should be in all human persons by the gift of God in creation and salvation through Christ.

It has been said, and it is true, that the Christian virtues are not all particularly "Christian" in the sense that only Christians know about them and are committed to attain them. Most, if not all, of the Christian virtues have been honored, respected and recommended by all great teachers of the spiritual life. This in no way detracts from their Christian value and truth, for Christ and His apostles and saints have not taught and practiced something other than that which all men should teach and practice. As the fulfillment of all positive human aspirations and desires, it is quite understandable that Jesus Christ, the perfect "**man from heaven**" and "**final Adam**"

(*I Corinthians 15:45-47, Romans 5:14*), should fulfill and realize in Himself that which all men of wisdom and good-will have sought for and desired in their minds and hearts, enlightened by God.

For in truth, whatever is found in man to be good and beautiful and true, is found there because of God and is from God. This is the case, whether it is realized or not, "**for every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights**" (*James 1:17*), and it is Christ Himself, the eternal Son and Word of God, who is the light and the life of every man who has ever lived and been enlightened on this earth. (*Cf. John 1: 1-10*) Thus the Apostle Paul has counseled Christ's faithful:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about those things. (Philippians 4:8)

As we "think about those things," we will refer to the teaching of the apostle himself, and to all of the apostles and teachers of the Christian faith who have been enlightened and inspired by God through the Lord Jesus Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church.

Faith [\(Top\)](#)

The foundation of all Christian virtue and life is **faith**. Faith is the natural possession of all men who are wise and virtuous. For if a person lacks faith in man's ability to know, to do good and to find meaning in life; if he does not believe that this is possible, profitable and worthy of man's efforts, then nothing wise or virtuous can be achieved. The striking characteristic of all prophets of doom, apostles of despair and preachers of absurdity is the absence of faith in man's capabilities for goodness and truth, and the absence of faith in the meaning and value of life. It is also an absence of faith in God.

Faith in God is the fundamental virtue of all the saints. (*Cf. Hebrews 11*) The prototype of the, believer in God is Abraham, the father of Israel.

The promise to Abraham and his descendents that they should inherit the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness

of faith.

That is why righteousness depends on faith in order to guarantee it to all his descendents ... who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all . . . in the presence of God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. That is why his faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) But the words "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake only, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:13-25)

Faith in God is fundamental for the spiritual life. And to believe in God is to believe in His Son Jesus Christ as well.

Let not your hearts be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. (...) Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of my works themselves. (John 14: 1-11)

Faith in Jesus as "**the Christ, the Son of the living God,**" is the center of the Christian life and the foundation of the Church. (*Matthew 16:16*) It is the source of all wisdom, power and virtue. It is the means by which man can know and do all things, for "**all things are possible to him who believes.**" (*Mark 9:23, Matthew 17:20*)

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. (John 15:4-5)

Faith, first of all, is "**the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**" (*Hebrews 11:1*) It is confidence in the spiritual capabilities of man and in the goodness and power of God. It is intellectual assent and existential everyday trust in the promises and gifts of God, given to the world in creation and in salvation in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Faith itself is a "**gift of God**" given to all and accepted by the poor in spirit and the pure in heart, who are open to the activity of God in their lives. (*Ephesians 2:8*)

Genuine faith is not a blind leap in the dark, an irrational and unreasonable acceptance of the unreasonable and the absurd. Genuine faith is eminently reasonable; it is rooted and grounded in man's reasonable nature as made in the image of God. Not to believe, according to the scriptures and the saints, is the epitome of absurdity and foolishness.

The fool says in his heart, "There is no God." They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good.

The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there are any that act wisely that seek after God. (Psalm 14:1-2, 53:1-2)

Man was made to have faith in God. Not to believe in God is a perversion of human nature and the cause of all evils. The weakness and absence of faith in God is rooted in sin, impurity and pride. It is never simply the result of an intellectual mistake or mental confusion. It is always the result of the suppression of the truth through wickedness, the exchange of God's truth for a lie, the refusal, consciously or unconsciously, to acknowledge God with honor and thanksgiving. (Cf. *Romans 1*)

You shall indeed hear but never understand, and you shall see, but never perceive. For this people's heart has drawn dull, and their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should perceive with their eyes and bear with their ears, understand with their heart, and turn to me to heal them. (Isaiah 6:9-10, Matthew 13:14-15)

The spiritual person lives "by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." (*Galatians 2:20*) The spiritual person is the one who, by the grace of God's Spirit, is faithful in all things.

Hope ([Top](#))

The virtue of hope goes together with the power of faith. The patriarch Abraham "**in hope believed against hope that he should be the father of many nations.**" (*Romans 4:18*) And hope, like faith, is in that which is not seen.

For in this hope we are saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (Romans 8:24-25)

Hope is the assurance of the good outcome of our lives lived by faith in God. Hope is the power of certain conviction that the life built on faith will produce its fruits. Hope is the confidence, that despite all darkness and sin, the light of the loving forgiveness of God is upon us to do with us and for us, what we ourselves cannot do.

Our soul waits for the Lord; He is our help and shield. Yea our hearts are glad in Him, because we trust in His holy name. Let Thy steadfast love, O Lord be upon us, even as we hope in Thee. (Psalm 33:20-22)

The opposite of hope is despondency and despair. According to the spiritual tradition of the Church, the state of despondency and despair is the most grievous and horrible condition that a person can be in. It is the worst and most harmful of the sinful states possible for the soul.

The loss of hope is the worst possible state because without hope, nothing else is possible; certainly not faith. If a person is faithless, he can be chastised and convinced. If a person is proud, he can be humbled; impure, he can be cleansed; weak, he can be strengthened; wicked, he can be made righteous. But if a person is despondent and despairing, the very condition of his sickness is such that his heart

and soul are dead and unresponsive to the grace of God and the support of his brothers.

...the force of despondence ... overwhelms him and oppresses his soul; and this is a taste of hell because it produces a thousand temptations: confusion, irritation, protesting and bewailing one's lot, wrong thoughts, wandering from place to place, and so on. (Saint Isaac of Syria, 6th c., Directions on Spiritual Training)

The demon of despondency, which is called the 46 noon-day demon" (Psalm 91:6) is more grievous than all others. (...) It arouses in him vexation against the place and mode of life itself and his work, adding that there is no more love among the brethren, and no one to comfort him. (...) Then it provokes in him a longing for other places ... (Evagrius of Pontus, 4th c., To Anatolius: On Eight Thoughts)

The only remedy for despair is humility and patience, the steadfast holding to the life of faith, even without conviction or feeling. It is the simplification of life by going through each day, one day at a time, with the continual observances, however external, of scriptural reading, liturgical worship, fasting, prayer, and work. In the advice of Saint Benedict (6th c), it is to remain stable in one's place, and to "to what you are doing" as well as you can, with all possible attention. In the advice of Saint Seraphim (19th c.), it is to visit with spiritual friends, with those who are hopeful, merciful, joyful and strong. It is to stand fast to the end while passing through aridity and darkness, until the light of blessed hope and comfort are found. There is no other way, and "**those who find it are few**" (Matthew 7:14). But when one "fights and conquers against despondency and despair, this struggle is followed by a peaceful state and the soul becomes filled with ineffable joy." (Evagrius, To Anatolius: On Eight Thoughts)

When we are attacked by the demon of despondency - the most grievous of all, but who more than all makes the soul experienced - let us divide our soul in two, and making one part the comforter and the other part the comforted, let us sow seeds of good hope in ourselves, singing with David the psalmist: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I will again praise Him, my help and my God." (Psalm 42:5; Evagrius of Pontus, To Anatolius: Texts on Active Life)

Sometimes people think that a certain "lack of hope" is a Christian virtue. They think that by proclaiming that "all is lost" they please God by their humility and sorrow over sins, their own and those of the world.

They think that the more they concentrate on the evils of men, the more they exalt the strength of the wicked, the more they sigh and say, "There is no help for US In God!", the more righteous and pious they become. But this is all wrong. It has nothing to do with the patient suffering at the hands of the wicked, and the patient struggle against the powers of evil that the righteous must endure, being absolutely certain of their ultimate and total victory in God, the source of their strength and their hope.

It is no virtue to feel weak and helpless in the presence of the wicked. It is no virtue to consider oneself totally at the mercy of evil and sin. It is a virtue rather to be always "**rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation**" knowing and believing that the final victory is God's. (*Romans 12:12*)

Knowledge [\(Top\)](#)

Faith and hope go together with knowledge. They are built on knowledge and lead to knowledge. For what is "not seen" is believed and hoped on the basis of what is seen. And the understanding of what is seen depends on belief and hope in what is not seen. One's belief and hope in the ability to know, to trust his senses, his mind and the revelation of his God, are the foundations of all knowledge.

Man was created to know God; not only to believe in Him and to hope in Him, but to know Him and so to love Him and to serve Him. Knowledge of God is the aim and goal of man's life, the purpose of his creation by God.

And this is eternal life, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.

O Righteous Father, the world has not known Thee; and these know that Thou hast sent me. I made known to them Thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which Thou has loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17.3, 25-26)

Faith, given as a gift by God, results in the knowledge of God. The Lord desires that man would "know the truth," and so become free from all blindness, ignorance and sin. (*John 8:32*) This is the central teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the law and the prophets of the Old Testament and of the apostles and teachers of the Church.

That men might know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity, that prudence may be given to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth ... The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. (Proverbs 1:1-7)

In all of his letters, the Apostle Paul prays that the faithful would "**be filled with the knowledge of Christ's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, to lead a life worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God**" since "**God our Savior desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.**" (*Colossians 1:8-9, 1 Timothy 2:4*)

In all of his writings, the apostle insists as well that the faithful have "**all the riches of knowledge of God's mystery of Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,**" and that the "**spiritual man**" has "**the mind of the Lord... the mind of Christ.**" (*Colossians 2:2-3; 1 Corinthians 2:6-16*)

The Apostle John gives the same doctrine as Saint Paul when he claims that the "**Spirit of Truth**" whom Christ has given in order to "teach you all things" and to

"guide you into all the truth" (*John 14:26, 16:13*), is truly living in the midst of the believers.

... you have been anointed by the Holy One and you know all things. I write to you, not because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?

I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as His anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in Him. (I John 2: 20-29)

This teaching of Saint John is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, quoted directly by Jesus Himself, that in the Messianic Age of the new covenant church, **"...they shall all be taught by God."** (*John 6:45; Isaiah 54:13*)

In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the knowledge of God and His truth is the main goal of life. "For what meaning would there be for creation," asks Saint Athanasius the Great (4th c.), "if man should not know God?" (*On the Incarnation, Book 1*) Knowledge of God, indeed knowledge itself, according to the scriptures and the saints, is not mere "knowledge about," the abstract knowledge of information and rational propositions, devoid of living experience. Knowledge is primarily and essentially an existential union, a cleaving together of the spiritual man and the object of his knowledge. Saint Gregory of Nyssa (4th c.) has said, "The Lord does not say that it is blessed to know something about God, but rather to possess God in oneself." (*On the Beatitudes, Sermon 6*) The possession of God within the mind and heart is the true knowledge of God. It comes through faith and repentance in the life of the Church. It comes essentially through the gracious purification from all sinful passions. Saint John of the Ladder (6th c.) has written:

The growth of fear is the beginning of love, but a complete state of purity is the foundation of all divine knowledge.

He who has perfectly united his feelings to God is mystically led by Him to an understanding of His words. But without union one cannot speak about God.

The engrafted Word (James 1:21) perfects purity . . .and the disciple of divine knowledge is illumined. (...) but he who has not come to know God merely speculates.

Purity makes a theologian (i.e. one who knows God), who of himself grasps the teachings of the Trinity. (The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 30)

The listing of knowledge among the virtues of man is critically important because in the present time there exists the widespread conviction that man is condemned to ignorance in the areas of religion and spiritual life. While most people would grant

that knowledge is possible in the realm of natural sciences, they would deny genuine knowledge in the realm of the Spirit. They would say that one can know the things of this physical world 'but cannot know the mysteries of God, and God Himself. Thus religion becomes a matter of personal choice and subjective taste, devoid of any pretension to objective truth and genuine knowledge. As we have seen, this is precisely not the teaching of the Scriptures and the saints.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known of God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His invisible nature, namely His eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. (Romans 1:18-25)

Wisdom ([Top](#))

The virtue of wisdom differs from knowledge in that wisdom is normally understood as the immediate insight into things, the practical understanding and grasping of what is true and right in its living expression and form. The wise man is the one who sees clearly and deeply into the mysteries of God. He is the one who can give concrete advice in the everyday affairs of life, the one who can point out the will of God to man who is confronted by actual problems and decisions. He is the one, who like Jesus, knows not only what is in God, but "**what is in man.**" (Cf John 2:25)

In the Old Testament, a whole body of literature developed concerning the theme of divine wisdom. ([See Book 3, Bible and Church History](#)) The **Psalms, Proverbs** and other wisdom writings such as **Ecclesiastes**, and the **Wisdom of Solomon** and **Jesus, Son of Sirach** show clearly what wisdom is, and what it is to be wise.

Does not wisdom call, does not understanding raise her voice?

On the heights beside the way, in the paths she takes her stand; beside the gates in front of the town, at the entrance of the portals she cries aloud: "To you, O men, I call, and my cry is to the sons of men. O simple ones, learn prudence; O foolish men, pay attention. Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips.

All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing twisted or crooked in them.

They are all straight to him who understands and right to those who find knowledge.

Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.

I, wisdom, dwell in prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion.

The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

*I have counsel and sound wisdom, I have insight, I have strength."
(Proverbs 8:1-14)*

In the New Testament, divine wisdom is found in Jesus Christ, who is Himself, "the wisdom of God." (*I Corinthians 1:24*)

... among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory. But, as it is written, "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him" (Isaiah 64:4, 65:17) God has revealed to us through the Spirit. (...) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom, but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. (I Corinthians 2:6-15)

In the holy Scriptures, the Spirit of the Lord is called "**the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.**" (*Isaiah 11:2*) It is this Spirit that the Lord gives to those who believe in Him.

For God has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth.

For this reason...I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power in us who believe...

For this reason I, Paul have written ... to make all men see what is the

plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known... (Ephesians 1:9-10,19-19,3:1-10)

In the Church, as Saint Paul says, the divine wisdom is given to the spiritual person. The wise man, who possesses the Spirit of God, can show forth the "**knowledge of salvation to His people ... to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.**" (Luke 1:77-79) The opposite of divine wisdom is sinful foolishness which brings man to calamity, sorrow, ruin and death. (Cf. Proverbs 10-14) In the spiritual life of the Church, it is the wise men, the spiritual masters and saintly teachers, who have gained divine wisdom and so are made competent to direct and guide the destiny of men's immortal souls. It is for this reason that all men should submit themselves to their instruction and rule.

Honesty ([Top](#))

The wise man who has knowledge lives according to the truth through a totally honest life. Honesty means first of all, to speak the truth and never to. "**bear false witness.**" (Exodus 20:16)

There are six things which the Lord hates, seven which are an abomination to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to do evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16-19; Cf 11:1, 12:17, 17:4, 21:28, 25:14, 18)

This basic scriptural teaching is also that of the apostles.

For we pray to God that you may not do what is wrong...but that you may do what is honest...for we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. (2 Corinthians 13:7-8)

Honesty also means to act truly and openly, without pretense, or the presentation of a false image of oneself. It means, in a word, not to be a hypocrite.

Above all things, Christ the Lord hated and condemned hypocrisy, lying and deceit. He accused the devil himself, first and foremost, of being a deceiver and liar, pretending to be other than he is, presenting himself and his teaching as totally other than the falsehood and wickedness that they actually are. (Cf. John 8:44-47) This is the way of all the false prophets, and of the antichrist himself.

For many deceivers have gone out into the world, men who will not acknowledge the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh; such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. (2 John 7)

Take heed that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name saying "I am the Christ," and they will lead you astray. (...)and many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. (...) For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and

wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. (Matthew 24:4,11,24)

In His fierce condemnation of the evil of the scribes, pharisees and lawyers, Christ was most violent against their hypocrisy. Of all the evils of men, the most vile in the sight of the Lord is undoubtedly hypocrisy.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you cleanse the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside you are full of extortion and rapacity. You blind Pharisee! first cleanse the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead men's bones and all impurity. So you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but within are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (Matthew 23: 25-28)

The spiritual person is not a hypocrite. He shows himself honestly for what he is, and does not pretend to be what he is not. He reveals himself to all exactly as he actually is. He does not say or do anything that would lead people to have a false impression of him or of anyone or anything. He is utterly honest and pure in all that he thinks, says and does, knowing that God sees all and judges with righteousness all those who "**walk in integrity.**" (Cf. Psalm 26:1,11)

Humility [\(Top\)](#)

In the Orthodox tradition, humility has often been called the "mother of all virtues," and pride has been named "the cause of all sin." The wise and honest person is the one who is humble.

Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor, than to divide the spoils with the proud.

A man's pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will retain honor. (Proverbs 16:18, 16:19, 29:23)

According to the Gospel, in the Song of the Virgin, the Lord scatters the proud in the imagination of their hearts and exalts those who are humble and meek. (Cf. Luke 1:51-52) This is the exact teaching of Jesus.

