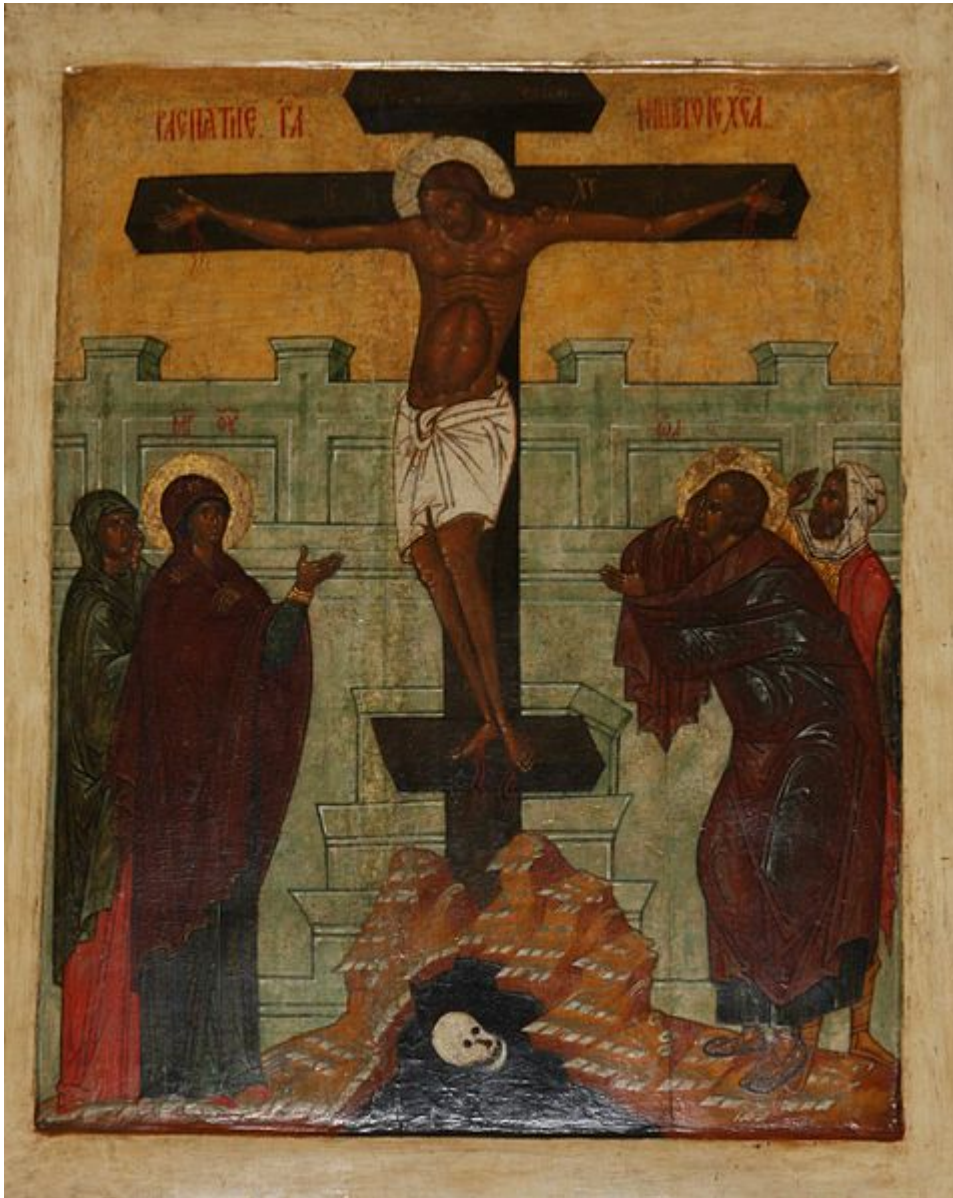


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## On the Presuppositions of our Personal Salvation

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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*Inquirer:* Father, earlier you spoke about our personal salvation. Can you tell me more about this?

