

active element, one of definite, positive actions. Wherever saving faith is spoken of in the Holy Scriptures, we always encounter definite acts. Just as in everyday life we want a car mechanic who doesn't merely know the theory but how to apply that knowledge in practice; likewise, God expects of us not an abstract faith, but one that is living and active. Indeed, the mere knowledge of religious truth, without a corresponding way of life, does not profit a man, but actually incurs even greater condemnation (see Luke 12:47; and Romans 2:13).

*A Christian's faith must include a sincere desire to become a different and better person. This demands interior effort, self-examination, repentance, a change in one's way of life,* so that our faith may shine brightly: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16).

#### What Should We Strive Towards?

**T**he question of whether people are saved by faith or by works is framed in the wrong way, because the soul's salvation cannot be separated from its moral and spiritual condition. The Son of God came to earth to restore to man a harmony among his thoughts, feelings and acts, and thus to reunite man with Himself. Faith cannot be set up in opposition to works. They should be united, as are the soul and body of a living human being. The more a man practices virtue, the stronger his faith grows, and the stronger his faith, the more virtuous his life will be. The two support each other.

God does not need either the bare acceptance of His existence or the mechanical performance of certain acts. He loves us so much that He offered His Only-begotten Son as a sacrifice for our redemption. What could be greater than such love? It follows that we ought to respond to God not with half-hearted love, but with a whole-hearted love which encompasses our hearts and our lives.

To sum up the essence of Christianity, St. Peter writes to believers:

"...as His divine power [i.e. God's grace] has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness ... giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:3, 5-8).

How can one gain self-control without fasting, or be kind and charitable without giving aid to the needy? Clearly, to be virtuous in soul requires a life of practicing virtue. As St. Peter further writes, "For he who lacks these things is short-sighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins" (2 Peter 1:9). The Apostle Peter thus combines the most important elements of Christianity: personal effort and the assistance of God's grace, a virtuous life and progressive improvement of the soul.

Of course, all this requires time and patience, as the Apostle Paul teaches:

Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all... (Galatians 6:9-10). Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (Romans 12:11)

In vain have non-Orthodox writers argued about how a man is saved. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love" (Galatians 5:6). Any Christian who does not work to better his or her soul is wasting the grace they have received, without any profit. As our Lord said, "...he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matthew 12:30).

From online version at <http://www.fatheralexander.org>  
**ST PATRICK RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH**  
Corner Way Street and Brooklyn Tce, Kilburn SA 5084  
[www.stpatrickrocor.com](http://www.stpatrickrocor.com) ph. 0466 720 088

## Works or Faith?

*Archbishop Alexander (Mileant)*

**T**he age-old dispute still rages. Each of the warring sides has dug itself deeply into its position and will not give even an inch. Roman Catholics assert that salvation is based on one's merits. Not only can a man make up for his sins by his acts and works, he can even acquire a surplus of merit, which can be used by others. In support of their position, Roman Catholics advance those passages of Scripture which speak of the necessity of good works; for example:

...we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians. 2:10). I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works (Titus 3:8).

Rejecting this doctrine, Protestants teach that all are saved by the merits of the Saviour alone. The gifts of forgiveness of sins and eternal life are obtained by faith alone, which is fully sufficient for salvation. There is no need for good works, ascetic labours or moral perfection: Only believe and you are saved.

To support the correctness of their idea they cite, among other texts, the words of the Apostle Paul:

Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, ... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe ... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Romans 3:21, 22, 28).

... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ ... and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. (Galatians 2:16).

Since both sides find support in Holy Scripture, which is right? Ordinary Christians who listen to the

arguments of both sides might even be led to doubt the truthfulness of Sacred Scripture. They might think that perhaps the Apostles did not fully understand Christ's teaching, or that they had been unable to express His teaching with sufficient clarity or even, perhaps, that someone meddled the Scriptures.