For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11, 18:14, Proverbs 3:34)

Humility does not mean degradation or remorse. It does not mean effecting some sort of demeaning external behavior. It does not mean considering oneself as the most vile and loathsome of creatures. Christ Himself was humble and He did not do this. God Himself, according to the spiritual tradition of the Church, has perfect humility, and He certainly does not act in this way.

Genuine humility means to see reality as it actually is in God. It means to know oneself and others as known by God - a power, according to Saint Isaac, greater than that of raising the dead! The humble lay aside all vanity and conceit in the service of the least of God's creatures, and to consider no good act as beneath one's dignity and honor. Humility is to know oneself, without the grace of God, as dust, sinful and dead.

God is humble because He cares about the least: the birds in the air, the grass in the fields, the worst of sinners. (Cf. *Matthew 6:25-30*) Christ is humble because He associates with the lowly, becoming the slave of all in taking on Himself the sins of the world.

If I then, your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. (John 13:14-15) You know that the rulers of the pagans lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. (Matthew 20:25-28)

All Christians are to follow the example of Christ in His divine humility. Saint Paul teaches:

Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:3-11)

The exaltation of Jesus as a man depended entirely on His self-emptying humility. True greatness, divine greatness, is the ability to be the least and to the least with the absolute certitude that it is externally and divinely important, that it is an imitation of God Himself.

True humility for the sinful man is to know that indeed, according to one's own possibilities and gifts, each one is truly the first and greatest of sinners (Cf. *I Timothy 1:15*), for each one has sinned in his own way "like no other man." (*Saint Andrew of Crete, (7th c), Penitential Canon*) The truly humble person is the one who, confessing his sins, is "**faithful over little**," and doing so, is exalted by the Lord and is "**set over much**." Only such a person will "**enter into the joy of his Master**." (*Matthew 25:14-23, Luke 19:17*)

Obedience [\(Top\)](#)

In speaking of Christ's humility, Saint Paul said that Jesus was obedient to God His Father "**unto death, even death on a cross.**" (*Philippians 2:8*) In truth, Jesus obeyed God in all that He did.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do my will, but the will of Him who sent me. And this is the will of Him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that He has given me, but raise it up on the last day. (John 6:38-39)

All that Jesus has and is, He has received from God the Father. From all eternity, the Son has listened to the Father in order to do His work and to accomplish His will. The will of God is that the Son should become a man, take up the sins of the world and die in the flesh in order to raise the dead that "nothing would be lost." Jesus has accomplished this in divine and perfect obedience, giving the example to all.

My father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt...if this cannot pass until I drink it, Thy will be done. (Matthew 26:39, 42)

There is no degradation in obedience to God, nothing shameful or demeaning. On the contrary, to do the will of God is glory and life. It is the highest dignity of man, his greatest joy and delight. (*Cf. Psalm 119*) It is the way of perfection for all, even for the man Jesus Himself.

Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered, and being made perfect He became the source of salvation to all who obey Him. (Hebrews 5:8-9)

Disobedience to God and His Son Jesus Christ is the source of all sin. Refusal to submit to God in all things is the cause of all sorrow and death. Those who hear the Gospel and fail to enter into the eternal rest of God, do so only "**because of disobedience.**" (*Hebrews 5-6, Cf. Deuteronomy 4:29-31*)

In the Orthodox spiritual tradition, obedience is a basic virtue: obedience to the Lord, to the Gospel, to the Church (*Matthew 18:17*), to the leaders of the Church (*Hebrews 13:7*), to one's parents and elders, to "**every ordinance of man**" (*I Peter 2:13, Romans 13:1*), "**to one another out of reverence for Christ.**" (*Ephesians 6:21*) There is no spiritual life without obedience, no freedom or liberation from sinful passions and lusts. To submit to God's discipline in all of its human forms, is the only way to obtain "**the glorious liberty of the children of God.**" (*Romans 8:21*) God disciplines us as His children out of His great love for us. "**He disciplines us for our good, that we might share His holiness.**" (*Cf. Hebrews 12:3-11*) Our obedience to God's commandments and discipline is the exclusive sign of our love for Him and His Son.

He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (...) If a man loves me, he will keep my

word, and my Father will love him, and we will come and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me. (John 14:21-24)

Patience [\(Top\)](#)

To be obedient in all things to God requires the virtue of patience. Saint Paul lists this virtue as one-of the "**fruits of the Spirit.**" (*Galatians 5:22*) Christ Himself in His humble obedience to God was exceedingly patient.

To be patient literally means to suffer and endure. It means to wait on the Lord through all tribulations and trials with courage and hope. It means to put up with ones self and others, growing gradually in the grace of God through the daily effort to keep His commandments and to accomplish His will. Only those who are patient, according to Christ, bring forth fruit from the seeds of God's Word that are sown in their hearts.

And as for that in the good soil, they are these who, hearing the Word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bring forth fruit with patience. (Luke 8:15)

In times of persecution, when Christians are delivered up to answer for Christ, being "**hated by all for my name's sake,**" the Lord counsels His followers: "**in patience, possess ye your souls,**" which means, "**through your endurance you will gain your lives.**" (*Luke 21:19*)

Be patient, therefore, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. Behold, the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient- over it until it receives the early and late rain. You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not grumble ... against one another, that you may not be condemned; behold the Judge is standing at the doors. As an example of suffering and patience ... take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. Behold, we call those happy who were steadfast. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful. (James 5:7-11)

Too often people embarking on the spiritual life forget that patience is a virtue, and that, because of man's freedom, the effort to cleanse one's life from sin is tiresome and long. Everything is expected at once, with little striving and small effort.

Too often, also, people who wish to be patient forget that the virtue is a grace of God and a fruit of the Spirit. They think that they can attain patience with themselves and with others by will power alone; by rationalizations and human considerations. Such people never find peace for their souls.

The virtue of patience is found in the steadfast endurance given by God. It is the power to "stay on the cross" no matter what, doing only the will of the Lord. Patience is united with faith, hope, love, humility and obedience, which alone brings the strength to go on. It must be renewed daily through fasting, prayer and communion

with God in the Church. It is found when one trains oneself to remember God, to abide in Christ and to see all things in the light of the Kingdom of God. If one wishes to be patient, one must be united with Christ and live by the power of the Spirit. According to the spiritual teachers, there is no other way.

No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and He will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. (1 Corinthians 10:13)

Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain you; He will never permit the righteous to be moved. (Psalm 55:22; cf. 1 Peter 5:7)

Courage [\(Top\)](#)

The virtue of courage and strength must accompany patience. Only the one who has courage can truly be patient in all things. To be courageous means simply not to be afraid. Many times in the Gospels, Christ speaks of this virtue and commands it to His disciples. In so doing, He follows the Old Testament example.

The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; yea, wait for the Lord! (Psalm 27:1,14; Psalm 31:24)

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear; fear Him who, after He has killed, has the power to cast into hell, yes, I tell you, fear Him! (Luke 12:32,4-5)

In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33)

The apostles were utterly courageous, and counseled all men to follow their example.

Be vigilant, stand firm in your faith, be courageous, be strong. (1 Corinthians 16:13)

Be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you will be able to stand ... (Ephesians 6:10)

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus...Take your share of sufferings as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 2:1-3; Cf Hebrews 11:32-38)

The virtue of courage is expressed not only in times of persecution and suffering, but also in the face of ridicule and disdain. It is expressed as well simply, in the, smallest,

most common things of everyday life. In Christ's parable of the talents, the man with little lost even the little that he had and was cast into out darkness because he failed to use his small gift through lack of courage: "**and I was afraid and hid your talent in the ground.**" (*Matthew 25:25-30*) The person with courage faces all things with strength and lives every day, in every little thing, with the power of Christ. To be "faithful in little" is a sign of great courage. The saints were eminently courageous in their lives and considered this virtue to be central in the spiritual life.

Courage, according to Saint Gregory of Sinai, is the first of the "four original virtues," one of the "four parent virtues which contain and constitute all others. (Saint Gregory of Sinai, 14th c., *Instructions to Hesychasts*)

*If you wish to make a right beginning in your spiritual activity, first prepare yourself for the temptations that will befall you. For the devil has the habit of visiting with terrible temptations those whom he sees starting a righteous life with ardent faith. (...) Therefore prepare yourself to meet courageously the temptations which will surely assail you, and only then begin to practice them. (Saint Isaac of Syria, 6th c., *Directions on Spiritual Training*)*

If you pursue virtue ... you are most likely to be attacked much by fear ... such a person should make every effort to overcome cowardice, that daughter of unbelief and that offspring of vain-glory.

Cowardice is a childish disposition in a ... vain-glorious soul . . . a failing away from faith that comes through expecting the unexpected ... a rehearsing of danger beforehand in fear, a loss of conviction.

A proud soul is a slave of cowardice; it vainly trusts in itself and fears any shadow and sound of creatures.

... all cowardly people are vainglorious ... and often have mental breakdowns...

He who has become the Lord's servant fears the Master alone, but he who does not yet fear Him is often afraid of his own shadow.

*He who has conquered cowardice has clearly dedicated his life and soul to God. (Saint John Climacus, 7th c., *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, Step 21)*

Faithfulness [\(Top\)](#)

According to the scriptures, one of the main characteristics of God is His absolute faithfulness. This virtue in man is also considered to be one of the "**fruits of the Holy Spirit.**" (*Galatians 5:22*)

To be faithful means to be absolutely true to one's word, to be totally loyal in one's devotion, to be completely steadfast and unswerving in one's own calling and vocation. It also means to remain in humble service, in truth and in love, no matter what the conditions or consequences. To be faithful means to be courageous and to be

and to do that which one must be and do by God's will, regardless of any rejection by others and in spite of any lack of recognition or appreciation. God Himself is perfectly faithful. He has made promises and declared covenants, keeping His word no matter what man does. When men are adulterous and faithless, God remains faithful (Cf. Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16); for "**the Lord has sworn and will not change His mind.**" (*Psalms 110:4, Hebrews 7:21*)

... if we deny Him, He will deny us; if we are faithless, He remains faithful for He cannot deny Himself. (2 Timothy 2:12-13)

Christ is faithful to His Father and to His creatures until the end. He does not swerve from His mission but accomplishes all that God the Father has given Him to do. (*Cf. John 17:4*) According to the book of Revelation, the name of Jesus, the Word of God, is "**Faithful and True**"; He is called "**the faithful witness**" by Saint John. (*Revelation 19:11, 1:5*)

The spiritual person is the one who is faithful to his calling, fulfilling every good resolution, and bearing fruit patiently with the gifts and talents given by God. The spiritual person is faithful in every little thing - every thought, every word, every deed - "**according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him**" (*Romans 12:3*), "**according to the measure of Christ's gift**" which is "given to each." (*Ephesians 4:7*) Such faithfulness is the main teaching in Christ's parable of the talents. The one who faithfully and without fear develops and grows with that which the Lord has provided is the one who hears the voice of the Master.

Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a little - faithful in a very little (Luke 19-27); I will set you over much, enter into the joy of your master. (Matthew 25.-21)

The main enemies of faithfulness to God and man are pride, covetousness, cowardice, envy and the refusal to serve humbly where one is, with the conditions and gifts which God has provided. Faithlessness is born when one "**thinks of himself more highly than he ought to think**" (*Romans 12:3*), fears that he cannot do with what God has given, covets his neighbors' talents and gifts, and moves from place to place seeking to be satisfied and filled by the things of this world.

Faithfulness is characterized by stability of body and soul; the utter refusal to move or be moved for any unworthy reason; the complete dedication to what God gives one to do, with the faith, grace and strength that God gives to do it. As it is written in the sayings of the fathers of the desert: "As a tree cannot bear fruit if it is often transplanted, no more can a monk (or any person) that is often changing his mind and moving from place to place." The only way to receive the "**crown of life**" is to be "**faithful until death**" in the place where God has put us. (*Revelation 2:10*) The only way to find joy, wisdom and peace is to be faithful to one's own uniqueness, knowing that each person has his own specific life and vocation from God which no one else has; his own specific mission which no one else can perform.

The spiritual person develops his own life in faithfulness, without envy or fear, and so accomplishes and becomes that which God has willed for him before the dawn of creation.

Self-Control [\(Top\)](#)

Self-control is also listed by the Apostle Paul as a "**fruit of the Spirit.**" (*Galatians 5:22*) This virtue is one which is not often easily attained because people forget that, like patience, it is a grace of God and they must seek it from the Lord. Instead they think that it can come from human effort and will power alone.

Self-control is one of the main characteristics of God and is one of the main gifts to man as created in God's image. According to the saints, self-control is one of the main elements of the divine image in man, coextensive with the gift of freedom which is often explained as the essential and basic element of man's likeness to his Creator. When one is perfectly free by the grace of God - "**where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom**" (*2 Corinthians 3:17*) - there is also perfect control over oneself.

Man loses his self-control when he sells himself to sin and becomes a slave to the corruption of his fleshly passions. Such a man has been characterized well in the second letter of Saint Peter.

*... those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority . . . bold and willful ... irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant . . . They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their dissipation ... They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin ... They have hearts trained in greed . . . They have gone astray ... These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm . . . For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved. (*2 Peter 10-19*)*

The man without self-control is enslaved. He is the captive of sin, the willing instrument of carnal passions, the victim of all foolishness and evil. He is bound in his mind and heart by "**the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.**" (*1 John 1-17*) He is a "**child of the devil**" (*John 8:44, Acts 13:10, 1 John 3:10*) and possesses a "**carnal mind.**" (*Romans 8:7*)

*...following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience. Among these we also once lived in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of the body ... (*Ephesians 2.3-4, Romans 1:18-32*)*

Self-control, according to the spiritual tradition of the Church, is the spiritual mastery over the lusts of the mind and the flesh. It is often called "passionlessness" by the spiritual masters. Passionlessness (apatheia) does not mean the destruction of the natural drives and desires of the body and soul, such as the need for sleep, food and drink; or the emotions such as spiritual desire, zeal, excitement, joy, awe, sorrow or fear. It means rather the control of the feelings that are normal, natural and healthy, and the mortification of the feelings that are wicked and evil.

Evil is to be seen, not in the nature of creatures, but in their wrong and irrational movements.

Passionlessness is a peaceful state of the soul in which it is not readily moved to evil.

In the soul are its spiritual powers. In the body are its senses and members. Around the person are food, possessions, money, etc. A right or wrong use of things, and the resulting effects show us as being either virtuous or sinful.

The scriptures ... do not forbid eating or bearing children or having money and spending it rightly, but they forbid gluttony, fornication, and so on.

They do not even forbid us to think about such things...but only forbid us to think of them with passion and lust.

When the mind is not the master, the senses hold sway, and as a rule the senses are mixed with the power of sin which, through pleasure, leads the soul to pity the flesh...As a result, it undertakes, as if it were natural to do so, a passionate and lustful and pleasure-loving care of the flesh and leads man away from the truly natural life, urging him to be for himself the instigator of evil...

Evil for a rational soul is to forget its natural good, thanks to a passionate attitude to the flesh and the world. When the mind becomes the master, it abolishes such an attitude...rightly interpreting the origin and nature of the world and the flesh...

As the mind, keeping passion in its power, makes the senses the instruments of virtue, so the passions, captivating the mind, move the senses to sin. It is necessary to see how the soul should keep a suitable mode of action by using for virtues what was formerly used for sin.

A soul moves rationally when its desiring power has acquired self-mastery, its excitable power strives after love ... and its mental power abides in God by prayer and spiritual contemplation. (Saint Maximus the Confessor, 7th c.)

Thus it is only communion with God, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, that gives the power of self-control to the rational creature of God.

Kindness [\(Top\)](#)

The spiritual person is kind. He never practices cruelty in any of its forms, but is always gentle in his relations with others. Kindness, according to the Apostle Paul, is also a "**fruit of the Spirit.**" (*Galatians 5:22*)

According to the scriptures, God Himself is kind. For all of His anger and wrath over the sins of men, the Lord is "**kind to the ungrateful and selfish.**" (*Luke 6:35*)

For great is His merciful kindness toward us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. (Psalm 117:2; Cf Psalm 31:21,119:76)

Christians are urged to follow God in His kindness and to do all things gently and with tenderness. Especially when rebuking and correcting others, the spiritual person must be kind.

...the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, forbearing; correcting one's opponents with gentleness ... (2 Timothy 2:24; Cf Galatians 6:1)

Parents especially are urged not to "**provoke their children to anger**" by unkindness and cruelty. (*Ephesians 6:4, Colossians 3:21*)

Very often it happens that people can be kind to strangers and to those with whom they have but a passing and casual relationship, but with persons with whom the relationship is longer and deeper - family, relatives, co-workers, fellow members in the same church community - it is sometimes assumed that they may be unkind, and that they even have a certain right to act carelessly and with harshness. This is a great temptation. Familiarity and everyday contact do not give one the right to act unkindly or to behave crudely. To those closest and nearest, the need for continual gentleness, tenderness and kindness in every action and word is especially necessary. There can be no excuse for insensitivity and harshness, whatever the relationship. Spiritual persons must "**do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**" (*Galatians 6:10*)

... for we are members one of another. Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. (Cf. Psalm 4)...Let no evil talk come out of your mouth, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:26-32)

Kindness does not mean overlooking people's sins; it means forgiving them. Kindness also does not mean "being nice" to everyone, whoever they are and whatever they do. It does not mean "going along" with others in every way. A kind person will correct others, if need be, and his very kindness will be shown by his care and concern for the well-being of his fellow creature "**for whom Christ died.**" (*Romans 14:15*)

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15)

The correction by a kind person is never with contempt or cruelty. It never ridicules, demeans or condemns. It always encourages and edifies with gentleness and understanding.