Elder Cleopa: Some religious confessions teach that personal salvation presupposes the action of Divine Grace alone, according to Calvin, or the grace of

faith, i.e. of trust in God, according to Luther, by which the merits or virtues of our Lord Jesus Christ are conferred upon man. Therefore, to give a general outline, there are Protestant Christians who believe that salvation stems only from faith and that on the part of man himself there is placed no condition or requirement for his salvation.

Our Church, however, teaches that our personal salvation is neither a gift, nor a [simple work](#), but rather a process and an undertaking that matures or develops gradually and is realized in the co-operation of two persons: God and man. On the part of God, Divine Grace (His uncreated Divine Energy) is offered to us, while for man's part, faith and righteous deeds are necessary. Consequently, the prerequisites for our personal salvation are the following: the Divine Grace or uncreated Divine Energy of God and the faith and virtuous deeds of man.

Our objective salvation is realized only in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, whereas our personal or subjective salvation, which in the language of the New Testament is called righteousness, holiness, or salvation (in the narrow sense), is realized as a continuance of this objective salvation, with our personal energy or activity acting in co-operation with Divine Energy or Grace.

On the part of God, Divine Grace is absolutely necessary, for we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, and we are justified by His grace, redeemed in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:23-24). For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Philp. 2:13). For by grace are ye saved through faith, and not that of yourselves: it is the [gift](#) of God – not by works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath beforehand ordained, that we should walk in them (Eph. 2: 8-10).

From this it is clear that divine Grace is necessary for our personal salvation. This truth is also evident in the words of the Lord: I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (Jn. 15: 5-7).

Hence, the Grace of God is for us the fluid that runs from vine to the vine branch. On the part of man, saving and actualized faith is necessary, i.e. faith which worketh by love (Gal. 5:6). Without this contribution of mans, salvation is not held out for any man. Conscious faith in God, without good deeds, the demons, too, possess, for they also believe and tremble (Jas. 2:19). Holy Scripture itself makes clear that good works are necessary for salvation. Holy Scripture is filled with

passages which refer to good deeds as a necessary prerequisite of our salvation (Mat. 25:34, Jn. 5:29, Rom. 2:6-13, 2 Cor. 5:10, Jas. 2:14-26, Rev. 20:12, and others).

*Inq.:* I have gathered from different discussions I have had with representatives of various confessions that they are of the opinion that divine Grace operates by force and irresistibly. For them, it is not possible to speak at all of freedom, nor of a certain worthiness of man in whatever pertains to his salvation. It is said that this is apparent from the parable of the Lord: And the Lord said unto the servant, go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled (Lk. 14:23). Elsewhere the Lord also said: No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (Jn. 6:44). It is claimed that with this meaning in mind the Apostle Paul says the following: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). It would seem clear from all of these citations that there does not, in fact, exist freedom of will and that God alone, independent of our disposition, grants salvation.

EC: Holy Scripture teaches us clearly that man is created by God free and self-governing, that is, with freedom of will, as the Holy Spirit tells us: O Lord as with a shield of Thy good pleasure hast thou crowned us (Ps. 5:13). Elsewhere it says, He Himself made man from the beginning, and left him in the hand of his counsel, (Eclus. 15:14) and again, He hath set fire and water before thee: stretch forth thy hand unto whichever thou wilt (Eclus. 15:16). Furthermore, in another place in Holy Scripture it is said: Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; a blessing if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God (Dt. 11: 26-27). And further on it is said: See, I have set before thee this day life and death, good and evil ... I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live (Dt. 30: 15, 19).

The freedom of the will of man, as well as the dependence of salvation upon his freedom, appears more clearly from the words of the Saviour Himself. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! (Mat. 23:37, Lk. 11:20) Whereas to the rich young man He said, If thou wilt enter into Life, keep the commandments (Mat. 19:17, Heb. 4:11, Rom. 2:4).

