

SALVATION: Why be a Christian? From a Coptic Orthodox Perspective

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1. “What is the goal or purpose of the Christian life?”

- To escape from the corruption that entered into our world by sin.
- To live in the renewal of God’s image which is restored in us.
- To become in the likeness of God by His grace (*ομοιωσις θεω: homoiosis theo*).

2. “What key or typical scriptural resources, concepts, and practices, or doctrines characterize the process and end goal of salvation?”

DEFINING SALVATION:

- Our salvation depends on our unity with Christ and on becoming one in His Body.
- Our Lord Jesus Christ IS Salvation:
 - When Simeon the Elder held Christ in his arms, he said, “... **for my eyes have seen Your salvation...**” (*Luke 2:30*).
 - Isaiah the prophet also writes, “For YAH, the Lord, is my strength and song; He also has become my salvation” (*Isaiah 12:2*; compare *Psalms 118:14*).
 - Therefore, we pray and confess this faith that Christ is our Salvation in the Holy Week Doxology, “Thine is the power [...] my Lord Jesus Christ, my good Savior; the Lord, Who is Holy, is my strength, my praise, and **has become my salvation**”.

PROCESS:

- Salvation is **only** available **through the blood** of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
 - “[...] without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Heb 9:22**).
 - The Passover lamb was a symbol of our Lord, “For indeed **Christ, our Passover**, was sacrificed for us” (**1Cor 5:7**).
 - “This is My **blood of the new covenant** which is shed for many **for the remission of sins** ” (**Mt 26:28**).

Conditions for Salvation:

- Our Lord said that His blood is shed for **many (Mt 26:28)** but in reality only **few** are saved (**Mt. 7:13-14**).
- **Conditions (prerequisites) for salvation:**

1. Faith.
2. Saving Sacraments:
 - a. Baptism.
 - b. Confirmation.
 - c. Repentance & Confession.
 - d. Eucharist.
3. Good Works

- **Salvation is the story of the whole life:**

- St. Paul said that, “The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to **us who are being saved** it is the power of God” **(1Cor 1:18)**.
- Salvation in the Coptic Orthodox concept is seen as comprehending all of life; it is not a historical event that took place during a moment in the past.
- As the subject of salvation is addressed in Holy Scripture, the Coptic Orthodox Christian would see it in at least three aspects:
 - I believe that I **have been** saved, having put on our Lord Jesus Christ in baptism.
 - I believe that I **am being** saved, growing in our Lord Jesus Christ through the sacramental life of the Church.
 - I believe that I **will be** saved, by God’s mercy in the Last Day of Judgment.

- **The story of salvation starts by faith, repentance and baptism:**

- “He who believes and is baptized will be saved” **(Mk 16:16)**.
- “Repent, and let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” **(Acts 2:38)**, this remission includes the original sin as well as all actual sins committed before baptism. Baptism provides us with salvation, forgiveness and regeneration. In baptism we are buried with our Lord Jesus Christ **(Col 2:12)**, we die and rise with Him in the newness of life **(Rom 6:4)**, “Knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” **(Rom 6:6)**. Through baptism, we become children of God and members of His body (the Church). Moreover, St. Paul said, “As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” **(Gal 3:27)**.
- In the Sacrament of Confirmation, we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, “you have an anointing from the Holy One” **(1Jn 2:20)**, and we become a temple of the Holy Spirit, “do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God” **(1Cor 6:19)**. As a result of our response to the work of the Holy Spirit within us, we grow spiritually and bear the fruits of the Spirit **(Gal 5:22-23)**.

- Unfortunately, we still sin after being baptized and confirmed, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (**1Jn 1:18**).
- Through repentance and confession we are being saved, “Unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (**Lk 13:3, 5**), “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (**1Jn 1: 9**).
- Additionally, we obtain salvation during Holy Eucharist, as the priest says in the Divine Liturgy, “... given for us salvation, remission of sins and eternal life to those who partake of it”, “whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life” (**Jn 6:54**).

END GOAL:

- God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Gen 1:26).
 - ***The Church Fathers commented on this verse saying:***
 1. There is a theological difference between the term ‘in the image of God’ and ‘**the image** of God’. The Divine Logos is **alone** the image of God as St. Paul said, “He is the image of the invisible God” (**Col 1:15**), “Christ, who is the image of God” (**2 Cor 4:4**), “through whom He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person” (**Heb 1:3**).
 2. The Divine Logos is **alone** the image of God because He is of the same essence and Godhead; humans on the other hand were created **in** that image or **according to** that image of God.
- God revealed His will and said, “Let Us make man in **Our image**, according to **Our likeness**” (Gen 1:26). But when God actually created man, Holy Scripture said, “God created man in **His own image**” (Gen 1:27) and there was no mention of “**God’s Likeness**”!
 - Notice that (Gen 5:1) is translated “in the image of God” according to the Septuagint and the Coptic translations. This is different from KJ translation, which says “in the likeness of God”. The LXX terms are **eikon** (Gen 1:26, 27; 5:1, 3; 9:6) and **homoiosis** (Gen 1:26).
- Some of the Church Fathers concluded that the ‘likeness of God’ would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God, in eternal life. St. John said, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, **we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is” (**1 Jn 3:2**). St. Paul said, “Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly

body that it may be **conformed to His glorious body**" (Phil 3:22-21)