Gratitude [\(Top\)](#)

The spiritual person is the one who is grateful for everything. He is the one who receives everything with thanksgiving, and who knows that he has nothing except what he has received from God. (Cf. *John 3:27*)

And from His fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16)

In the Old Testament, thanksgiving was central in the life of God's people. The temple liturgy offered sacrifices of thanksgiving and praise, and psalms sang continually of thanksgiving to God.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you His saints, and give thanks to His holy name.

Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving. Let us enter His gates with thanksgiving, and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name!

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High; to declare Thy steadfast love in the morning, and Thy faithfulness by night.

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is gracious, for His mercy endures forever. (The Psalms)

In the New Testament, thanksgiving is the very essence of the Church's life. The word **eucharist** means **thanksgiving**, and the very center of the Church's liturgical worship of God is when, in remembrance of all His saving acts in Christ, the faithful "lift up their hearts" and "give thanks unto the Lord."

The apostolic scriptures and the lives of the saints abound with thanksgiving to God for all things.

Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving ... always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father. (Ephesians 5:4,20)

Rejoice always, pray constantly, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. (I Thessalonians 5:16-18).

Rejoice always in the Lord; again I say, Rejoice! (...) Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)

The spiritual person has thanksgiving and gratitude in all circumstances, in everything and for everything. This thanksgiving is rooted in the firm conviction of God's merciful providence and care in all things, in the steadfast faith that "**God works in everything for good with those who love Him**" or, as the passage may also be rendered, "**everything works together for good with those who love God.**" (Romans 8:28)

The spiritual teachers, especially Saint John Chrysostom (4th c), are very strict in this teaching. The spiritual man does not thank God only for what he considers to be good. Rather, he thanks God for everything, even for what appears to be bad, knowing that God's tender care is over all, and that the evil in this world - which is always present and inevitable (Cf. John 17) - can itself be the vehicle for spiritual growth and salvation if rightly understood and overcome by the grace of God.

The opposite of gratitude is bitterness and complaining; it is bemoaning one's lot in life because of pride and covetousness. It is caused by the absence of humble trust in the Lord. It is rooted in an attitude of life which does not allow the person to exclaim with the righteous Job:

Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I shall return. The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.
(Job 1:21)

To thank God in everything and for everything is the result of faith and faithfulness in God. It is the result of absolute trust in the Lord who knows best what we need for our salvation and does all that He can within the evil conditions of the world to bring us to eternal life, to peace and to joy. It is the product of believing, with Isaiah, the Word of the Redeemer who says:

For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love will I have compassion on you.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts...

And you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing...

Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come...
(Isaiah 54:7-8, 55:8-9, 56:1)

A person is grateful to the extent that he trusts in the Lord and has love for God and man.

The Greatest Virtue is Love [\(Top\)](#)

God is Love

According to the Christian faith "**the greatest virtue is love**" (I Corinthians 13:13) Love is the "**fulfilling of the law**" of God. (Romans 13:10) For God Himself is Love.

Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God.

He who does not love does not know God; for God is love.

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent His only Son into the world, so that we might live through Him.

In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His own Spirit.

And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son as the Savior of the World. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

So we know and believe the love God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

In this is love perfected with us, that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as He is so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love.

We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:7-19)

In these inspired words of the beloved Apostle John, one sees that man's communion with God, his entire spiritual life, is expressed in love. Where there is no love, God is absent and there is no spiritual life. Where love is, God is, and all righteousness.

Man's love has its origin in God. God's love always comes first. Men are to love God and one another because God Himself has loved first.

God's love is shown in the creation and salvation of the world in Christ and the Holy Spirit. All things were made by, in and for Jesus Christ, the Word of God, and the "**Son of His love.**" (*Colossians 1:13-17; John 1:1-3; Hebrews 1:2*)

When the world became sinful and dead, "**God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son ... not to condemn the world, but to save the world.**" (*John 3:16, 12:47*)

But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8) But when the goodness and love of God our

Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that we might be made righteous by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)

God's love for man and His world in Christ is given in the Holy Spirit. This love is the first and greatest "**fruit of the Spirit**" (*Galatians 5:22*), "**for God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.**" (*Romans 5:5*)

In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the aim of life as the "acquisition of the Holy Spirit" is expressed most perfectly in love. (cf. Saint Macarius of Egypt, 4th c., *Spiritual Homilies*; Saint Seraphim of Sarov, 19th c., *Conversation with N. Molovilov*) Indeed, the Holy Spirit Himself is identified with God's love by the saints, as witnessed in the writings of Saint Simeon the New Theologian.

O Holy Love, - i.e., the Holy Spirit of God - he who knows you not has never tasted the sweetness of your mercies which only living experience can give us. But he who has known you, or who has been known by you, can never have even the smallest doubt. For you are the fulfillment of the law, you who fills, burns, inflames, embraces my heart with a measureless love. You are the teacher of the prophets, the offspring of the apostles, the strength of the martyrs, the inspiration of the fathers and masters, the perfecting of all the saints. Only you, O Love, prepare even me for the true service of God. (Saint Simeon the New Theologian, 11th c, Homily 53)

Thus God who is Love enters into union with man through the Son of His love by the Spirit of love. To live in this divine love is the spiritual life.

The first definition of love as **agape** is love as the action of perfect goodness for the sake of the other. This is the most basic meaning of love: to do everything possible for the well-being of others. God Himself has this love as the very content of His being and life, for "God is agape." It is with this love that spiritual persons must love first of all.

The second definition of love as **eros** is love for the sake of union with the other. Erotic love is no sin when it is free from sinful passions. It can be the utterly pure desire for communion with the other, including God. All spiritual writers have insisted that such love should exist between God and man as the pattern for all erotic love in the world between husband and wife. (See [Sexuality](#), [Marriage](#), and [Family](#)) Thus the mystical writers and spiritual fathers have used the Old Testament's **Song of Songs** as the poetic image of God's love for man and man's love for God. (*Philo the Jew, Gregory of Nyssa, Bernard of Clairvaux, John of the Cross, Richard Rolle in England, et al.*) Indeed the prophets have used the image of erotic love in explaining the Lord's relation with Israel. (*Isaiah 54; Jeremiah 2-3,31; Ezekiel 16; Hosea*) And Saint Paul uses this image for Christ's love of the Church. (*Ephesians 6*) In the

scriptures, the union of man with the Lord in the Kingdom of God is primarily revealed in the image of eros. (*Matthew 22, Revelation 19-22*)

*...for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted to her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure - for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.
(Revelation 19:7-8)*

"Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:9)

The third type of love is friendship - **phila**. This also should exist between man and God. Man has no greater friend than God, and God Himself wants to be man's friend. According to the scriptures, the very purpose of the coming of Christ was to dispel all enmity between God and man, and to establish the co-working of Creator and creature in the fellowship of friendship.

Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. (Exodus 33:11)

Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants (or slaves), for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you. (John 15: 13-15)

So it is that love as goodness, love as union, love as friendship are all to be found in God and man, between God and man, and between human beings. There is no form of true love which lays outside the realm of the spiritual life.

Love of God [\(Top\)](#)

The first and greatest commandment of God is that His creatures should love Him.

Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. (Mark 12:29-30, Matthew 22:37, Luke 10:27, Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

This is the great and first commandment. (Matthew 22:38)

To love the Lord God with all one's heart means to desire nothing but Him and His holy will. The heart is the center of man according to the scriptures and the teachings of the saints. It is the "deepest part" of man, the foundation and guide of his life. What is in a man's heart, and what his heart desires, is what determines the whole life and activity of the person.

For the inward mind and the heart of man are deep. (Psalm 64:6)

The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart produces evil; for out

of the abundance of his heart, his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45, Matthew 12:34-35)

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these things come from within, and they defile a man. (Mark 7:21-23)

My son, says the Lord, give me your heart, and let your eyes delight in my ways. (Proverbs 23:26)

According to the scriptures and the saints, man's heart grows hard, fat, cold and corrupt when it is stubborn and rebellious against God, depriving itself of His Holy Spirit. Many times and in many different ways this is said in the holy writings. (Deuteronomy 6:7, Isaiah 6:10, Jeremiah 5:23, Zechariah 7:12, Mark 8:17, Matthew 19:8, et al.) But when man sins, the Lord still loves him faithfully and purifies his heart by grace in order that he might be saved for everlasting life.

I will give them a new heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them; and they shall be my people, and I shall be their God.

Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. Cast away from you all transgressions which you have committed against me and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn, and live.

A new heart will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you ... I will put my Spirit within you and you shall live ... (Ezekiel 11:19-20, 18:30-32, 36:26-27, 37:14; cf. Psalm 51:10; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Isaiah 57:15-18; Joel 2:28-29)

God gives a clean heart and a new and right Spirit to man that he might love Him in return with all of his heart. This is given in Christ, in the Holy Spirit, in the Church of the new and everlasting covenant. It is given that man might fulfill the first and greatest commandment of God. (cf. 2 Corinthians 3-5)

To love God with all one's soul means to love Him with every spiritual power and with the whole of one's life. Sometimes the word soul is used as a synonym in the sacred writings for life itself. Man's soul is his life, all of his life. When one loves God with all his soul he loves Him and serves Him in whatever he does, doing all things **"to the glory of God."** (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:31)

To love God with all one's **mind** is to love God's Word, to serve God's trust, to delight in God's righteous commandments.

...I find my delight in Thy commandments which I love, I revere Thy commandments, which I love, and I will meditate on Thy statutes.

Oh, how I love Thy law! It is my meditation all the day. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Thy testimonies are my meditation.

Therefore I love Thy commandments above gold, above fine gold. Therefore I direct my steps by all Thy precepts; I hate every false way ... give me understanding that I may live.

The sum of Thy word is truth, and everyone of Thy righteous ordinances endures forever.

I long for Thy salvation, O Lord, and Thy law is my delight. (Psalm 119)

The love of God with all one's mind is the "love of the Truth," and those who refuse such love are those who will perish. (*cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:9-11*) The mind of man is the guide of his life, directed to truth by the purity of his heart. When one loves God with all his mind, he is not "**conformed to this world**" but proves "**what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**" (*Romans 12:2*) He is the one who follows the advice of Saint Paul, and thinks solely and continually about "**whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise...**" (*Philippians 4:8*) He is the one, in a word, who has "**the mind of Christ.**" (*1 Corinthians 2:16*)

To love God with all one's **strength** is to be spiritually violent in the pursuit of God's will, in order to do it.

...the kingdom of God has suffered violence, and the men of violence take it by force. (Matthew 11:11)

It means to do everything to please Him, with all of one's energy and power, to serve Him faithfully and patiently in all things until death. It is to struggle to resist sin and every evil "to the point of shedding your blood." (*cf. Hebrews 12:4*) It is to have, once again, the attitude and virtue of Saint Paul.

We have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

...but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way through great endurance, in afflictions, in hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, watchings, hunger; by purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors,

and yet are true, as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing and yet possessing everything. (2 Corinthians 4:7-11, 6:4-10)

The one who loves God perfectly is the one who loves Him with the power of Christ and the Holy Spirit, the "**power ... made perfect in weakness.**" (1 Corinthians 12:9)

Love of Neighbour ([Top](#))

After the love of God, the greatest commandment is the love of one's neighbour.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the first and great commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Luke 10:27, Leviticus 19:18)

There is no commandment greater than these. (Mark 12:31)

Love of neighbour necessarily follows from the love of God, and there can be no true love of God without it.

He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light and in him there is no cause of stumbling. He who hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness, and does not know where he is going for the darkness has blinded his eyes.

If any one says "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that he who loves God, should love his brother also. (1 John 2:9-11, 4:20-21)

The love of the neighbour and the brother does not mean the love of only those who love us and are good to us. The neighbour and the brother mean anyone near at hand, everyone made by God, all "**for whom Christ has died.**" (Romans 14:15) The neighbour and the brother include also the **enemies**. This is the point of Christ's parable of the Good Samaritan. (Luke 10:29-37) It is also the Lord's specific teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax-collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the heathen do the same? You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:44-48)

But I say to you that hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you...If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to the ungrateful and selfish. (Luke 6:27-35)

This teaching of Jesus is conveyed also in the writings of the apostles.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with brotherly affection...Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them...No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink...Owe one another nothing, but to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet," and any other commandment are summed up in this sentence, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbour, therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 12:9-10, 14-20; 13:8-10; cf. Matthew 25:31-46)

Genuine love is expressed in deeds, and not in words alone. It is expressed through what one actually does in one's life. It is manifested in concern for others through kindly speech and generosity with one's earthly possessions given by God. It is revealed in one's works of faith in keeping all of God's commandments.

Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that Christ laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and in truth. (I John 3:14-18; cf. James 2:8-17) The love of neighbour "as oneself" is sometimes misunderstood. One should, of course, love oneself in the sense that one is faithful to God and grateful for his life. And certainly one should love oneself in the sense that he sees himself as uniquely important in the eyes of God and the object of God's own unfailing love and mercy. One should not hate oneself in the sense that he despises the life given to him by God, rejecting his own talents and gifts because he is envious of others. Neither should

one hate oneself for being a sinner, since, as the masters teach, such a self-hate is only the subtle form of a more grandiose pride which vaunts a person to stature of judgment greater than that of God Himself who is merciful, loving and forgiving, (cf. Father Alexander Elchaninoff, 20th c. *Diary of a Russian Priest*; Father John of

Kronstadt, 20th c. My Life in Christ)

One should certainly "hate himself," however, in the sense that he despises and crucifies his "old self" corrupted by sin in order to "put off the old nature with its evil practices" and to "**put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator.**" (*Romans 6:6, Colossians 3:10*)

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20; cf also 5:24, 6:14)

This is also what Christ undoubtedly meant when He spoke those most violent and terrifying words in the Gospel.

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

This is the extreme and terrifying warning against all passionate attachments stronger and more powerful than one's passionate attachment to Christ alone. And the greatest passion of all which keeps one from the love of God and the love of one's neighbour is the sinful passion for oneself. Sinful self-love, says Saint Maximus the Confessor, is the "mother of all evils," and the "original sin" of man's heart.

One must "hate oneself" in this sense, even as he must hate his family and friends. He must hate them as objects of his sinful self-love, that he might love them, and himself most truly in Christ.

The New Commandment ([Top](#))

The commandments to love God and neighbor are found in the law of Moses. They are not commandments for God's people. They are the commandments "**written on men's hearts**" and given "**by nature**" itself. (*Romans 2:14-15*) They are the commandments given by God in His Words to man "**from the beginning.**" (*I John 2:7*)

In the new covenant Church of Christ, however, there is a "**new commandment.**" (*I John 2:8*) It is the "**new commandment**" given by Jesus Himself to those who believe in Him.

A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34)

The new element in this "**new commandment**" is not the teaching of love, for this was written in the law. The new element is that believers in Christ must love as Christ Himself loves. The new commandment is to love "**as I have loved you.**"

Christian love must be the perfect love of Christ Himself which is wholly divine.

Christian love must be the totally self-emptying love of the Lord Himself. It must be the divine love of God the Father poured into men's hearts by the very Spirit of God. It must be the love that is absolutely faithful, perfect, eternal and divine.

Of all the men who ever lived on this earth, or who ever will live, only one has fully fulfilled the two great commandments of God; only one has lived absolutely and perfectly according to God's laws; only one has loved the Father with all of His heart, mind, soul, and strength, and His neighbor as Himself. This is Jesus Christ, the child of Mary according to the flesh.

There is no one righteous before God's law but Jesus. Only He has lived according to the law and by the teachings of the prophets. He alone is the one who has "**fulfilled the law and the prophets.**" (cf *Matthew 5:17, 7:12*) He alone, of all men, has loved with perfect, sinless, dispassionate love.

He committed no sin; no guile was found on His lips. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten; but He trusted to Him who judges justly. He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:22-24; cf Isaiah 53)

Having no sin, Jesus took our sins upon Himself and became sin "for us men and for our salvation." (*Nicene Creed*) In this the perfect love of God was perfected in a human being, that all humans might share in the love and glory of God. As all of the holy fathers have said, "He became what we are, that we might become what He is... God became man that man might become god."

For our sake God made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... that you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the nature of God (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Since...the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage.

Therefore He had to be made like His brethren in every respect, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. For because He Himself suffered and was tempted, He is able to help those who are tempted.

For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize (i.e., co-suffer) with our weaknesses, but One who in every respect has been tempted as we, yet without sinning. (Hebrews 2:14-18,4:15-16)

God has given us His love in Jesus. When a person is "in Christ" he can love with the love of God. This is the "new commandment," that men filled with the Holy Spirit should love with the love of God Himself.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Saint Paul describes the perfect love which is Christ's gift of God to men in the Holy Spirit. He describes what Christian love is: the chief gift of the Spirit of God, who is love.

Through the love of Christ, men are called to bear, believe, hope and suffer all things. This is what Christ has done. This is what love does. The one who does this has fulfilled the "new commandment" of Jesus and abides in the love of God. The one who does this abides in God Himself, and already possesses eternal life as a member of His Kingdom.