Through the mouth of His prophet Isaiah, God says the following: If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land. But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall

be devoured with the sword (Isa. 1: 19-20). And again to the rich young man He says, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me (Mat. 19:21).

In all of these passages it is positively obvious that God fashioned man with freedom of will and does not compel the will of anyone to draw nigh to salvation. For if the will of man is coerced into accepting salvation then any compensation in the future life would be meaningless. Likewise, God would cease to be the just judge the Holy Scriptures customarily refer to Him as being. If our salvation is accomplished without our personal will then that which the great Apostle Paul says would be incomprehensible to us: For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). And likewise, Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour (1 Cor. 3:8).

*Inq.:* Fair enough, but I still have serious doubts. Isn't it possible that God, from before the ages, determined the fate of each one of us? In other words, some are to be saved and some to be punished, analogous with the decisions rendered from time immemorial, out of His sovereign pre-ordination for each one of us? The following words of the Apostle Paul appear to support this opinion.

For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour? (Rom.9: 11-21).

The same Apostle says elsewhere,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with

all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. (Eph. 1: 3-4).

From this it seems evident that salvation is offered according to the decision of God from before the ages. For the Apostle says likewise elsewhere: But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:13-14). Furthermore, the following is written in another passage: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory (1 Cor. 2:7). And elsewhere it is said: what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it? (1 Cor. 4:7). For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). Hence, consequently the problem is posited as follows: No one is saved except those who were pre-elected and predestined by God from before the ages. Man in this life follows the lot proscribed for him by God without the possibility of changing or replacing it.

EC: Holy Scripture contains within it unanswerable passages or, as Saint Gregory of Nyssa puts it, strong bones. Some would like to break these bones of Scripture with their wisdom teeth as of yet still only suitable for sucking milk. However, such a thing they would never be able to manage. All who have desired to plunge into the depths of Scripture have drowned in the fathomless ocean that is the wisdom of God. Such was the portion shared by Origen, Arius, Macedonius, Nestorius, Sabellius, Dioscorus, Eutyches and all the other chiefs of the ancient heresies who have been swallowed up in the unfathomable sea of Holy Scripture. The profundity and depth of Scripture was not the cause of their fall and drowning, but rather they themselves were the cause, due to their own insufficiencies, of being drowned in the depths of the mysteries of the Scriptures.

Holy Scripture is like a fountain or an endless spring, of the wisdom of God in which we must be steeped and partake in accordance with our level of wisdom and spiritual maturity. Just as we take water from the well with a bucket, empty it into our pitcher and then into our glass in order to quench our body's thirst, so must we also do with our spiritual thirst when we are urged to drink of the deepest ocean of wisdom, the Holy Scriptures. Thus, spiritually speaking, if we draw more water from the well of Scripture than is drinkable (out of desire for the purity of our intellect (νοῦς) and heart), due to our pride and inquisitiveness we will be destroyed in our

attempt to grasp the incomprehensible with our limited human faculties. If, for example, we were to see a child from the first grade trying to learn and to teach others that which is taught at the university, how much laughter and amusement would it provoke in us! The same and worse happens to those who desire to scrutinize and unravel the incomprehensible mysteries of the Scriptures with an intellect inexperienced and unenlightened by the Holy Spirit.

The divine Prophets and Apostles, as well as the holy Fathers of the Church, while by the purity of their lives attaining to the simplicity and innocence of infants, at the same time also, on account of their wisdom, became as perfect spiritual men (Eph. 4:13). Nevertheless, they were never so bold as to delve into the impenetrable mysteries of the wisdom of God. Before these elevated notions and expressions they remained as if enraptured saying, How great are Thy works, O Lord, exceeding deep are Thy thoughts, (Ps. 91:6) and Great is our Lord, and great is His strength, and of His understanding there is no measure (Ps. 146:5). Still further, in another place, it is said: Hast thou not known? Hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding (Is. 40:28). Listen also to the vessel of election, the Apostle Paul, as he says with wonderment; O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? (Rom. 11: 33-34).

