

Salvation in Christ: Freedom, Healing, and Union

“As long as man is quite weak from maltreatment by wicked tyranny he does not ward off the enemy by himself... Someone else fights on behalf of the weak... But when he has outgrown the stature of a child and laid hold of the vigor of youth, he fights with his opponents by himself, using as a general no longer Moses the servant of God, but God Himself.”

— St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* II.148

St. Gregory of Nyssa offers this beautiful image of salvation as a journey from **bondage to freedom**, from **immaturity to divine likeness**, and from **the shadow of the Law to life in Christ**. The story of Moses and the Israelites becomes an image of our own soul’s pilgrimage: from slavery to sin and death, through healing and renewal, to union with God Himself as our leader and life.

In the Orthodox understanding, salvation is not a single event or a legal transaction. It is a **process of transformation** in which Christ frees us, heals us, and unites us to Himself so that we may share in the very life of God. This process touches every part of who we are — our body, our soul, our mind, our desires, and our relationships.

1. Christ Frees Us from Death and Corruption

Humanity’s deepest problem is not merely guilt but **bondage** — slavery to sin, corruption, and death. In the beginning, humanity turned away from God, the Source of Life, and became subject to mortality and decay. Cut off from divine communion, our inner powers — reason, spirit, and desire — became disordered: our mind darkened, our zeal misdirected, our desires enslaved to the senses.

Christ came into the midst of this bondage. Through His **Cross and Resurrection**, He entered death voluntarily to destroy its power from within:

“Through death He destroyed him who has the power of death” (Heb. 2:14).

By dying without sin, Christ broke death’s dominion over human nature. By rising, He opened the way to eternal life. He is the new Moses who leads His people out of Egypt — out of slavery to the devil and into the promised land of freedom in the Spirit.

This is the **objective victory of salvation**: humanity, once enslaved, is now free. The enemy has been overthrown. Yet as Gregory of Nyssa says, we must still learn to fight alongside our new General — to enter personally into the freedom Christ has won.

2. Christ Heals Our Human Nature

If the Cross and Resurrection free us from the enemy, the **Incarnation** heals what was wounded. The Son of God took on our full humanity — body, soul, and mind — “that He might heal the whole by uniting it to Himself” (Gregory Nazianzen, *Or. 38.13*). In His human soul, Christ perfectly ordered the three powers that in us have been scattered by sin:

- His **reason** was illumined by divine wisdom.
- His **spirit** was perfectly obedient and meek.
- His **desire** was wholly directed toward the Father in love.

In Christ’s humanity, our humanity is restored. He becomes the **Divine Physician** who heals our nature from the inside, teaching the soul again how to think truly, love purely, and desire rightly. Salvation, therefore, is not only liberation from death but **the restoration of the image of God** in us — the harmonizing of our whole being so that we may live as we were created to live: in communion with the Holy Trinity.

3. Faith: The Soul’s “Yes” to the Divine Physician

The healing and victory of Christ are universal — but they must become **personal** through **faith**. Faith (πίστις) in the Orthodox sense is not mere belief, but the **trusting openness of the whole soul** to God’s saving work. It is our free cooperation (*synergia*) with grace.

- Faith heals our **reason**, freeing it from pride and falsehood, so that it may behold the truth of Christ.
- Faith strengthens our **spirit**, giving courage and peace in the midst of temptation.
- Faith awakens our **desire**, turning our longing for created things into love for the Creator.

Through faith, the soul says *yes* to the Divine Physician, allowing His healing to take root. Faith is both **the beginning of union** and **the gaze of love** that continues forever, even in eternity, as the soul looks into the infinite mystery of God.

4. Life in Christ: The Journey of Theosis

The Fathers describe salvation as a lifelong ascent — a passage from purification to illumination to union. Baptism, Chrismation, and the Eucharist make this reality sacramentally present:

- In **Baptism**, we die and rise with Christ, freed from the tyranny of death.

- In **Chrismation**, the Holy Spirit fills us with divine energy, healing and sanctifying the soul's powers.
- In the **Eucharist**, we partake of Christ's deified humanity, and our desire is satisfied with the Bread of Life.

As we live in this grace, the threefold division of the soul — reason, spirit, and desire — is gradually brought into harmony by the Spirit. What was once fragmented becomes whole. What was mortal becomes alive. What was earthly becomes divine.

This lifelong transformation is called **theosis** — deification. It is not the loss of our humanity, but its fulfillment. We become, by grace, what Christ is by nature: children of God, participants in the divine life.

5. The Goal: Union with God

Ultimately, salvation is not merely escape from punishment or the avoidance of death. It is **union with God** — a communion of love, participation in the divine life through Christ in the Spirit. As St. Gregory of Nyssa says, this union is an *eternal ascent*; even in the age to come, we shall always be growing in the knowledge and love of the Infinite God.

Thus, the story of salvation is the story of divine love:

- **Christ frees us** from slavery to death.
- **Christ heals us** from the wounds of sin.
- **Faith** opens our hearts to receive that healing.
- And **the Holy Spirit** makes us one with God, transforming our whole being in love.

“Faith is the beginning of union,
and love is the gaze by which we behold God forever.”