The Gift of Love [\(Top\)](#)

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for the prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love. (*I Corinthians 13:1-13*)

Prayer, Fasting and Alms-Giving [\(Top\)](#)

Prayer

All of the virtues and powers of God are attained primarily by prayer. Without prayer, there is no spiritual life. As the Russian bishop, Theophan the Recluse, has said, "If you are not successful in your prayer, you will not be successful in anything, for prayer is the root of everything." (*Theophan the Recluse, 19th c., The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*)

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:5-6)

Prayer must be in secret. This is the first rule given by Christ. The person who prays must do so in such a way that he would not be seen by men to be praying.

In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the words of Christ "go into your room" have been interpreted in two ways. First of all, they have been understood to be a literal commandment. The praying person must close himself off physically during times of prayer in order to pray secretly and to avoid being seen.

Secondly, these words of Christ have been understood to mean that the praying person must enter within himself, praying secretly in his mind and heart at all times, without displaying his interior prayer to others. Thus the "room" which one must "go into" is the "room of the soul."

The room of the soul is the body; our doors are the five bodily senses. The soul enters its room when the mind does not wander here and there, roaming among the things and affairs of the world, but stays within, in our heart. Our senses become closed and remain closed when we do not let them be passionately attached to external sensory things and in this way our mind remains free from every worldly attachment, and by secret mental prayer unites with God its Father.

God who sees all secret things sees mental prayer and rewards it openly with great gifts. For that prayer is true and perfect which fills the soul with divine grace and spiritual gifts. (St. Gregory Palamas, 14th c., How All Christians Must Pray Without Ceasing)

Thus, in the spiritual tradition of the Christian teachers of prayer, the unification of the mind and the heart within the soul is seen to be the fulfillment of the basic condition of prayer as commanded by Christ. (cf. *The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*)

And in praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the heathen do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matthew 6:7-8)

God knows the needs of His people. Man prays in order to unite his mind and heart with God. He prays in order that God's will would be done in his life. He prays so that whatever he needs from God would be given. He prays so that he would consciously and with full awareness express the fact that all that he is, has and does is dependent on God. It is man who needs to pray. It is not God who needs man's prayers.

True Christian prayer must be brief. It must be simple and regular. It must not be many-worded. Indeed it need not have words at all. It may be the totally silent inner attitude of the soul before God, the fulfillment of the words of the psalmist:

Commune with your hearts...and be silent. Be still, and know that I am God. (Psalm 4:4, 46:10)

The teaching about brevity and silence in prayer is found in all of the spiritual teachers. St. Dimitry of Rostov sums up this teaching when he says that the publican prayed only "God be merciful to me a sinner" and was justified; the repentant thief prayed only "Remember me..." and received paradise; and the prodigal son and the tax-collector, Zacchaeus, said nothing at all, and received the mercy of the Father and the forgiveness of Christ. (*Luke 15:20, 18:13, 19:5, 22:42; cf. St. Dimitry of Rostov, 17th c., The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*)

Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks, finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. (...) If you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!

Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it. (John 14:13-14)

Truly, truly I say to you, if you ask anything of the Father, He will give it to you in my name. Until now you have asked nothing in my name; ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full. (John 16:23-24)

Whatever one asks in the name of Jesus will be given. This does not mean that man can ask God for anything at all. He cannot ask for what is not needed, or for what is evil. He can ask, however, and must ask for "good gifts," for whatever can be asked in the name of Christ, for whatever is holy and sinless and good. If one asks for good things in faith, he will certainly receive them if God thinks that he should have them for his life and salvation. This is the promise of the Lord Himself.

If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:7)

And whatever you ask in prayer, if you have faith, you will receive. (Matthew 21:22, cf Luke 18:1-8)

Every prayer directed to God in faith is answered. This does not mean that what is asked is always given, for God knows better than the person who prays what is good for him. For this reason the spiritual teachers warn man against being too long and insistent in his concrete demands of the Lord. God knows best what is needed, and in order to prove this to His servants, He may at times yield to their insistent demands and give what they want, but should not have, in order to show them quite clearly that they should have trusted in His wisdom. Thus it is always best to be silent and brief in prayer, and not too specifically demanding. It is always best to pray: "Give what is needed, O Lord. Thy will be done."

How many times have I prayed for what seemed a good thing for me, and not leaving it to God to do, as He knows best, what is useful for me. But having obtained what I begged for, I found myself in distress

*because I had not asked for it to be, rather, according to God's will...
(St. Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts on Prayer)*

The Lord's Prayer [\(Top\)](#)

When teaching men to pray, Christ said,

Pray then like this: Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:9-13, cf Luke 11:2-4)

This is the usual translation of the prayer used in the Orthodox Church. It begins with a petition to God as "**our Father**." There was no such prayer before this teaching of Christ. The Old Testament people did not address God as "**Abba: Father**." (*Romans 8:15, Galatians 4:6*) This name of "Father" for God is given by Christ, the divine Son of God. Men can dare, "with boldness and without condemnation" to call upon the "heavenly God" with the name of "Father" only when they are made worthy to do so by Christ. (*cf. Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*) In the early church the prayer "Our Father" was taught only to the baptized members of the church.

The statement that the Father is "**in heaven**," or literally "**in the heavens**," means that He is everywhere and over all things. The heavens are over all and encompass all. Wherever man goes on the earth or in the air, or even in space, the heavens are around him and over him. To say that the Father is "in the heavens" means that He is not tied down or limited to any location whatsoever - as were the gods of the heathens. The heavenly God is the "**God of gods**" (*Deuteronomy 10:17, 2 Chronicles 2:5*), the "**Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all**," (*Ephesians 4:5*) the one in whom "**we live and move and have our being**," (*Acts 17:28*) To say that God is "in heaven" is not to place Him somewhere; it is rather to say that He transcends all things and yet is present to all.

"**Hallowed be Thy name**" means that God's name is holy and should be treated with respect and devotion. In the old covenant it was the custom of the Jews never to say the sacred name of God: **Yahweh**, the I AM. (*cf. Exodus 3:13-15*) This was to guard against defilement of the divine name, and to safeguard against transgressing the commandment: "**You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain**." (*Exodus 20:7*)

In the New Testament God gives Jesus the "**name which is above every name**" (*Philippians 2:9*) and in making the name of the Father holy, Christians do so in the name of His Son.

"**Thy Kingdom come**" in the Lord's Prayer is first of all the prayer for the end of the ages. Christians want the world to end so that God's Kingdom would fill all creation with divine glory and life. "**Come Lord Jesus**;

Marantha!" is the prayer of the faithful, the last prayer of the Scriptures. (*Revelation 22:20, cf. I Corinthians 16:22*) It is the calling for the final appearance of the Lord.

In the spiritual tradition of the Church, the prayer "Thy Kingdom come" has also been understood as an invocation of the Holy Spirit to dwell in God's people. In his commentary on the Lord's Prayer, St. Gregory of Nyssa says that there was another reading for this petition which said "Thy Holy Spirit come upon us and cleanse us." Thus he says, following the scriptures, that the presence of the Holy Spirit in man is the presence of Christ and the Kingdom of God.

For the Kingdom of God is...righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Romans 14:17)

...it is God who establishes us with you in Christ...He has put His seal upon us and given us His Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (2 Corinthians 1:22)

In Him...you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit which is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it to the praise of His glory.

...do not grieve the Holy Spirit in whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Ephesians 1:13-14, 4:30)

The seal of the Holy Spirit on men's hearts is the pledge and guarantee of the Kingdom of God still to come in all power and glory. In the prayer "Thy Kingdom come," believers in Jesus ask that the Kingdom of God **"not coming in external signs of observation"** for the faithless to behold, might dwell powerfully and secretly within the faithful. (*cf. Luke 17:20-21*)

"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" is the center of the Lord's Prayer, the central desire of Christians. The whole purpose of prayer, the very purpose of man's life, is to do the will of God. This is what Jesus prayed and did. (*cf. Matthew 26:42*) And this is what His followers must pray and do. There is but one purpose of prayer, say the spiritual teachers, to keep God's commandments so as not to sin, thus leading to deification and divine sonship with Christ.

The only thing that God demands of us mortals is that we do not sin. But this...is merely keeping inviolate the image and rank we possess by nature. Clothed thus in the radiant garment of the Spirit, we abide in God and He in us; through grace we become gods and sons of God and are illumined by the light of His knowledge... (St. Simeon the New Theologian, 10th c., Practical and Theological Precepts)

To pray "Thy will be done" according to the spiritual teachers, is a daring and dangerous act. This is so, first of all, because when one makes this prayer, he must be ready, like Christ, to follow where it leads. God will answer this prayer, and make known His will. The person who prays must be ready to obey, whatever the consequences. When asked why many Christians are frustrated and irritated, grouchy and mean, and sometimes even somewhat "unbalanced," one spiritual teacher responded that the reason is clear. They pray "Thy will be done," and continue daily to do so, while at the same time they resist God's will in their lives and so are always

ill at ease. Then they begin to justify their attitudes and actions, to explain and to rationalize their behavior, before their own consciences and others. A person in such a state can never be at peace, for "**it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.**" (*Hebrews 10:31*)

The second reason why it is said that the prayer "Thy will be done" - and prayer generally - is daring and dangerous is because the devil ferociously attacks the person who prays. Indeed one of the greatest proofs of demonic temptation, and the reality and power of the devil, is to be fervent in prayer. For the devil wants nothing so much as for man to fail to accomplish the will of God which is the purpose of all prayer.

If you strive after prayer, prepare yourself for diabolical suggestions and bear patiently their on-slaughts; for they will attack you like wild beasts...Try as much as possible to be humble and courageous...He who endures will be granted great joy. (St. Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts on Prayer)

The prayer for our "**daily bread**" is normally understood to signify generally all of our bodily needs and whatever we require to sustain our lives in this world. In the spiritual tradition however, this petition, because it literally says our "essential" or "super-essential" bread, is often understood in the spiritual sense to mean the nourishment of our souls by the Word of God, Jesus Christ who is the "**Bread of Life;**" the "**Bread of God which has come down from heaven and given life to the world**" (*John 6:33-36*); the bread which "**a man may eat of it and not die,**" but "**live forever.**" (*John 6:50-51*) Thus the prayer for "**daily bread**" becomes the petition for daily spiritual nourishment through abiding communion with Christ so that one might live perpetually with God.

The prayer "**forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us**" has been especially emphasized by the Lord.

For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. (Matthew 6:14-15)

This is the point of Christ's parable about the unforgiving servant. (*Matthew 18:23-35*) All men need the forgiveness of God and must pray for it. All men are indebted to God for everything, and fail to offer the thanksgiving and praise and righteousness that are due. The only way that God will overlook and forgive the sins and debts of His servants is if they themselves forgive their brothers, not merely in words and formal gestures, but genuinely and truly "**from their hearts.**" (*cf. Matthew 18:35*) In the prayer taught by Christ this is clearly acknowledged.

"**Lead us not into temptation**" should not be understood as if God puts His people to the test or brings them in to the occasion of evil.

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God;" for God cannot be tempted with evil, and He Himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then

desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15)

"Lead us not into temptation" means that we ask God not to allow us to be found in situations in which we will be overcome by sin. It is a prayer that we be kept from those people and places where wickedness reigns and where we in our weakness will certainly succumb. It is a prayer that we will be liberated from the deceit and vanity of our minds and hearts, from the carnal lusts that dwell in our bodies. It is a prayer that God Himself would be man's shelter and refuge. (*cf. Psalm 91*)

"**Deliver us from evil**" says literally "rescue us from the evil one," that is, the devil. The meaning is clear. There are but two ways for man: God and life or the devil and death. Deliverance from the devil means salvation and redemption from every falsehood, foolishness, deceit, wickedness and iniquity that leads to destruction and death.

Thus, as Archbishop Anthony of Surozh has explained, the Lord's Prayer shows the whole meaning of the life of man. (*cf. Archbishop Anthony Bloom, Living Prayer*)
Delivered from evil, man is saved from temptation, in so doing he is merciful to all and receives the forgiveness of his own sins. Being forgiven his sins, by his mercy to others, he has all that he needs for life - his "daily bread"; and being nourished by God, he accomplishes His will. Having accomplished His will, God's Kingdom is present, His name is sanctified and He becomes the Father of the one who shows himself to be in truth the child of God who can say "Our Father."

Intercessory Prayer ([Top](#))

In praying to His Father, Jesus prayed for His people, (*cf. John 17*) He Himself is the only competent intercessor for men before God.

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus who gave Himself as a ransom for all. (I Timothy 2-3)

Jesus in His resurrected glory, prays eternally to His Father on behalf of His creatures.

...He holds His priesthood permanently because He continues forever. Consequently He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

For Christ has entered, not a sanctuary made with hands . . . but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Hebrews 7:24-25; 9:24)

In and through Christ, Christians become competent to intercede before God. In the name of Jesus, Christians are commanded and empowered to pray for each other and for all creation: "on behalf of all and for all." (*Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*)

First of all I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings and all who are in high

positions,...This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:1-4)

Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man has great power in its effects. Elijah was a man of like natures with ourselves and he prayed fervently that it might not rain and...it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth its fruit. (James 5:16-18)

Intercessory prayers can be made for every "good gift" from God for the sake of the salvation of others. Such prayers can include petitions for every kind of blessing, both for the body and the soul. They can be made for the inspiration and instruction of men, as well as for their healing and salvation. Whatever one can ask for oneself, one can ask for all men. Whatever one does ask for oneself should be entreated for all. "It is right to pray not only for one's own purification, but for the purification of every man..." (*St. Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts on Prayer*)

To understand intercessory prayer, one must remember the eternal providence of God. One must grasp the fact that God knows all things eternally and takes into consideration each act of man in His overall plan. With this perspective one can then see that even before the creation of the world, God has heard, or rather, more accurately, eternally hears, the cries of His people. He considers man's prayers in all that He does in His dealings with men. Thus it is the case that God does not wait to see what we do or how we will pray. He considers our actions and prayers from the perspective of eternity. And in the light of our desires and deeds He sees that "**all things work together for good for those who love God.**" (*Romans 8:28*)

If we understand this we can see how our prayers are considered by God, for ourselves and for others. We can understand as well how we can pray even for those who are dead, whose lives on this earth are over and done. For the Lord does not hear our prayers "after" something is finished, because for God there is no "after" at all. God knows what we ask before we even ask it, for He knows all of man's life in one divine act of all-embracing vision and knowledge. Thus all of our prayers, even for those who are dead, are heard and considered by God before we even make them. If we fail to pray, this too is known to God, and it takes its effect in God's plan of salvation. Therefore we have to "pray for one another" and our prayer will have "great power in its effects" through the eternal and providential action of God.

Unceasing Prayer [\(Top\)](#)

In his letter to the Romans St. Paul instructs Christians to "**be constant in prayer.**" (*Romans 12:12*) In his first letter to the Thessalonians he says simply, "**pray without ceasing.**" (*I Thessalonians 5:17*)

These two commands of the apostle have been interpreted in the Orthodox tradition in two different ways. The first way, mentioned by St. John Chrysostom and St. Dimitry of Rostov, is that Christians should have regular times for prayer which they never skip - "**in the evening and the morning and at noon day**" (*Psalms 55:17*) - and then in between they should always remember God and do all things to His glory (*cf. I*

Corinthians 10:31), offering up supplications and petitions as the need may arise, praising and thanking when the occasion requires it. Such is the normal way that all Christians must live.

Prepare for your set times of prayer by unceasing prayer in your soul, and you will soon make progress. (St. John of the Ladder, Step 28)

The set times of prayer are very important, and should not be put aside for any reason, even when one prays continuously in his heart. This is the teaching and practice of the saints. Each person desiring to live the spiritual life should have his own rule of prayer. It should be brief and regular, such that it could be kept in all conditions and circumstances. In this set rule of prayer, the prayers of the Church should be used, the Lord's Prayer and those from the prayer book. This gives discipline in prayer and provides instruction and inspiration in prayer which is perfectly trustworthy and sound, having demonstrated its power in the lives of the saints. A person who does not follow a set rule of prayer using the traditional prayers of the Church runs the great risk of impoverishing his prayer and reducing its dimensions and scope to the limited perspective of his own individual desires and needs.

When praying with a set rule of prayer, the spiritual teachers tell us to put our whole mind and heart into the meaning of the words, not merely "saying prayers," which is not prayer at all, but genuinely praying through personal attention and fervor. They tell us to allow our mind not to wander from the words of the prayer, but to use the given words as the basis of our own personal devotion, even allowing our mind to go beyond the given words to our own words, or to no words in the prayer of silence, if the Lord leads us this way. They also tell beginners - and St. Dimitry of Rostov says that we are all beginners, no matter how advanced - never to go back and repeat prayers done poorly. They tell us rather to put ourselves at the mercy of God, and to try to do better the next time. This method reduces the possibility of thinking that God hears our prayers according to the perfection of our performance and not according to the greatness of His mercy, and safeguards against both pride and despair. It gives humility and hope, and keeps us always forging ahead. (*cf. Luke 9:62, Philipians 3:13-15*)

Thus when one finishes his rule of prayer, however well or poorly he has done it, he should say Amen, and go about his business of living in Christ, remembering God and doing His will until the next time comes for the rule of prayer to be done. Then he should do it as well as he can, beginning all over again.

The second way of interpreting the teachings about unceasing prayer is that men should actually pray with conscious awareness at every moment of their lives, and even in their unconscious selves while their bodies are sleeping. This understanding of "unceasing prayer" was developed in the monastic tradition, but then spread rapidly throughout the whole membership of the church. It became very popular in recent times, mostly through the appearance of the book by the anonymous Russian peasant called **The Way of the Pilgrim**.