You understand, therefore, my friend, that this fathomless depth of the wisdom of God cannot be approached by any intellect among His creatures, neither those found in the heavens, nor those on earth. Much more difficult is it for those who, without purifying their intellect (νοῦς) and heart from the passions, and being bereft also of divine enlightenment, presume on their own to penetrate the unbounded abyss of the Scriptures.

My dearest to Christ, earlier you referred me to certain passages that appeared to you to underscore a type of absolute predestination for man, however, the truth of things is entirely otherwise.

The first passage refers to the call of man toward the grace and righteousness which is in Christ Jesus (Rom. 9: 11-21). The Apostle desires with this example to illustrate that the call and righteousness of men do not depend on the works of the law but on the goodness of God Who calls by His Grace all men to salvation, both Jews and Gentiles (see above: Rom. 9: 22-24). Without the grace of God, men are powerless to accomplish anything with regards to their salvation. Here the Apostles is underscoring the importance of the presupposition of our objective salvation or

sanctification (i.e. the salvation of the race of man collectively), without repeating again the personal presupposition: the freedom of man in co-operation with the grace of God, with faith and good works.

Furthermore, in no sense is it maintained that the foreknowledge of God exists as a basis for the predetermination of the soul or the predestination of each one of us. This is unstated yet implicit when the Apostle says that there are those whom God chastens and hardens since they had become instruments of wrath, God tolerating them with forbearance. God perceives everything in advance and is not dependent upon the passing of time to know that between the two sons of Isaac one would be the conveyor of His messianic promise. Thus, it is nothing to marvel at when He says: Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.

If it is said that God has mercy on whomever He wishes and punishes whomsoever He wishes, then we must ask: Upon whom does God want to show mercy and upon whom does He desire to inflict punishment? If He loves him that He has predetermined for salvation, who in this life would be evil? Likewise, if He punishes those who reject Him, who in this life would be good? Or does God want certain among the good to become evil and certain among the evil to become good, without any righteous judgement or requital? Yet, in this case, where is righteousness? Where is equity or impartiality? Where is wisdom and all of the other attributes of God? Not even among men is it possible for such things to occur, and yet even when men are given over to arbitrariness it is a tragedy and setback.

As for the other passages you cited, they do not refer to some type of categorical predestination of the eternal life of the soul, but rather to the election or call of the soul to the Christ-sent grace. The call or election of the soul is not based on its worth or virtue but rather solely on the goodness of God. This invitation is not expressed and offered to a few, as is maintained by the followers of unqualified predestination, but rather to every human being, since the Apostle is speaking only in the plural and thereby showing that it is not that some are preferred and especially invited in the sense of predestination.

It is with this understanding that the Apostle Paul says: For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself as a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2: 3-6). If from this text we wanted to expound an unconditional predestination for the heavenly majesty, a predestination of this sort would have to be understood according to the letter and spirit of the text, i.e. as unrestricted and unbounded. However, this would mean that salvation comes

automatically to everyone, and it is well known that it does not. Furthermore, the very followers of predestination themselves maintain that the number of the predestined for salvation is restricted.

The truth is that Christ has brought salvation to everyone, something theologians have labelled general (or objective) salvation. And yet, everyone does not actualize this objective salvation, only those who seek and pursue it. While objective salvation is granted to every human being, subjective or personal salvation depends on the intent of man. Those who desire to be saved and work toward that goal receive divine Grace as their aide and guide. This Grace does not work in us violently; rather it abides with us perennially as a specific offering for the work of our salvation. Subsequently, it is not possible for us to speak of an unconditional predestination and its inadequate presuppositions for salvation. The truth concerning the predestination, fate and life of man can be summed up as follows.