- The likeness of God is perfected in Eternal Life but we actually start this process here on earth through the Sacramental life of the Church and the working of the Holy Spirit and God's grace. St. Paul said, "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until **Christ is formed in you**" (Gal 4:19), "That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; ... that you may be **filled with all the fullness of God**" (Eph 3:14-19), "Till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, **to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**" (Eph 4:13), "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ **have put on Christ**" (Gal 3:27), "You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge **according to the image of Him who created him**" (Col 3:9-10), "**we have the mind of Christ**" (1 Cor. 2:16)
- **Deification:**
 - Deification is an ancient theological term used to describe the process by which a Christian becomes more like God. A distinction must be drawn between the idea of deification as "becoming God" (*theosis*) and as "becoming like God" (*homoiosis theo*).
 - **What Deification is not:**
 - becoming like God in His nature. "My glory (of the divinity) I will not give to another" (Is 42:8).
 - In (Jn 10:34), our Lord Jesus Christ, quoting (Ps 82:6) repeats the passage, "You are gods". The use of the word "god" here is not referring to divine nature. We are gods in that we bear His likeness, not His nature. Moreover, the same Holy Psalm says in the next verse, "You shall die like men and fall like one of the princes" (Ps 82:7)
 - **What Deification is:**
 - Deification means we are to **become more like God** through His **grace**.
 - Thus, those who are joined to Christ through Faith, Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist begin a re-creation process, being renewed in God's image and likeness. We become as St. Peter writes, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4)
- H.H. Pope Shenouda III explained this in his book '*Many years with people's questions*' part II, q.27, p. 55-57:
 - A hypostatic (personal) union between the divine nature and a human nature only took place in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ;

- The divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ is undermined by two ways:
 1. Belittling our Lord and claiming that He was created → *Arianism*.
 2. Exalting creatures (humans) to His Divine Level → *Pantheism*.
- In the Christian life, we partake of the divine virtues and not the essence of the Godhead. He therefore shows us the way by saying in the same verse, "... having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (1 Pet 1:4).

3. "What is the historical context informing this articulation of salvation?"

- This articulation of salvation is rooted in the first century Christian Church and documented in the birth of the church and its life as recorded in the book of Acts.
- The Church Tradition (*Tradition is the life of the church with all its practice as our Lord has delivered once for all to the apostles and the latter to faithful disciples*)
 - The Coptic word is: "**Nietantitou-etoutou**".
 - The Greek word is: "**Paradosis**" (**παραδοσις**)"
 - Which means from "hand to hand" or "hand delivery"
 - **2 Timothy 2:2** "And the things that you have heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."
 - "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." **Jude 1:3**
- The Tradition includes all facts about the Christian faith written in:
 - The Holy Bible (as the main reference)
 - The Didascalia and the teachings of the Apostles
 - Canons of the Canonical councils
 - All the rest of the verbal Apostolic teachings that exists in the church and in the sayings and writings of the early church fathers.
- Also all the rituals used in worship established in the church since the early centuries. The church Tradition: is the dogmatic and ritualistic teachings, which can be traced back to the Apostles who received it from Christ Himself.
 - **1 Corinthians 11:23** "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread".
 - Process & goal of salvation embodied in the Liturgical Worship:
 - In the prayer before the gospel, the priest says "For You are the life of us all, the salvation of us all, the hope of us all, the healing of us all and the resurrection of us all."

- In the liturgy of St. Basil, it recalls our fall since the Garden of Eden and God's plan for our salvation. Laying out the actions of God to save us.
- The hymn of "Amen...Amen...Amen" (the Memorial Prayer):
 - The Memorial is an Eucharistic prayer includes proclamation of the history of our salvation; the divine saving plan for us.
 - This prayer starts with the memorial of our incarnation and fall. Then the priest declares the incarnation of the Son of God and His works for us, His Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension and His last Advent.
- *Saint Basil the Great wrote:*
"We say that we know the greatness of God, His power, His wisdom, His goodness, His providence over us, and the justness of His judgment, but not His very essence... The energies are diversified, and the essence simple, but we say that we know our God from His energies, but do not undertake to approach near to His essence. His energies come down to us, but His essence remains beyond our reach... So knowledge of the divine essence involves perception of His incomprehensibility, and the object of our worship is not that of which we comprehend the essence, but of which we comprehend that the essence exists."
(Saint Basil, *Letter to Amphilochius* 1,2 - Holy Apostles Convent, Dormition Skete. *The Orthodox New Testament: vol.2 Acts, Epistles, and Revelation*. Buena Vista, Colorado: 2nd Ed. 2000 p. 473.)

4. "How does your tradition understand and address the present time?" (What key scriptural references, concepts or doctrines characterize the world within which salvation occurs? When your tradition talks about the world in which salvation occurs, what scriptures, concepts, etc. does it reach for?)

- Our life on earth is a test of our faith, "Now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ" **(1Pet 1:6-7)**.
- Indeed, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" **(Acts 14:22)**.
- Moreover, we are subject to spiritual warfare, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12), "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a raring lion, seeking whom he may devour" **(1Pet 5:8)**.
- Our Lord said, "He who endures **to the end** will be saved" **(Mt 10:22)**, "He **who overcomes** shall inherit all things" **(Rev 21:8)**.

- St. Paul said, “Lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (**1Cor 9:27**), therefore, he also said, “Work out your salvation in fear and trembling” (**Phil 2:12**) and St. Peter exhorts us, “conduct yourselves throughout the time of your sojourning here in fear” (**1Pet 1:17**).
- The outcome of our life and struggle will be revealed in the last day, “...you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for **salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” (**1Pet 1:5**). Therefore, our Lord said, “Be faithful **until death**, and I will give you the crown of life” (**Rev 2:10**).
- Since the spiritual struggle and warfare takes up our whole life, therefore **salvation is indeed the story of the whole life**.

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