The search for active "unceasing prayer" has its source not only in the instruction of Saint Paul, but also in the literal interpretation of such words of the psalmist:

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continuously be in my mouth. (Psalm 34:1)

And of the Song of Solomon:

I slept, but my heart was awake. (Song 5:2)

The method of "unceasing prayer" is to have a brief prayer verse, usually the Jesus Prayer (*see p. 131ff.*) which is repeated over and over, literally hundreds of times throughout the day and night, until it becomes perpetually implanted in the heart as a "bubbling spring," a continual presence in the soul calling out to the Lord. (*cf. Theophan the Recluse, 19th c., The Art of Prayer*) It is often, but not necessarily, connected with one's breathing, so much so that it is uttered "with every breath." (*St. Gregory the Theologian; St. John Chrysostom*) It begins by being said vocally, silently with the lips, and then it becomes wholly mental. The claim is made that one can continue this "unceasing prayer" even while engaged in the normal activities of life, while reading or writing, and even while sleeping, thus the "body sleeps," but the "heart is awake." Then, whenever one's attention to the affairs of life cease, or when one awakes from one's bed, one finds that the prayer is continuing itself.

The prayer is also known to break through one's consciousness with power in times of temptation or stress, appearing, as it were, of its own accord. (*cf The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*)

We are not commanded to work, keep vigil or fast without ceasing, but we are commanded to pray without ceasing. For...prayer purifies, and strengthens the mind which was created to pray...and to fight the demons for the protection of all the powers of the soul. (Evagrius of Pontus, 4th c.)

He who has entered his room (i.e. his heart) and prays without ceasing has included in this all prayer everywhere. (St. Mark the Ascetic, 4th c., Direction from Discourses)

Let no one think, my brother Christians, that it is the duty only of priests and monks to pray without ceasing, and not of laymen. No, no; it is the duty of all Christians to remain always in prayer.

...bear in mind the method of prayer - how it is possible to pray without ceasing, namely by praying in the mind. And this we can do always if we wish. For when we sit down to work with our hands, when we walk, when we eat, when we drink we can always pray mentally and practice this mental prayer - the true prayer pleasing to God.

Blessed are those who acquire this heavenly habit, for by it they overcome every temptation...

This practice of inner prayer tames the passions...by it the dew of the Holy Spirit is brought down into the heart...

This mental prayer is the light which illumines man's soul and inflames his heart with the fire of love for God. It is the chain linking God with man and man with God. Oh, the incomparable blessing of mental prayer. It allows a man constantly to converse with God.

And what other and greater rewards can you wish than this, when...you are always before the face of God, constantly conversing with Him - conversing with God, without whom no person can ever be blessed, either here or in the life still to come. (St. Gregory Palamas, 14th c., How All Christians In General Must Pray Without Ceasing)

The Jesus Prayer [\(Top\)](#)

The most normal form of unceasing prayer in the Orthodox tradition is the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer is the form of invocation used by those practicing mental prayer, also called the "prayer of the heart." The words of the prayer most usually said are "**Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.**" The choice of this particular verse has a theological and spiritual meaning.

First of all, it is centered on the name of Jesus because this is the name of Him whom "**God has highly exalted,**" the name given to the Lord by God Himself (*Luke 1:31*), the "**name which is above every name.**" (*Philippians 2:9-10, cf Ephesians 1:21*)

...for there is no other name given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)

All prayer for Christians must be performed in the name of Jesus: "**if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.**" (*John 14:13-14*)

The fact that the prayer is addressed to Jesus as Lord and Christ and Son of God is because this is the center of the entire faith revealed by God in the Spirit.

He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

And Jesus answered, "Blessed are you...for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven...and on this rock I will build my Church..." (Matthew 16:16-18)

That Jesus is the Christ, and that the Christ is Lord is the essence of the Christian faith and the foundation of the Christian church. To believe and proclaim this is granted by the Holy Spirit.

...no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:3)

... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:11)

In calling Jesus the Son of God is to acknowledge God as His Father. To do this is, at the same time, to have God as one's own Father, and this too is granted by the indwelling Spirit.

And when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying "Abba! Father!" (Galatians 4:4-6)

When we cry "Abba! Father!" it is the Spirit Himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God ... (Romans 8:15-16)

Thus, to pray "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God" is already to be a child of God, and already to be certain that the Holy Spirit is in you. In this way, the Jesus Prayer brings the Spirit of God into the heart of man.

"**Have mercy on me a sinner**" is the publican's prayer. When uttered with humble conviction it brings divine justification. (*cf. Luke 18:9-14*) Generally speaking, divine mercy is what man needs most of all. It is for this reason that the numberless repetition of the request for the Lord's mercy is found everywhere in the prayers of, the Church.

And finally, all men are sinners. To know this is a fact, and to confess it with faith is to be justified and forgiven by God. (*cf. Romans 3:10-12, Psalm 14:1-3*)

The Jesus Prayer basically is used in three different ways. First as the verse used for the "prayer of the heart" in silence in the **hesychast** method of prayer. Second as the continual mental and unceasing prayer of the faithful outside the **hesychast** tradition. And third as the brief ejaculatory prayer used to ward off temptations. Of course, in the actual life of a person these three uses of the prayer are often interrelated and combined.

In the **hesychast** method of prayer the person sits alone in a bodily position with his head bowed and his eyes directed toward his chest or his stomach. He continually repeats the prayer with each aspiration and breath, placing his "mind in his heart" by concentrated attention. He empties his mind of all rational thoughts and discursive reasoning, and also voids his mind of every picture and image. Then, without thought or imagination, but with all proper attention and concentration he rhythmically repeats the Jesus Prayer in silence - **hesychia** means silence - and through this method of contemplative prayer is united to God by the indwelling of Christ in the Spirit. According to the fathers, such a prayer, when faithfully practiced within the total life of the Church, brings the experience of the uncreated divine light of God and unspeakable joy to the soul. Its purpose is to make man a servant of God.

...the mind when it unites with the heart is filled with unspeakable joy and delight. Then a man sees that the Kingdom of heaven is truly within us.

When you enter the place of the heart...give thanks to God, and

praising His mercy, keep always to this activity, and it will teach you things which you will learn in no other way.

...when your mind becomes established in the heart, it must not remain idle, but it should constantly repeat the prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me!" and never cease.

For this practice, keeping the mind from dreaming, renders it invincible against all suggestions of the devil and every day leads it more and more to love and longing for God. (St. Nicephorus, 14th c., Discourse on Sobriety)

To practice the **hesychast** method of prayer requires always and without exception the guidance of a spiritual guide, one must not use this method unless one is a person of genuine humility and sanity, filled with all wisdom and peace. To use this method without guidance or humble wisdom, is to court spiritual disaster, for the temptations that come with it are many. Indeed, the abuses of the method became so great in recent centuries that its use was greatly curtailed. Bishop Theophan tells that the bodily postures and breathing techniques were virtually forbidden in his time since, instead of gaining the Spirit of God, people succeeded only "in ruining their lungs." (cf. *The Art of Prayer, Igumen Chariton, ed.*)

Such abusive and abortive use of the method - itself something genuine and richly rewarding were already known in fourteenth century Byzantium when St. Gregory Palamas defended the tradition. And evidence exists from as early as the fourth century to show that even then people were using the prayer foolishly and to no avail by reducing it to a "thing in itself" and being captivated by its form without interest in its purpose. Indeed, the idolatrous interest in spiritual technique and in the pleasurable benefits of "spirituality" and "mysticism" are the constant temptations of the spiritual life - and the devil's most potent weapon. Bishop Theophan called such interest "spiritual hedonism"; John of the Cross (16th c. Spain) called it "spiritual gluttony" and "spiritual luxury." Thus, by way of example from various times and places, come the following admonitions.

Those who refuse to work with their hands under the pretext that one should pray without ceasing, in reality do not pray either. Through idleness...they entangle the soul in a labyrinth of thoughts...and make it incapable of prayer. (St. Nilus of Sinai, 5th c., Texts on Prayer)

As long as you pay attention only to bodily posture for prayer and your mind cares only for the external beauty of the tabernacle (i.e. proper forms), know that you have not yet found the place of prayer and its blessed way is still far from you.

Know that in the midst of all spiritual joy and consolation, that it is still more necessary to serve God with devotion and fear. (St. Nilus of Sinai, Texts on Prayer)

It is natural for the mind to reject what is at hand and dream of something else to come ... to build fantasies and imaginings about

achievements before he has attained them. Such a man is in considerable danger of losing what he has and failing into self-delusion and being deprived of good sense. He becomes only a dreamer and not a man of continual prayer (i.e. a hesychast). (St. Gregory of Sinai, 14th c., Texts on Commandments and Dogmas)

If you are truly practicing the continual prayer of silence, hoping to be with God and you see something sensory or spiritual, within or without, be it even the image of Christ, or an angel, or some saint, or if an image of light pervades your mind in no way accept it...always be displeased with such images, and keep your mind clear, without image or form...and you will suffer no harm. It has often happened that such things, even when sent by God as a test before victory, have turned into harm for many...who have then done harm to others equally unwise...leading to pride and self-conceit.

For the fathers say that those who live rightly and are faultless in their behavior with other men...who seek God with obedience, questioning and wise humility...will always be protected from harm by the grace of Christ. (St. Gregory of Sinai, Instructions to Hesychasts)

The use of the Jesus Prayer outside the **hesychast** method for unceasing prayer is to repeat the prayer constantly and continually, whatever one is doing, without the employment of any particular bodily postures or breathing techniques. This is the way taught by St. Gregory Palamas in his short discourse about how unceasing mental prayer is the duty of all Christians. (see p. 130) Anyone can do this, whatever his occupation or position in life. This also is shown in **The Way of the Pilgrim**.

The purpose and results of this method of prayer are those generally of all prayer: that men might be continually united with God by unceasing remembrance of His presence and perpetual invocation of His name, so that one might always serve Him and all men with the virtues of Christ and the fruits of the Spirit.

The third method of using the Jesus Prayer is to have it always ready for moments of temptation. In this way, as St. John Climacus has said, you can "flog your enemies, i.e. the temptations, with the name of Jesus for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or on earth." (*The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 21*) This method works best when one practices the prayer without ceasing, joining "to every breath a sober invocation of Jesus' name." (*Evagrius of Pontus*) When one practices the continual "prayer of the heart," and when the temptations to sin enter the heart, they are met by the prayer and are defeated by grace.

Man cannot live in this world without being tempted. When temptation comes to a person, there are only three possible results. Either the person immediately yields to the temptation and sins, or he tries to ward off the temptation by the power of his will, and is ultimately defeated after great vexation and strife. Or else he fights off the temptation by the power of Christ in his heart which is present only by prayer. This does not mean that he "prays the temptation away." Or that God miraculously and magically descends to deliver him. It means rather that his soul is so filled with the

grace and the power of God that the temptation can have no effect. It is in this sense that the Apostle John has written: "**no one who abides in Christ sins.**" (*1 John 3:6*)

He who sins is of the devil...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God commits sins; for God's nature abides in him, and he cannot sin for he is born of God. By this may be seen who are children of God, and who are children of the devil. (1 John 3:8-10)

One becomes a child of God, born of God in the Church through baptism. One continues as a child of God and does not sin only by continual prayer: the remembrance of God, the abiding in Him, the calling upon His name without ceasing in the soul. The third use of the Jesus Prayer, like the first two, is to accomplish this end: that man might not sin.

Liturgical Prayer [\(Top\)](#)

Liturgical prayer is not simply the prayers of individual Christians joined into one. It is not a corporate "prayer service" of many persons together. It is rather the official prayer of the Church formally assembled; the prayer of Christ in the Church offering His "body" and "bride" to the Father in the Spirit. It is the Church's participation in Christ's perpetual prayer in the presence of God in the Kingdom of heaven. (*cf. Hebrews 7:24-25, 9:24*) The model of liturgical prayer is in the book of **Revelation**, and not in the gospel events of Jerusalem or Galilee.

In the Orthodox Church there is no tradition of corporate prayer which is not liturgical. Some consider this a lack, but most likely it is based on Christ's teaching that the prayer of individuals should be done "**in secret.**" (*Matthew 6:5-6*) This guards against vain repetition and the expression of personal petitions which are meaningless to others. It also protects persons from being subjected to the superficialities and shallowness of those, who instead of praying, merely express the opinions and desires of their own minds and hearts.

When a person participates in the liturgical prayer of the Church, he can only do so effectively to the extent that he prays by himself, at home, and in his own mind and heart. The one who "prays without ceasing" is the one who offers and receives most in liturgical prayer.

When one participates in the liturgical prayer of the Church, he should make every effort to join himself fully with all the members of the body. He should not "say his own prayers" in church, but should pray "with the Church." This does not mean that he forgets his own needs and desires, depersonalizing himself and becoming but one more voice in the crowd. It means rather that he should unite his own person, his own needs and desires, all of his life with those who are present, with the church throughout the world, with the angels and saints, indeed with Christ Himself in the one great "divine" and "heavenly liturgy" of all creation before God.

Practically this means that one who participates in liturgical prayer should put his whole being, his whole mind and heart, into each prayer and petition and liturgical action, making it come alive in himself. If each person does this, then the liturgical exclamations become genuine and true, and the whole assembly as one body will

glorify God with "one mouth, one mind and one heart." (See [Worship](#), *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*)

Meditation [\(Top\)](#)

Meditation differs from prayer, even from silent prayer, in that meditation is thought about God and contemplation of His word and His works.

Meditation normally begins by reading from the holy Scriptures, the Word of God. This is called in the spiritual tradition **lectio divina**. It is the slow and attentive reading of the Bible, or perhaps the writings of the church fathers and saints, not for the purpose of gaining information, but for the purpose of communion with God.

Such meditative reading may be of the sort where the person tries, with the power of his thought and imagination, to enter into the event about which he is reading in order to become its contemporary participant. Or, it can be of the sort where the person merely reads and listens in silence, without imagination or rational thought, in order to let the Word of God enter his mind and heart in order to remain there, to bring forth its fruit at the appointed time.

Psalmody, done either alone or in the churchly assembly, exists for this latter purpose. When reading or chanting the psalms, the person does not try to think about each word and phrase. Rather he cuts off all reasoning, and opens his heart to the Lord, uniting "his mouth with his mind," (*St. Benedict*) and allowing the Word of God to be planted within him to blossom in his soul with the fruits of the Spirit. This also is the case with churchly hymnology. It is sung for the glory of God and the edification and expansion of the soul through the contemplation of the Lord in His words and works of salvation, much more than for any intellectual instruction. This type of meditation is especially advised in times of despondency.

There is also the type of meditation and contemplation done totally in silence, without any words or images or thoughtful activity at all, not even psalmody. The person merely sits in silence, often in the presence of holy icons, and emptying his mind of all thoughts, imaginations and desires, listens to God in silence, the divine "language of the Kingdom of heaven." (*St. Isaac of Syria*) This type of meditation, for a person of unceasing prayer, will be the "prayer of silence," with the "bubbling spring" of the Jesus Prayer as its only foundation and background. In such contemplative prayer and prayerful contemplation, the spirit of man becomes one with the Spirit of God. (*cf. I Corinthians 6:17*)

Prayer in the Spirit [\(Top\)](#)

All Christian prayer must be prayer in the Spirit; and all genuine prayer most certainly is. Men pray to the Father, through Christ the Son and Word of God in the Holy Spirit. This is the case wherever men pray, whatever their method, whether they know it or not. For prayer is not man's lonely cry across empty spaces to a far-off God. Prayer is man's being in God; being in the Holy Spirit, as made in Christ's image, the dwelling place of God.

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? ... God's temple is holy, and that temple you are. (I

*Corinthians 3:16-17, cf. Deuteronomy 30:9-14, Psalms 139:7-14,
Romans 10:5-13)*

Christian prayer is done consciously in the Holy Spirit, with all faith and awareness. It is addressed to and through Christ, to the Father. In the Orthodox Church there is only one prayer among all the prayers of the Church addressed to the Holy Spirit. This is the prayer **O Heavenly King** which begins all prayers and clearly creates the conditions in which all prayer is performed.

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth,

You are everywhere and fill all things,

Treasury of blessings and Giver of Life,

*Come and abide in us, cleanse us from every impurity and save our
souls,*

O Good One.

Even on Pentecost Sunday in the Orthodox Church the three special prayers of the feast are addressed to Christ and the Father.

The prayer to God for the coming of the Spirit is itself a sign that the Spirit is already in man enabling him to call to the Father. This is the mystery of man's nature and existence; that he is only truly man when the Holy Spirit is in him. This is the mystery of God's gracious work in man. It is the mystery of prayer and life itself.

One calls God "Our Father" only in the Spirit. One calls Jesus "Lord" only in the Spirit. One prays to God in any manner or form only in the Spirit. The words of the psalms, the prayers of the Saints, the liturgical worship of the Church, is the "**breathing of God's Spirit**" in man. (*Father John of Kronstadt, My Life in Christ*) For all prayer, like the scripture itself, is by the inspiration of God.

Even when men do not know how to pray or for what they should ask, it is the Holy Spirit who prays in them that they would have what is needed, that God's will would be done.

*Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how
to pray as we ought, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with signs
too deep for words. And He who searches the hearts of men knows
what is the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the
saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)*

Thus the prayer in the Spirit, as well as the prayer for the Spirit, has as its purpose the "acquisition of the Spirit" so that by the "fruits of the Spirit" man would be holy and divine by God's grace. This is the basic mystery of the spiritual life. For as Saint Augustine has said, the person who seeks the Lord has already been found by Him. The very seeking in prayer, when one knows not how to pray, makes a person already the dwelling place of God.

In his first letter to the Corinthians the Apostle Paul speaks of a special kind of prayer in the Spirit. It is the spiritual gift of "speaking in tongues." With this particular gift the person praises God in a language he cannot understand. His "spirit prays" with ecstatic utterances, but his "mind remains unfruitful." According to the apostle, who himself had this gift and says that it should not be forbidden, such prayer in the Spirit is without benefit to man unless it is accompanied with "some revelation or knowledge or prophecy (i.e. the directly inspired Word of God) or teaching." He says that it should not be done in the public gathering of the church unless there be some interpretation and that even then there should be "**only two, or at most three,**" and that those who are "**eager for manifestations of the Spirit should strive to excel in building up the church**" and should "not be children in their thinking...but in thinking be mature." He says that all should seek rather to prophesy, i.e. to speak the Word of God clearly and plainly so that those who observe Christians would declare "that God is really among" them and not consider them mad." He says finally that "all things should be done decently and in order." (*cf. I Corinthians 12-14*)

It is apparent that the gift of praying in the Spirit with tongues was the cause of no small confusion and disorder in the Corinthian Church, and that those having this gift of ecstatic prayer were disturbing and dividing the community by considering themselves more spiritual than others. St. Paul insists that not all have the same gifts, and that tongues are but one of the gifts, the last of those mentioned, to serve as a sign not for those who already believe, but "**for unbelievers.**" (*I Corinthians 14:22*) In general it is clear that the sole purpose of the apostle's extended discussion of the spiritual gifts, and his insistence on giving up "childish ways" in the pursuit of perfection when one becomes mature, was to rebuke the members of the Corinthian Church for their misuse and abuse of the spiritual gift of tongues.

There is no evidence in the spiritual tradition of the church that any of the saints had the gift of praying in tongues or that such kind of prayer was ever a part of the liturgy of the church. The only mention that can be found of it, to our knowledge, was at the baptism of Montanus, a third-century heretic who left the Church to found his own spiritualist sect. If any of the saints or spiritual masters had this gift, they did not write about it or propagate it openly. It was unknown, for example, to Saint John Chrysostom by his own report, (*cf. Commentary on Corinthians*) Since a number of believers have this gift in our time, and since there are persons who seek it, it is critically important that this method of prayer be understood according to the counsels of Saint Paul and in the light of the teaching of the spiritual masters on prayer.

Fasting [\(Top\)](#)

Jesus Himself fasted and taught His disciples to fast.

And when you fast, do not look dismal like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by men, but your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18)

The purpose of fasting is to gain mastery over oneself and to conquer the passions of the flesh. It is to liberate oneself from dependence on the things of this world in order to concentrate on the things of the Kingdom of God. It is to give power to the soul so that it would not yield to temptation and sin. According to St. Seraphim, fasting is an "indispensable means" of gaining the fruit of the Holy Spirit in one's life (cf. Conversation with Motovilov), and Jesus Himself taught that some forms of evil cannot be conquered without it (*Matthew 17:21, Mark 9:29*)

Man does not fast because it pleases God if His servants do not eat, for, as the lenten hymns of the Church remind us, "the devil also never eats." (*Lenten Triodion*) Neither do men fast in order to afflict themselves with suffering and pain, for God has no pleasure in the discomfort of His people. Neither do men fast with the idea that their hunger and thirst can somehow serve as a "reparation" for their sins. Such an understanding is never given in the scriptures or the writings of the saints which claim that there is no "reparation" for man's sin but the crucifixion of Christ. Salvation is a "**free gift of God**" which no "works" of man can accomplish of merit. (cf. *Romans 5:15-17, Ephesians 2:8-9*)

Men fast, therefore, and must fast, only to be delivered from carnal passions so that the free gift of salvation in Christ might produce great fruit in their lives. Men fast so that they might more effectively serve God who loves them and has saved them in Christ and the Spirit. Fasting without effort in virtue is wholly in vain.

Why have we fasted, and Thou seest it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and Thou takest no knowledge of it?

Behold, in the day of your fast, you seek your own pleasure and oppress all your workers. Behold, you fast only to quarrel and fight...Fasting like yours ... will not make your voice to be heard on high.

Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness...to let the oppressed go free...is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them...

Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall protect you. Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; then you shall cry, and He will say: Here I am. (Isaiah 58:3-9)

"Fasting in the body, O brethren, let us also fast from sin." This is the Church's song in the lenten season of fasting. It is also the teaching of the saints.

...in fasting one must not only obey the rule against gluttony in regard to food, but refrain from every sin so that, while fasting, the tongue may also fast, refraining from slander, lies, evil talking, degrading one's brother, anger and every sin committed by the tongue. One should also fast with the eyes, that is, not look at vain things...not look shamefully or fearlessly at anyone. The hands and feet should also be

kept from every evil action.

When one fasts through vanity or thinking that he is achieving something especially virtuous, he fasts foolishly and soon begins to criticize others and to consider himself something great.

A man who fasts wisely...wins purity and comes to humility...and proves himself a skillful builder. (St. Abba Dorotheus, 7th c., Directions on Spiritual Training)

Saint Paul himself fasted, and in his teaching on food insists that men fast and do so in secret, without mutual inspection and judgment.

Brethren, join in imitating me, and mark those who so live as you have an example in us. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you with tears, live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. (Philippians 3:17-19)

All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be enslaved by anything. Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food - and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. (I Corinthians 6:12-13)

Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains, pass judgment on him who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another?

He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God.

Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of him for whom Christ has died ... for the Kingdom of God does not mean food and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, he who thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Do not for the sake of food destroy the work of God...the faith that you have keep between yourself and God...whatever does not proceed from faith (whether eating or abstaining) is sin. (cf Romans 14)

The spiritual fathers, as strictly ascetic as they were, are very clear in their teaching about fasting. They insist with the Lord and the scriptures that men must fast in order to be free from passions and lust. But they insist as well that the most critical thing is to be free from all sin, including the pride, vanity and hypocrisy which comes through foolish and sinful fasting.

...eating beyond the point of being satisfied is the door of madness through which lust enters, for the belly is the queen of passions which man serves as a slave.

But you, firm in this knowledge, choose what is best for you, according to your own powers...for the perfect person, according to Saint Paul ought both "to be full and be hungry...and do all things through Christ who strengthens (Philippians 4:12-13)

Thus a man who strives for salvation...must not allow himself to eat to fullness...but should still eat all kinds of food so that on the one hand he avoid boastful pride and on the other not show disdain for God's creation which is most excellent...Such is the reasoning of those who are wise! (St. Gregory of Sinai, Instruction to Hesychasts)

St. Isaac of Syria says, "Meager food at the table of the pure cleanses the soul of those who partake from all passion...for the work of fasting and vigil is the beginning of every effort against sin and lust...almost all passionate drives decrease through fasting."

For the holy fathers taught us to be killers of passions and not killers of the body. Partake of everything that is permissible with thanksgiving, to the glory of God and to avoid boastful arrogance; but refrain from every excess. (The Monks Callistus and Ignatius, 14th c., Directions to Hesychasts)

If such is the teaching to hesychast monks, it is certainly applicable to all Christians as well. The whole essence of the matter is put simply and clearly in these two short stories from the fathers of the desert.

A certain brother brought fresh loaves of bread and invited his elders. When they had eaten much, the brother, knowing their travail of abstinence, began humbly to beg them to eat more. "For God's sake, eat this day and be filled." And they ate another ten. Behold how these that were true monks and sincere in abstinence did eat more than they needed, for the sake of God.

Epiphanius, bishop of Cyprus, called the abbot Hilarion to see him. A portion of fowl was set before them and the bishop invited the abbot to eat. The old man said, "Forgive me, Father, but since the time I took this habit I have never eaten anything that has been killed."

And Epiphanius said to him, "And from the time I took this habit I have let no man sleep who has anything against me, and neither have I slept holding anything against anyone."

And the old man said to him, "Forgive me, Father, for your way of life is greater than mine." (The Sayings of the Fathers)

Alms-Giving [\(Top\)](#)

In Christ's teaching, alms-giving goes together with fasting and prayer. We have seen that this is also the teaching of Isaiah (See [Fasting](#)) and of the Old Testament generally. When one prays and fasts, one must show love through active generosity to others.

Beware of practicing your piety before men, in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do...that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, they have their reward. But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-4)

As with fasting and prayer, the gifts of help to the poor must be done strictly in secret, so much so that one should, as it were, even hide from himself what he is giving to others, not letting one hand know what the other is doing. Every effort must be made, if the gift will be pleasing to God, to avoid all ostentation and boastfulness in its giving.

As we have already seen, there is no real love if one does not share what he has with the poor.

...if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (I John 3:17)

Such was the command of the law of Moses as well.

If there is among you a poor man, one of your brethren, in any of your towns within your land which the Lord your God gives you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him, and lend him sufficient for his need, whatever it may be. Take heed lest there be a base thought in your heart, and you say, 'The seventh year, the year of release is near,' and your eye be hostile to your poor brother, and you give him nothing, and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin in you. You shall give to him freely, and your heart shall not be grudging when you give to him; because for this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in all that you undertake. For the poor will never cease out of the land; therefore I command you, you shall open wide your hand to your brother, to the needy and to the poor, in the land. (Deuteronomy 15:7-11)

Such also was the teaching of Wisdom.

The poor is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends.

He who despises his neighbor is a sinner, but happy is he who is kind to the poor.

He who mocks the poor, insults his Maker, he who is glad at calamity will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 14:20-21, 17:5)

According to St. John Chrysostom, no one can be saved without giving alms and without caring for the poor. St. Basil the Great says that a man who has two coats or two pair of shoes, when his neighbor has none, is a thief. All earthly things are the possessions of God. **"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it."** (*Psalm 24:1*) Men are but stewards of what belongs to the Lord and should share the gifts of His creation with one another as much as they can. To store up earthly possessions, according to Christ, is the epitome of foolishness, and a rich man shall hardly be saved. (*cf. Luke 12:15-21*)

*How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the Kingdom of God!
For it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.*

Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?"

But he said, "What is impossible with men is possible with God." (Luke 15:24-27, Matthew 19: 23-26, Mark 10:23-27)

*Woe unto you that are rich, for you have received your consolation.
Woe unto you that are full now, for you shall hunger. (Luke 6:24-25)*

For He who is mighty...has filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He sent away empty. (Luke 1:53)

The reason why a rich man can hardly be saved, according to Jesus, is because when one has possessions, he wants to keep them, and gather still more. For the **"delight in riches chokes the word of God, and so it proves unfruitful"** in man's heart. (*Matthew 13:22, Mark 4:19, Luke 8:14*)

According to the apostle Paul, the "love of money" - not money itself - is the "root of all evils."

There is great gain in godliness with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world; but if we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and hurtful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs. (I Timothy 6:6-10, cf Hebrews 13:5-6)

The apostle himself collected money for the poor and greatly praised those who were generous in giving.

The point is this: he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, but he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to provide...so that you may always have enough of everything and may provide in abundance for every good work. As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever." (Psalm 112:9)

You will be enriched in every way for great generosity which...will produce thanksgiving to God... (2 Corinthians 9:6-12)

The spiritual person must share what he has with the poor. He must do so cheerfully and not reluctantly, secretly and not for the praise of men. He also must do so, as the poor widow in the gospel, not out of his abundance, but out of his need.

And Jesus sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. And a poor widow came, and put in two copper coins, which make a penny. And He called His disciples to Him, and said to them, "Truly, I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who are contributing to the treasury. For they all contributed out of their abundance; but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, her whole living." (Mark 12:41-44, Luke 21:2)

Giving alms, therefore, must be a sacrificial act if it has any spiritual worth. One cannot give merely what is left over when all his own needs are satisfied. One must take from oneself and give to others. In the spiritual tradition of the Church it is the teaching that what one saves through fasting and abstinence, for example during the special lenten seasons, should not be kept for other times but should be given away to the poor.

In recent times the teaching has developed that the spiritual man should work within the processes and possibilities of the free societies in order to make a social structure in which the poor will not merely be the object of the charity of the rich, but will themselves have the chance to work and to share in the common wealth of man. In this way the poor will have dignity and self-respect through assuming their just place as members of society. "We do not want hand-outs," say the poor, "we want to be able to learn and to work for ourselves." The spiritual person is the one who works to make this happen; and it is right and praiseworthy to do so. The only temptations here would be to have this attitude and to undertake this action without personal sacrifice, and to think that when such a "just society" will exist - if it ever will - all of men's problems will be solved. The spiritual decadence of many wealthy persons demonstrates that this is not the case. Thus the words of Christ remain forever valid and true:

"...the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me...if you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, and follow me." (Matthew 19:21, Mark 14:5-7, Luke 18:22, John 12:8)

The one who is truly perfect as the Father in heaven is perfect is the one who gives all for the sake of others, in the name of Christ, with Him, and for His sake. Such a person is most truly living the spiritual life.

Sexuality, Marriage, and Family [\(Top\)](#)

Sexuality

The sexual character of human persons has a positive role to play in human spirituality. Like all things human, sexuality must be sanctioned by God and inspired with the Holy Spirit, used for the purposes God has intended. And like all things human, through its misuse and abuse, sexuality can be perverted and corrupted, becoming an instrument of sin rather than the means for glorifying God and fulfilling oneself as made in His image, and according to His likeness.

...The body is not meant for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body...Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I therefore take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who joins himself to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two shall become one." But he who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (I Corinthians 6:13-20)

The teaching of St. Paul about sexuality is analogous to his teaching about eating and drinking and all bodily functions. They are given by God for spiritual reasons to be used for His glory. In themselves they are holy and pure. When misused or adored as an end in themselves, they become the instruments of sin and death. The apostle specifically says that all sexual perversions have as their direct cause man's rebellion against God.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct...Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them. (Romans 1:24-32)

That those who "**do such things deserve to die**" was taken literally in the law of Moses; thus adulterers, homosexuals, incestuous people and those committing sexual acts with beasts were ordered to be "**put to death.**" (*Leviticus 20:10-16*)

In following this teaching, while hoping on the mercy of God and the forgiveness of Christ for all sinners, the New Testament scriptures are even more strict in their demands regarding sexual purity. Jesus, who forgave the woman taken in adultery (*John 8:7-11*) and the repentant harlot who washed His feet with her hair (*Luke 7:36-50*) gave the following teaching in His sermon on the mount:

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

*It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (*Matthew 5:27-32, also 19:3-9, Romans 7:3*)*

The Apostle Paul says simply that unrepentant adulterers, fornicators, and homosexuals will not enter the Kingdom of God. (*cf. I Corinthians 6:9-10, Galatians 5:19*)

*Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and the adulterous. (*Hebrews 13:4*)*

Thus, according to the revelation of God, sexual relations are holy and pure only within the community of marriage, with the ideal relationship being that between one man and one woman forever. Those who are not married and those who choose by the will of God not to marry must abstain from all sexual relations since such relations cannot possibly fulfill the function given to the sexual act by God in creation. This does not mean that there will be no sexual character to the unmarried person's spiritual life for the unmarried man and the unmarried woman will still express their humanity in masculine and feminine spiritual forms. The virtues and fruits of the Spirit in each, as in those who are married, are identical, but the manner of their incarnation and expression will be proper to the particular sexual form of their common humanity, as well as the individual uniqueness of each person.

The single person who lives his or her whole life without husband or wife is called to virginity as a witness in this world of the Kingdom of God where "**in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.**" (*Matthew 22-30*) It is for this reason that those following the monastic life are said to have taken the "angelic habit." This does not mean that they become disincarnate or unsexual. It means rather that they perpetually serve and praise God as His children, comprising, as it were, the universal family of God without being

themselves the leaders of families on this earth. In this way they express themselves as the fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters of all mankind in Christ.

"Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?" And stretching out His hands toward His disciples, He said, "Here are my mother and my brethren! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Mark 3:34-35)

Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. (I Timothy 5:1-2)

These words, of course, are intended for all, married and unmarried, but they also most obviously have special significance for those who, for Christ's sake, are living the unmarried life. For as those who are married have the task of living their spiritual lives with the cares of the family, and within the context of its needs and demands, the Christian who is single lives his or her life in Christ without these conditions.

I wish that all were as I myself am (i.e. unmarried, says Paul). But each has his own special gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. (...) The unmarried man is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord, but the married man is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please his wife, and his interests are divided. And the unmarried woman or girl is anxious about the affairs of the Lord, how to be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about worldly affairs, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to lay any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and to secure your undivided devotion to the Lord. (I Corinthians 7:34-35)

So he that marries ... does well; and he who refrains from marriage will do better. (cf I Corinthians 7:7-40)

The teaching here is clear. People can serve God and live the spiritual life both in marriage and in the single life. And people can sin in both as well. **"Each has his own special gift from God."** (I Corinthians 7:7) Saint Paul thinks, however, that among those who want to do as perfectly as they can, they who do not marry **"will do better."** (I Corinthians 7:38-40)

The spiritual tradition of the Church clearly agrees with the apostle. This does not mean that marriage is in any way disparaged or disdained. It is given by God and is a sacrament of the Church, and those who abhor it for "spiritual reasons" are to be excommunicated from the Church. (*Canon Laws of the Council of Gangra*) It means only that, most practically, one can be a greater servant of God and more perfectly a witness to His unending Kingdom if he gives up everything in this world, sells all that he has, and follows Christ in total detachment and poverty.