A. Holy Scripture speaks often of a kind of predestination that carries with it the meaning of *pre-knowledge*. At times it is spoken of directly, being referred to variously as foreknowledge and predestination, (Acts 2:23 Rom. 8:29) the counsel of His will, (Eph. 1:11) the mystery which hath been hid from the ages, and the book of life (Col. 1:26, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 20:15, Lk. 10:20)

This predetermination is based on the life and works of man, which are plainly evident to our All-knowing God. Indeed, Holy Scripture speaks precisely: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. Moreover those whom he predestined, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified (Rom. 8:28-30).

We know also that at the future judgement there will be specific criteria upon which all will be judged. No one will be judged arbitrarily for that judgement will be righteous and unprejudiced. The Apostle says, For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in his body, according to what he hath done, whether it be good or bad (2 Cor. 5: 10, 1 Cor. 3:8). But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully (2 Cor. 9:6).

Furthermore, Holy Scripture sets forth this teaching with more clarity in other ways. It is often repeated that God does not want the death of any sinner, that He is not willing that any should perish, (2 Pet. 3:9, Eph. 4:6, Rom. 3:29) that all are called to salvation, and that God gave His grace to overflowing (Mat. 28:19, Rom. 10:18),



precisely there where sin abounded, in order to provide all men with the possibility of salvation. All of this would be made a lie if the number of the chosen were in fact limited.

B. History certifies with all of the Church Fathers and theologians of great authority, together with the entirety of Holy Tradition and its incontestable substantiating elements, that the teaching on divine foreknowledge has always existed within the Church.

- Saint Irenaeus (+202 AD) says: God who knows everything has made ready the proper dwelling: for to those who seek after and yearn for the unapproachable light God in His goodness grants them that light.

- Saint John Chrysostom (+407 AD) says: God has not foreordained us for salvation only out of love, but also on account of our good deeds, because if this (salvation) were dependent only upon our good works then the coming of Christ and everything which He has effected for our salvation would be as though unnecessary.

- Saint Hilary (+367 AD) writes similarly: That which God foresaw, He also foreordained.

- Blessed Jerome (+420 AD) writes: For that which God knew would happen in the life of His Son, that He also permitted (preordained) for His Son.

- Saint Ambrose (+397 AD) says: God did not predetermine without seeing first that which He foreknew. Likewise, in those whom He foresaw worthiness, to those He also preordained a spiritual reward.

*Inq.:* If grace is always necessary for salvation, whatever the case, and if salvation is a gift of God given with grace, do we have a part in the working out of our salvation?

EC: Yes, we certainly do have a part to play but grace is also necessary for our salvation, for man cannot be saved on his own. We are not like logs or stones with which God does whatever He likes.

If grace were to work on its own – indifferent to us – it would mean that we would walk to our salvation without our will. In this case if some are lost to perdition they would not be to blame, but rather grace would be responsible since it did not compel them to be saved. This teaching, as we have said previously, is not a teaching of the Church but of the Calvinists who have themselves termed it unconditional election or predestination. According to this teaching, God decided from before the ages to save certain men and destroy others. This He does in

accord with His liking, not according to the way man would work but through His grace – grace that He decided to give in order to save some. To a few Grace is given – grace that compels them to work according to His will – while to others grace is withheld. Such is the teaching of the Calvinists.

*Inq.:* And the teaching of the Orthodox Church is different from that?

EC: Previously, I showed you the Church's teaching clearly enough and at quite some length, and yet I will add for you also the following: God our Saviour will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Grace does not compel anyone. Men have the God-given freedom to accept it and to work with it or to reject it. Those who embrace it are saved and those who withdraw from it are lost. Guard well, my son, that which you have heard that you may be illumined by it and believe as a true Orthodox Christian.

Ch.13 from [\*The Truth of Our Faith: A Discourse from Holy Scripture on the Teachings of True Christianity\*](#), by Elder Cleopa of Romania (Greece: [Uncut Mountain Press](#), 2000). Order from [Uncut Mountain Supply](#).

*by Elder Cleopa of Romania*

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