

ARE WE "SAVED" OR "BEING SAVED"?

Most of us at one time or another have been stopped by a "born again" Christian and asked that immortal question, "Are you saved?" It seems we're never quite sure how to answer. So we mumble a response, certain that the questioner is convinced that we'll be burning eternally in Hell! To make it easier to answer their questions from the Orthodox point of view, we offer the following:

We know both from the Bible and from experience that the world, and all that is in it, is *not* what it was meant to be. God created a Good World, and He made man in His "image and likeness." But we know that we are not "like God" any more. We do not love as He loves. We are not as kind, patient, forgiving and generous as our Creator. And try as we might, we find it impossible to change ourselves by "will-power." St. Paul wrote that the good things he knows he ought to do, he never does, while the wrong things he shouldn't do are the very things he finds himself doing (Romans 7:19-24). And as we all know, just "trying harder" isn't enough, because we are fighting "not against human enemies but against spiritual powers, against authorities and powers of darkness, against super-human forces of evil in the heavens." (Ephesians 6:12) St. Paul himself writes that he has not yet won this battle, even after his baptism. He urges Christians to "fight" like soldiers, to "run" like athletes (2 Timothy 2:4-6). He says that he has not yet reached perfection but that he presses on, reaching out for what lies ahead, so that he might "win the prize" (Philippian 3:8-14). The Bible teaches that being saved is a process that begins with our baptism, but that is only the beginning! After baptism, we are called to grow, to become nothing less than holy (see 1 Peter 1:16; 2 Corinthians 7:1). The battle against the powers of Evil starts at baptism but continues throughout our life. So we must "take up God's armour, buckle on the belt of Truth, the coat of iron integrity. Let the shoes on your feet be the Gospel of peace to give to you firm footing, and take up the great shield of faith, salvation for a helmet and for a sword, the words that come from God. Give yourselves completely to prayer . . . keep watch and persevere" (Ephesians 6:10-18).

In this struggle God Himself, by His Grace, gives us direct help and support. This is why He founded His Church, which will never be conquered by the power of Evil (Matthew 16:18). In the Church we receive forgiveness of sins through confession (1 John 1:9; John 20:22-23) and direct contact, communion with God who said, "He who eats my Body and drinks my Blood lives in me and I in him," and who also said, "Unless you eat my Body and drink my Blood, you have no Life in you." (John 6:53, 56). Orthodox

Christians do not speak of being "saved" as if this were something already accomplished. For us, salvation means "growing to the fullness of the stature of Christ" to attain to the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19). We are in the process of being saved, by freely accepting the gifts God has given us in Christ, through His Church, by cooperating with God in growing to become like Him once again. Salvation means more than being pardoned. It means waging spiritual war by prayer, fasting, alms, repentance, confession, reading Scripture, good deeds and receiving the Holy Sacraments. Being saved is the goal of our life as Orthodox Christians.

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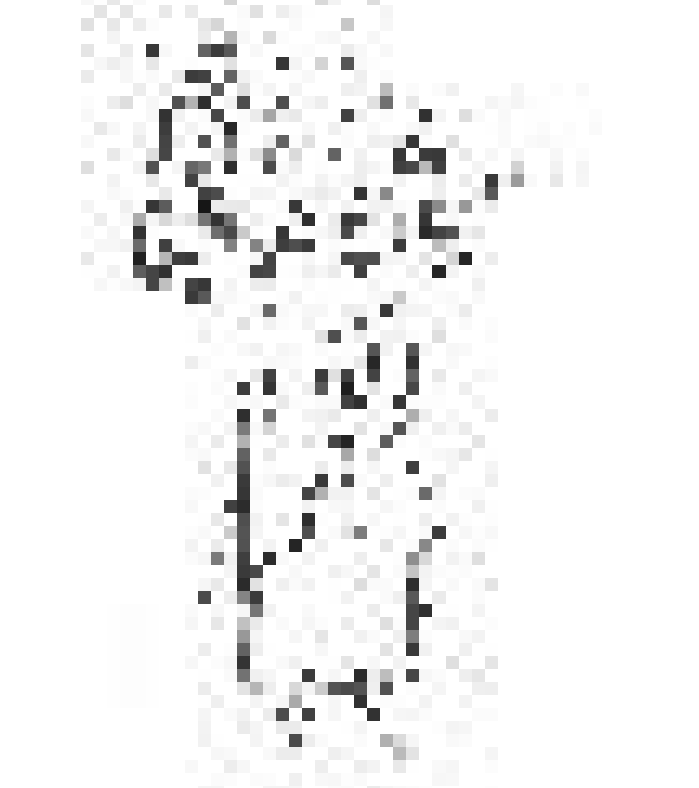
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