The idea, however, that a single person can indulge oneself in the things of this world, including sexuality, and still be the servant of God in Christ is totally rejected and condemned. One can forsake marriage in the body only for greater freedom from

"anxiety about worldly affairs" in order to be concerned with "the affairs of the Lord...how to be holy in body and spirit." The single person who is "holy in body and spirit" has sexual relations with no one.

Marriage [\(Top\)](#)

Marriage is a part of human life on this earth as created by God.

Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh. (Genesis 2:24, cf Matthew 19:5-6)

God created male and female so that man and woman would live their lives together in marriage as one flesh. This union should be broken for no earthly reason.

What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

They said to Jesus, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to put her away?"

He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife except for sexual impurity and marries another, commits adultery."

The disciples said to him, "if such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry."

But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this precept, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the Kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it." (Matthew 19:6-12)

Human marriage exists by the will of God on the earth as the created expression of God's love for man and as man's participation in the creative love of God. The union of man and woman in the community of marriage is used in the Bible as the image of God's faithful love for Israel, and Christ's sacrificial love for the Church. (cf. *Isaiah 54, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel 16, Hosea*)

Wives, be subject to your husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, His body, and is Himself its Savior. As the church is subject to Christ, so let wives also be subject in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present the church to Himself in splendor without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the

church, because we are members of His body. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one. This is a great mystery, and I take it to mean Christ and the church; however, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33)

These words of Saint Paul, read at the sacramental celebration of marriage in the Church, contain the whole program for spiritual life in the community of marriage. The husband must love his wife to the point of death, as Christ loves the Church. And the wife must be totally given to her husband in everything as the Church is given to Christ. The union in love must be perfect, total, complete, enduring and lasting forever. Within this union, the sexual act of love is the mystical seal of the total union in love; the act whereby the two are united in mind, heart, soul and body in the Lord.

According to the spiritual teaching of the Orthodox Church, marriage, and so the sexual act of love, is made perfect only in Christ and the Church. This does not mean that all those who are "married in church" have an ideal marriage. The sacrament is not mechanical or magical. Its reality and gifts may be rejected and defiled, received unto condemnation and judgment, like Holy Communion and all of the sacramental mysteries of the faith. It does mean, however, that when a couple is married in the Church of Christ, the possibility for the perfection of their marriage is most fully given by God.

When a man and a woman truly love one another, they naturally desire that their love would be perfect. They want their relationship to be filled with all virtue and every fruit of the Spirit. They want it to be ever more perfectly expressed and fulfilled. They want it to last forever. Those who do not desire such perfection for their love, do not really love.

When a man and woman have such a love, they can find its fulfillment only in Christ. He makes it possible; no one and nothing else can do it. So, for those who love truly, the savior and accomplisher of their love is Christ. He gives every virtue and every fruit of the Spirit. He allows them to grow ever more perfectly one. He allows them to live and to love for eternity in the Kingdom of God. A marriage in Christ does not end in sin; it does not part in death. It is fulfilled and perfected in the Kingdom of heaven. It is for this reason, and this reason only, that those who seek true love and perfection in marriage come to the Church to be married in Christ.

A truly Christian and spiritual marriage is one where true love abides. In the community of marriage true love is expressed in the total union of the couple in all that they are, have and do. It is the love of each one living completely for the good of the other, the love of erotic union in total oneness of mind, heart and flesh; the love of perfect friendship. (*See God is Love*)

Within such a community of love, the sexual act is the expression of all of this. It was created for this purpose by God. It is the intimate act which finds its total joy when perfected by those who are fully devoted and dedicated to each other in all things, in every way, forever. It is for this sacred and divine reason that the sexual act cannot be done casually or promiscuously for one's own spiritual or bodily pleasure. It is the act of loving self-sacrifice in eternal fidelity. Only when accomplished in this way does it

yield divine satisfaction and infinite delight to the lovers who enact it.

Sexual dissatisfaction in marriage is virtually never simply a bodily or biological problem. It is with almost no exception, the result of some defect of mind, heart and soul. Most basically, it is the defect of love itself. For when each considers only the good of the other, desiring total spiritual and bodily union in perfect friendship, the sexual act is always most satisfying. When this is absent, and something other is central, the gratification of some unworthy passion of body or mind, then all is lost and the perversion of love brings sadness and death to the union.

Normally the sexual act in marriage bears fruit in the procreation of children. The marriage ceremony in the Church prays for "chastity, a bed undefiled, the procreation of children, and for every earthly blessing that they may in turn bestow upon the needy." The sexual act of love, however, is not limited merely to the bearing of children. It exists as well for the union in love and the mutual edification and joy of those who are married. If this were not the case, the Apostle Paul would not have given the following counsel:

...each man should have his own wife, and each wife her own husband. The husband should give the wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does. Do not refuse one another except per haps by agreement for a time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through each of self-control. (I Corinthians 7:2-5)

The apostle does not say that the married couple should be separated and come together only with intentions of bearing a child. He says rather that they should stay together, separating "by agreement, for a time," and that for the purpose of being devoted "to prayer." The words "by agreement" are central in this counsel, for each one must live totally as belonging to the other.

Sexuality in pure marriage is pure. For, as the apostle says in another context:

To the pure, all things are pure, but to the corrupt and unbelieving nothing is pure; their very minds and consciences are corrupted. They profess to know God but they deny Him by their deeds; they are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good deed. (Titus 1:15-16)

There are those whose marriages are impure because they are corrupt and unbelieving, unfit for any good deed. Even though they are married and the sexuality is, as they say nowadays, "legal," nevertheless it is ungodly and impure. The fact that a couple is "legally" or even "sacramentally" married does not make their marital life pure and free from sinful passion, perversion and lust. Only those who truly live the spiritual life in genuine love and devotion have sexual lives that are holy and pure, mutually satisfying and fulfilling, and well-pleasing to God. This is guaranteed when the spiritual life is in Christ and the Church. But as St. John Chrysostom has said, even heathen marriages are holy and pure when true love is present and the couples

are eternally given to one another in unending fidelity and mutual devotion. For where such love is present, there is the presence of God.

Family [\(Top\)](#)

True love in marriage supposes the bearing of children. Those who truly love in marriage will naturally have children as the fruit of their love and the greatest bond of their union. Those who despise children and refuse to offer them care and devotion do not truly love.

Of course there are those whose marriages will be childless because of some tragedy of nature brought on by the "sin of the world." In such marriages perfect love can exist, but the mutual devotion in the service of God and man will take on other forms, either the adoption of children or some other good service for the sake of others. The childless marriage, either by voluntary choice or natural tragedy, which results in self-indulgence is not a spiritual union.

The voluntary control of birth in marriage is only permissible, according to the essence of a spiritual life, when the birth of a child will bring danger and hardship. Those who are living the spiritual life will come to the decision not to bear children only with sorrow, and will do so before God, with prayers for guidance and mercy. It will not be a decision taken lightly or for self-indulgent reasons.

According to the common teaching in the Orthodox Church, when such a decision is taken before God, the means of its implementation are arbitrary. There are, in the Orthodox opinion, no means of controlling birth in marriage which are better or more acceptable than others. All means are equally sad and distressing for those who truly love. For the Christian marriage is the one that abounds with as many new children as possible.

The abortion of an unborn child is absolutely condemned in the Orthodox Church. Clinical abortion is no means of birth control, and those who practice it for any reason at all, both the practitioners and those who request it, are punished according to the canon law of the Church with the "penalty for murder." (*Council of Trullo, 5th and 6th Ecumenical Councils*)

In extreme cases, as when the mother will surely die, if she bears the child, the decision for life or death of the child must be taken by the mother alone, in consultation with her family and her spiritual guides. Whatever the decision, unceasing prayers for God's guidance and mercy must be its foundation. According to the Orthodox faith, a mother who gives her life for her child is a saint who will most certainly be greatly glorified by God; for there is no greater act of love than to give one's life so that another might live. (cf. John 15:13)

Within the life of the family, the father must be the leader and head. He must love his wife and children as Christ loves the Church - and Christ died for the Church. He must never be harsh. The wife must be totally devoted to her husband and must demand, encourage and enable his leadership. This is the normal way of family life prescribed in the scriptures, for "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of a woman is her husband, and the head of Christ is God." (*1 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:18-19, 1 Peter 3:1-7*)

When the husband or wife is an unbeliever - and such should be the case only when one member of the marriage becomes Christian after being married, or when one member of a married couples loses his or her faith, for a Christian should not normally enter into marriage with an unbeliever - the couple, according to Saint Paul should not separate or divorce, but should continue to live together. The believer should show the best example of the spiritual life of love to the unbeliever in every word and deed, totally without coercion or compulsion regarding the faith, and certainly without accusation or condemnation.

For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy.

But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace. Wife, how do you know whether you will save your husband? Husband, how do you know whether you will save your wife? (I Corinthians 7:13-16, cf I Peter 3:1-7)

Here the apostle, for the sake of peace, permits separation, but does not encourage it. Nevertheless, in dire circumstances, such as when there is spiritual or physical danger, the Church itself counsels separation as the lesser evil. However, in such cases the Church also counsels the separated Christian, if possible, to "remain single." (I Corinthians 7:10) Second marriages, even for widows and widowers, are allowed and blessed by the Church, without the penalty of excommunication, only, in theory, in those cases where the new marriage has the possibility of being holy and pure. (*See Worship*)

Within the family, the spiritual life of love should be sought and lived as fully as possible. This means that every member of the family should live for the good of the other in all circumstances, "**bearing one another's burdens**" and in this way fulfilling "**the law of Christ.**" (*Galatians 6:2*) There should be the constant presence of mercy and forgiveness and mutual upbuilding. There should be every expression of true love as is generally found in those who are holy.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (I Corinthians 13:4-7)

Such love is the basis of enduring family life, lived and expressed joyfully and cheerfully, without reluctance or compulsion. (*cf. 2 Corinthians 9:6-12*) For marriage is not "holy deadlock" as one cynical writer has put it, but, in the words of Saint John Chrysostom, a "small church" in the home where the grace and freedom of God abounds for man's salvation and life.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother...that it may be well with you and that you may live

long on the earth." (Ephesians 6:1-3, Exodus 20:12)

There are those who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers...

If one curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in utter darkness. (Proverbs 30:11, 22:20)

For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall be put to death; he who has cursed his father or his mother, his blood is upon him. (Leviticus 20:9)

Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. (Colossians 3:20)

Saint John Chrysostom says that those who cannot honor, love and respect their parents can certainly not serve God, for He is the "**Father of all**" (Ephesians 4:6), the One "**from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named.**" (Ephesians 3:15)

The true father loves and disciplines his child as God loves and disciplines His people. (cf. Hebrews 12:3-11)

He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him.

Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 13:24; 22:6,15; 23:13)

The love of the father for children is expressed in loving discipline without hypocrisy. The best teacher is one's own example.

Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger but bring them up with discipline and instruction in the Lord. (Ephesians 6:4)

Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21)

Like the pastors of churches, the fathers of families must be "**temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome and no lover of money.**" (I Timothy 3:2) He must be an example for his children "**in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.**" (I Timothy 4:12) Like the father in Christ's parable, the human father must always be ready to receive home with joy his prodigal children. The wives and mothers of families must be fully devoted to their husbands and children. They must be the very embodiment of all of the fruits of the Holy Spirit as those who give life, both physical and spiritual.

A good wife, who can find? She is far more precious than jewels. The heart of her husband trusts in her...she does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come. She opens her mouth in wisdom and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue.

She looks well to the ways of her household, and does not eat the bread of idleness.

Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, he praises her, saying: "Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all." Charm is deceitful, and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord is greatly to be praised. (Proverbs 31:10-31)

This teaching of Wisdom is found also in the writing of the apostles of Christ.

I desire then that in every place...women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire, but by good deeds as befits women who profess piety. (I Timothy 2:8-10)

Likewise, you wives, be submissive to your husbands, so that some, though they do not obey the word, may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, when they see your reverent and chaste behavior. Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of robes, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. So once the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves and were submissive to their husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are now her children if you do right and let nothing terrify you. (I Peter 3:1-6)

Thus in the "small church" of the family, with each member living according to God's will, the Kingdom of God is already present and active, waiting to be perfectly fulfilled in the Kingdom of heaven which never will end, where all are God's children, the bride of His Son.

Sickness, Suffering and Death [\(Top\)](#)

Sickness

Sickness exists in the world only because of sin. There would be no sickness at all, neither mental nor physical, if man had not sinned. According to Christ sickness is bondage to the devil. (*Matthew 8:16, 12:22; Luke 4:40-41, 13:10-17*) And Christ has come to "**destroy ... the devil.**" (*Hebrews 2:14*) With Jesus the forgiveness of sins, the healing of the body, the destruction of the devil and the raising of the dead are all one and the same act of salvation.

For which is easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say "Rise and walk"? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins - He then said to the paralytic - "Rise, take up your bed and go home." And he rose and went home. (Matthew 9:4-7, Mark 2:9-12, Luke 5:23-25)

In that hour He cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. (Luke 7:21)

Doing these things Jesus showed that He is Christ the Messiah, the fulfillment of the prophets who brings the Kingdom of God to the world.

...the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the good news of the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not scandalized at me. (Luke 7:22-23; cf. Isaiah 29:18-19, 35:5-6, 61:1; Matthew 4:23-24, 11:4-6)

When one is delivered from sin and evil, one is also freed from sickness and death. In the Kingdom of God there will be "no sickness or sorrow or sighing, but life everlasting." (*Requiem Kontakion of the Church*)

When one is visited by sickness in this world, whether bodily or mental, he is a victim of the devil and the "**sin of the world.**" (*John 1:29*) This does not mean that people are necessarily being personally punished with their diseases. It means rather, as in the case of those born with infirmities and children who are ill, that where sin abounds, sickness and disease are also rampant. It is the teaching of the Church that those who are innocently victimized by sickness, such as small children and retarded people, are certain to be saved in the Kingdom of God.

This is the teaching of the book of **Genesis**. God did not say to man, "Sin and I will kill you." He said, if and when you sin, "**you will die.**" (*Genesis 2:17, 3:3*) Thus when man sins and ruins himself by evil, he brings the curse of sickness and suffering to the world for himself and his children; and his life becomes toil until he returns to the dust out of which he is made - and which he is by nature without the grace of God in his life. (*cf. Genesis 3:17-19*) It is in this sense that the "**prince of this world**" is the devil. (*John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11*)

Given the sinfulness of the world, its bondage to the devil, its "**groaning in travail**" (*cf. Romans 8:19-23*) until its salvation in Christ, God Himself uses sickness and death for His own providential purposes as the means for man's salvation. God is not the cause of sickness, suffering and death; but given their existence because of the devil's deceit and man's wickedness and sin, God employs them that man might be healed and saved in the forgiveness of sins. In this sense, and this sense only, can it be said that "God sends sickness to man."

When a spiritual person is sick he recognizes that his illness is caused by sin, his own and the sins of the world. He does not blame God for it, for he knows that God has not caused it and does not wish it for His servants. He knows as well, through the providential plan of God and the salvation of Christ, that his sickness will be healed.

He knows also that if God so wills, he can be healed of his sickness in this life in order to have more time to serve God and man on earth, and to accomplish what he must according to God's plan. He also knows as well that the very sickness itself can be the means for serving God, and he accepts it in this way, offering it in faith and love for his own salvation and for the salvation of others.

There is no greater witness to the love of God and faith in Christ than sickness endured with faith and love. The one who bears his infirmities with virtue, with courage and patience, with faith and hope, with gladness and joy, is the greatest witness to divine salvation that can possibly be. Nothing can compare to such a person, for God's praise in distress and affliction is the greatest possible offering that man can make of his life on earth.

Every saint who ever lived suffered bodily infirmities. And all of them, virtually without exception - even when healing others by their prayers - did not ask for or receive deliverance for themselves. This is the case most evidently of Jesus Himself, the suffering servant of God.

He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; as one from whom men hide their faces...

Surely He has borne our grieves, and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities, upon Him was the chastisement that healed us, and with His wounds we are healed...the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man (i.e. Joseph of Arimathea, Matthew 27:57) in His death...when He makes Himself an offering for sin...(Isaiah 53, cf. Psalms 22, 38, 41)

Christ "**poured out His soul to death**" (*Isaiah 53:12*) when He was only in the third decade of His life. Many of the saints hardly lived longer, and virtually all suffered, as did St. Paul, from some "thorn in the flesh," normally understood as some bodily affliction.

...a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from being too elated. Three times I besought the Lord about this, that it should leave me; but He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," that the power of Christ may rest upon me...for when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)

All spiritual persons follow the example of Christ and Saint Paul and all of the saints in their appreciation of sickness. They say to the Father, "Thy will be done," and transform their weakness, by the grace of God, into the means of salvation for themselves and others.

Suffering [\(Top\)](#)

There is no life in this world without suffering. The cessation of suffering comes only in the Kingdom of God.