### An Explanation of Terms

**R**eally, there are no contradictions in the Scriptures. The whole dispute among the non-Orthodox arises from a misunderstanding. For them the question of salvation is reduced from the spiritual and moral sphere to the level of formal juridical (legal) categories. Salvation is understood not as the renewal of a sinful soul, or as the acquisition of righteousness, but rather as the result of a person satisfying certain conditions: whether good works (as with the Roman Catholics) or faith (as with the Protestants). If someone violates the required conditions he cannot be saved.

In fact, *the salvation or perdition of a person is the result of the moral state of his or her soul.* Paradise is not simply a place, but also the state or condition of a soul that has been renewed. *Christ came to earth not to move us into better living conditions, but rather to give us spiritual rebirth, to heal us of the corruption of sin, to restore to us the beauty of the image of God, and to make us children of God.* “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Since the moral condition of the soul depends on the inclination of the will, a man must use force to fix his heart (cf. Luke 17:20; Matt. 11:12). This is why our doctrine of salvation cannot be considered on the level of what we have done or not done. *Salvation has to be regarded as a spiritual process, carried out by the grace of Christ with the active participation of the one who is being saved.* In some people this process is completed quite quickly, as with the wise thief who repented on the cross, while in others it takes place slowly and indirectly. What is spiritually

required varies with the individual, as does the level of spiritual perfection which he or she may reach. This is evident from the parables of the seed and the talents (Matthew 13:1–23; and 25:14–30).

In those texts concerning *justification by faith* which are cited by Protestants, the Apostle Paul's words are directed not against good works, as such, *but against the works of the law.* “The works of the law” is a very specific term, by which St. Paul refers to the ritual and ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic Law: its sabbaths and feasts, circumcision, washing and rites of purification, its scrupulous distinction between clean and unclean food, and finally its whole ponderous structure of ethnic religious customs which had been built up over the ages. Growing up with “the works of the law”, the Jews regarded their religion not as a force for moral regeneration, but rather as the sum total of all the requirements which had to be strictly observed in order to merit justification in the sight of God. The more one fulfilled the letter of the law, the greater his reward. St. Paul constantly battled against this way of thinking.

But St. Paul positively encouraged Christians to perform good works as the expression of a lively faith in God. For example, he writes:

As we have opportunity, let us do good to all (Galatians 6:10). For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Ephesians 2:10). Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. (1 Corinthians 10:31).

St. James states it more categorically: “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.” (James 4:17).

Thus, when we speak about works, *we must make a very important distinction between good works and the works of the law*, which have indeed lost all their importance in Christianity. *Good works are not quantities that can be weighed and measured. Their value lies not in their number but in the dedication with which they are done.* For example, the small coin of a poor widow was worth more in

God's eyes than the large sums which the wealthy were donating to the treasury of the Temple:

for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood (Mark 12:44).

Furthermore, the very same work can be accounted as good or bad, depending on the intention with which it is performed. The Pharisee of the Gospel parable spent much time in fasting and prayer, but he derived no benefit from them, because he acted to show off his good works to others; yet Anna the prophetess acquired the Holy Spirit by her fasting and prayer (Luke 2:36). Those sectarian Protestants who reject the fasts and prayers of the Church as being unnecessary should note the fact that this righteous woman, by her works of abstinence and prayer, obtained God's grace even at a time when grace was not yet accessible to men, since the Holy Spirit had not yet descended upon the Apostles (John 7:39).

Finally, the worth of good works lies not so much in the deeds themselves as in their manifestation of man's good qualities, his virtues. There is a definite correspondence to be noted here. *Every "work" or act that a person does leaves a discernible trace in their soul, whether positive or negative.* If these acts are continued more or less consistently, they gradually render a man virtuous or base. Thus, it is important to practice good works so as to acquire good habits (cf. Romans 12:12; 1 Timothy 4:16). For this reason the Gospel says, “Blessed are those who mourn .... Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness .... Blessed are the merciful .... Blessed are the peacemakers”—meaning that true happiness accrues to those who constantly and consistently do good.

Now let us try to clarify the essence of the concept of faith. When the Sacred Scriptures speak of the necessity of faith, they mean by this word not only an abstract, theoretical acknowledgement of certain truths of religion, but *the consent of one's will in submitting to God.* In other words, faith contains an