There are generally three sources of suffering in this world: suffering from the persecution of others in body and soul, suffering from sickness and disease, and suffering in spirit because of the sins of the world. There are only two possible ways to deal with such sufferings. Either one humbly accepts them and transforms them into the way of salvation for oneself and others; or one is defeated by them with rebellion and rejection, and so "curses God and dies" both physically and for eternity in the ages to come. (*cf. Job 2:9-10*)

We have seen already that "**all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**" (*I Timothy 3:12*); and that Christians should "**count it all joy**" when they "**meet various trials**" (*James 1:2*), "**rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.**" (*Acts 5:41*)

We have also seen that those who suffer through sickness and disease with every virtue of Christ will receive "sufficient grace" from God to be strong in the Lord in their bodily weakness, and so direct their sufferings "**not unto death**" but to the "**glory of God.**" (*cf 2 Corinthians 12:7-10, John 11:4*)

Since therefore Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same thought, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of time in the flesh no longer by human passions, but by the will of God. (I Peter 4:1-2)

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is the church ... (Colossians 1:24)

So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, because we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen; for the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord... (2 Corinthians 4:16-5:6)

The spiritual person, when suffering in the flesh, uses his afflictions to be set free from sin, and to be made "**perfect through suffering**" like Jesus Himself. (*Hebrews 2:10*) He knows that as his "**outer nature is wasting away**" he is being born into the Kingdom of God if he suffers in and with Jesus the Lord.

In a very real sense the most grievous suffering of all is not in the flesh but the spirit. This is the suffering which torments the soul when, by the grace of God and in the light of Christ, the spiritual person sees the utter futility, ugliness and pettiness of sin which is destroying men made in the image of God. According to one great theologian of the Church this suffering was the most grievous of all for the Lord Jesus Himself. (*cf. Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitskii, 20th c., The Dogma of Redemption*)

Jesus knew the fullness and perfection of the divine beauty of God; He knew His mercy and love, the glory of paradise, the goodness of His creation. Beholding all of this, given to man as a gift, and beholding it scorned and rejected in His own person, was infinitely more painful and torturing to the Lord than were any beatings and scourging and being nailed to the cross. For the cross itself was the great scandal of man's hatred and rejection of the love and light and life of God as given to the world in the person of Christ. Thus the agony and torment of the Lord in His being killed on the cross was the divine agony, in body and soul, of man's refusal of divine life. No greater agony than this can possibly exist, and no human mind can fathom the infinite scope of its horror and tragedy.

The spiritual person, according to the measure of grace given by God, participates spiritually in this agony of Christ. It is the greatest suffering of the saints, infinitely more unbearable than any external persecution or bodily disease. It is the torment of the soul over the utter foolishness of sin. It is the agony of love over those who are perishing. It was in such straightness of soul that the Apostle Paul could exclaim: "**...I have great sorrow and anguish in my heart, for I wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race.**" (*Romans 9:3*)

It is with this same agony of love that Saint Isaac of Syria could say about the saints, "if they were cast into fire ten times a day for the sake of their love for man, even that would seem to them to be too little." (*Mystic Treatises, Wensinck, ed.*) This same Saint Isaac himself was known to weep fervent tears of suffering love for all men, the whole of creation, and even the devil himself.

Thus the ultimate form of all suffering which leads to salvation is compassionate love for all that is perishing through the ridiculous foolishness of sin. Christ suffered from such love to the full and unlimited extension of His divinity. And each person suffers it as well to the extent that he or she is deified in Christ by the grace of the Spirit.

Death ([Top](#))

There is no person who will not die. The preparation for death is at the center of the spiritual life.

Lord, let me know my end, and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is! Behold, Thou hast made my days a few

handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing in Thy sight. Surely every man stands as a mere breath! Surely man goes about as a shadow! Surely for nought are they in turmoil; man heaps up, and knows not who will gather! (Psalm 39:4-6)

That man should die is not the will of God, for as the scripture says, "**God did not make death.**"

God did not make death, and takes no pleasure in the destruction of any living thing; He created all things that they might have being. (Wisdom of Solomon 1-13)

For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God; so turn and live. (Ezekiel 18:32)

Death is the result of sin. It is the final victory of the devil, the result of his destructive activity. If man had not sinned, he would not have died. His body may have changed and evolved over great periods of time, but it would not have been separated from his spirit to return to the dust, And man's soul itself would not have been corrupted, losing power over its body and becoming its slave. This is the meaning of the sin of Adam, that man has emerged on the face of the earth, made in God's image and inspired with His Spirit, and has chosen death instead of life, evil instead of righteousness, and so through defilement of his nature in rebellion against God, brought corruption and death to the world. (cf. *Genesis 3, Romans 5:12-21*)

"**Sin spread to all men because all men sinned**" (*Romans 5:12*); and in sinning man brought death to the children who partake of his mortal nature and life. In a sin-bound world, no person escapes, even those who are personally guiltless and innocent, for all are caught up in the sins of the world.

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Psalm 51:5)

Even the all-pure Virgin Mary who gave birth to Christ in the flesh could not escape the snares of death. For all her innocence and spiritual perfection, she too needed salvation from death by her Son, and her spirit rejoiced in God her Savior. (cf. *Luke 1:47*)

According to the Orthodox Christian faith, Jesus Christ alone, of all men, as the incarnate Son and Word of God, need not have died. His death alone of all human deaths, was perfectly voluntary. He came in order to die, and by His death to liberate all who were held captive by death's power.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father. (John 10:17-18)

Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? "Father, save me from this hour?" No, for this purpose I have come to this hour.

Now is the judgment of the world, now shall the prince of the world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to my- self.

He said this to show by what death He was to die (i.e. crucifixion).

The crowd answered Him, "We have heard from the law that the Christ (i.e. Messiah) remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?"

Jesus said to them, "The light is with you for a little longer..." (John 12:27-35, cf. Matthew 16:21-23, 17:9-13)

Jesus came "for us men and for our salvation" in order to die. (*Nicene Creed*) He came that through His death and resurrection all men might be raised from the dead for eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This is the Christian faith.

...for the hour is coming when all who are in the graves will hear the voice of the Son of God, and come forth, for those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation. (John 5:25-29)

This, too, is the apostle's doctrine. (cf. Acts 2:22-36)

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at His coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. (I Corinthians 15:20-26)

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy victory?

O death, where is thy sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. (I Corinthians 15:52-57)

The whole essence of the spiritual life is to die with Christ to the sins of this world and to pass through the experience of bodily death with Him in order to be raised up "on the last day" in the Kingdom of God. (*cf. John 6:39-44, 54*)

By the power of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit, Christians can and must transform their deaths into acts of life. They must face the tragedy of death with faith in the Lord, and defeat the "**last enemy - death**" (*I Corinthians 15:26*) by the power of their faith.

None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. If we live, we live to the Lord, if we die, we die to the Lord, so whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (Romans 14:8-9)

Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears my word and believes in Him who sent me has eternal life; he does not come to judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24, cf. John 6:29-58)

I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. (John 11:25-26)

For Christians, as for all men, death remains a tragedy. When confronted by death, like all men, and like Jesus Himself and His apostles, Christians can only mourn and weep. (*cf. John 11:35, Matthew 26:37-38, Mark 14:33-34, Luke 22:42-44, Acts 8:2*) But for Christians, filled with faith in Christ and His Father, the tragedy of death can be transformed into victory.

The Kingdom of Heaven [\(Top\)](#)

The Final Judgment

Every man will stand judgment before God for his life in this world. Each person will be judged according to his words and his works.

I tell you, on the day of judgment men will render account for every idle word they utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned (Matthew 12:36)

For the Son of Man is to come with His angels in the glory of His Father, and then He will repay every man according to his works. (Matthew 16: 27, cf. Revelation 2:23)

The judge will be Christ Himself, for He is the one who, by His suffering and death, has received the power to judge. It is the Crucified One who will call men to account at the end of the ages. He has won this right as a man through the perfection of His human life.

For the Father ... has given Him the authority to execute judgment because He is the Son of Man. (John 5:27)

Christ will judge all men exclusively on the basis of how they have served Him by serving all men - the least of the brethren.

When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and He will place the sheep at His right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at His right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see Thee hungry and feed Thee, or thirsty and give Thee drink? And when did we see Thee a stranger and welcome Thee, or naked and clothe Thee? And when did we see Thee sick or in prison and visit Thee?'

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then He will say to those at His left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food. I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see Thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to Thee?'

Then He will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.'

And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life. (Matthew 25: 31-46)

All spiritual life is fulfilled in this one parable of Christ, for the heart of it is love, both for God and for man.

In commenting on this teaching about the final judgment, Saint Augustine has said that Christ Himself is truly the one who is found in all of these conditions, just as He is the one who is the Savior in each of them.

He Himself was hungry; who is the "**bread of life**," which if a man eats of it, he will never hunger again. (*John 6:35*)

He Himself was thirsty, crying out "**I thirst!**" (*John 19:28*); who gives the "**living water,**" which, if a man drinks of it, he will never thirst again. (*John 4:13, 6:35, 7:37*)

He Himself was a stranger with "**no place to lay His head**" (*Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58*), who "**came to His own home, and His own people received Him not**" (*John 1:11*); who brings all men home to the heavenly house of the Father. (*John 14:1-2*)

He Himself was naked, in the manger in Bethlehem, in the streams of the Jordan, and on the cross of Golgatha; who clothes all men with Himself (*Galatians 3:27*), and with the "**robes of salvation.**" (*Isaiah 61:10, Revelation 6:11*)

He Himself was sick, "**wounded for our transgressions**" and "**bruised for our iniquities,**" left alone hanging on the cross (*Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 26:56*); who Himself heals all the wounds of men, for "**with His wounds we are healed.**" (*Isaiah 53:5*)

He Himself was in prison, arrested as a criminal and thrown into jail, forsaken by His disciples (*Matthew 26:56, 27*); who Himself proclaims "**liberty to the captives**" (*Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18*), setting men free from everything that binds them, and forgiving their crimes.

Since Christ has identified Himself wholly with every man, in every one of his sad and most sorrowful states, the person who "**does it to the least of his brethren**" does it to Christ Himself - not "as if" to Christ, but to Christ in reality, for Christ is most truly within every man, and every man is the bearer of Christ, the "image of the invisible God." (*Colossians 1:15*)

St. Simeon the New Theologian gives the following teaching about the parable of the final judgment:

The Son of God has become the Son of Man in order to make us men sons of God, raising our nature by grace to what He is Himself by nature, granting us birth from above through the grace of the Holy Spirit and leading us straightway into the Kingdom of heaven, or rather, granting us the Kingdom of heaven within us....

A man is not saved by having once shown mercy to someone...for "I was hungry" and "I was thirsty" is said not of one occasion, not of one day, but of the whole of life. In the same way, "you gave me food," "you gave me drink," "you clothed me," and so on, does not merely indicate one incident or action, but a constant attitude to everyone always. Our Lord Jesus Christ said that He Himself accepts such mercy...in the persons of the needy.

...it is Him whom we feed in every beggar...Him whom we have left to die in our neglect...Our Lord was pleased to assume the kindness of every poor man...in order that no one who believes in Him should exalt himself over his brother, but seeing his Lord in his brother, should consider himself beneath him...and honor him, and be ready to exhaust all his means in helping him, just as our Lord exhausted His blood for

our salvation.

A man who is commanded to love his neighbor as himself should do so...for his entire lifetime...A man who loves his neighbor as himself cannot allow himself to possess anything more than his neighbor; so that if he has more and does not distribute them without envy...he does not fulfill our Lord's command exactly.

If he who possesses...disdains even one who does not...he will still be regarded as one who has disdained Christ our Lord.

His words, "you have done it unto me," are not limited only to those to whom we have been unkind, or whom we have wronged, or whose possessions we have taken, or whom we have harmed, but include also those whom we have disdained. - This latter alone is sufficient for our condemnation for, in disdaining them, we have disdained Christ Himself.

All this may appear too hard for people and they may think it right to say to themselves: "Who can strictly follow all this, satisfying and feeding every- one and leaving no one unsatisfied?" Let them listen to St. Paul: "For the love of Christ compels us..." (2 Corinthians 5:14)

...a man who gives all...has fulfilled the particular commandments in one stroke...as he who prays constantly has fulfilled the rules of prayer...and he who has God in himself...has accomplished everything...(Practical and Theological Precepts)

It is also the teaching of the spiritual masters that what must be given to all men is Christ Himself: the Bread of Life, the Living Water, the Home of the Father, the robes of salvation, the healing of wounds, the liberation and forgiveness of all sins. In this sense every man, no matter how rich or how righteous, is poor, hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, sinful and imprisoned by evil and death. Thus to "do it to the least of the brethren" is to offer Christ to all men, to give them the eternal and unending satisfaction of all their needs and desires: bread which is never consumed, water which eternally satisfies, a home which is never lost, garments which do not grow old, healing which never suffers again, liberation which can never revert to captivity. Thus, "to do it to the least of the brethren" is to bring them the Kingdom of God. In doing this one offers to all men and so to Christ Himself what already belongs to them from God; as in the liturgy of the Church we offer to God that which already is His. In every case, this is Christ Himself.

*We offer to Thee, what is already Thine, on behalf of all, and for all.
(Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom)*

This, therefore, is perfect love; the love of God and the love of man, the love for God and the love for man, becoming one and the same love. It is accomplished in Christ and is Christ. To love with this love is to love with the love of Christ and to fulfill His "**new commandment**" to "**love one another even as I have loved you.**" (John 13:34-35, 15:12) In this is the whole of spiritual life. In this, and this alone, man will be

finally judged. It is the crown of all virtue and prayer, the ultimate and most perfect fruit of God's Spirit in man.

Heaven and Hell [\(Top\)](#)

The Kingdom of heaven is already in the midst of those who live the spiritual life. What the spiritual person knows in the Holy Spirit, in Christ and the Church, will come with power and glory for all men to behold at the end of the ages.

The final coming of Christ will be the judgment of all men. His very presence will be the judgment. Now men can live without the love of Christ in their lives. They can exist as if there were no God, no Christ, no Spirit, no Church, no spiritual life. At the end of the ages this will no longer be possible. All men will have to behold the Face of Him who "for us men and our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate ... who was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried . . ." (*Nicene Creed*) All will have to look at Him whom they have crucified by their sins: Him "**who was dead and is alive again.**" (*Revelation 1-17-18*)

For those who love the Lord, His Presence will be infinite joy, paradise and eternal life. For those who hate the Lord, the same Presence will be infinite torture, hell and eternal death. The reality for both the saved and the damned will be exactly the same when Christ "**comes in glory, and all angels with Him,**" so that "**God may be all in all.**" (*I Corinthians 15-28*) Those who have God as their "all" within this life will finally have divine fulfillment and life. For those whose "all" is themselves and this world, the "all" of God will be their torture, their punishment and their death. And theirs will be "**weeping and gnashing of teeth.**" (*Matthew 8:21, et al.*)

The Son of Man will send His angels and they will gather out of His kingdom all causes of sin and all evil doers, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.
(*Matthew 13:41-43*)

According to the saints, the "fire" that will consume sinners at the coming of the Kingdom of God is the same "fire" that will shine with splendor in the saints. It is the "fire" of God's love; the "fire" of God Himself who is Love. "**For our God is a consuming fire**" (*Hebrews 12:29*) who "**dwells in unapproachable light.**" (*I Timothy 6:16*) For those who love God and who love all creation in Him, the "consuming fire" of God will be radiant bliss and unspeakable delight. For those who do not love God, and who do not love at all, this same "consuming fire" will be the cause of their "weeping" and their "gnashing of teeth."

Thus it is the Church's spiritual teaching that God does not punish man by some material fire or physical torment. God simply reveals Himself in the risen Lord Jesus in such a glorious way that no man can fail to behold His glory. It is the presence of God's splendid glory and love that is the scourge of those who reject its radiant power and light.

... those who find themselves in hell will be chastised by the scourge of love. How cruel and bitter this torment of love will be! For those who understand that they have sinned against love, undergo no greater

suffering than those produced by the most fearful tortures. The sorrow which takes hold of the heart, which has sinned against love, is more piercing than any other pain. It is not right to say that the sinners in hell are deprived of the love of God ... But love acts in two ways, as suffering of the reproved, and as joy in the blessed! (St. Isaac of Syria, Mystic Treatises)

This teaching is found in many spiritual writers and saints: St. Maximus the Confessor, the novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky. At the end of the ages God's glorious love is revealed for all to behold in the Face of Christ. Man's eternal destiny - heaven or hell, salvation or damnation - depends solely on his response to this love.

The Kingdom of Heaven [\(Top\)](#)

When Christ will come in glory at the end of the ages, and God will be all in all, then will come the new heaven and new earth foretold by the prophet Isaiah and described in the book of Revelation. (*cf. Isaiah 65:17-66:24*)

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them; He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

And He who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also He said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water without price from the fountain of the water of life. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son. But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." (Revelation 21:1-8)

Behold I am coming soon, bringing my recompense to repay everyone for what he has done. (Revelation 22:12)

To gain the "heritage" of the New Jerusalem is the whole meaning of life, the sole purpose of man's being created by God. **"He who conquers shall have this heritage."** And as St. Paul has said simply, **"We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us."** (*Romans 8:37*)

For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans

8:38-39)

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father' from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory He may grant you to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
(Ephesians 3:14-19)*

To be "**filled with all the fullness of God**" - this, and this alone, is what Orthodox spirituality is about.