

St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Christian Cathedral • Los Angeles, California
Fall 2021 Adult Study:

Orthodox Christian Faith and Practice

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Dec. 1 Spirituality (Vol. IV pp. 16-143 new; Vol. IV pp. 8-30, 95-155 old)
Spirituality, Love and Prayer

What is Orthodox Christian Spirituality... It's about "doing"?

- Spirituality in the Orthodox Church means the everyday activity of life in communion with God. The term spirituality refers not merely to the activity of man's spirit alone, his mind, heart and soul, but it refers as well to the whole of man's life as inspired and guided by the Spirit of God.
- Every act of a Christian must be a spiritual act. Every thought must be spiritual, every word, every deed, every activity of the body, every action of the person.
- This means that all that a person thinks, says and does must be inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit so that the will of God the Father might be accomplished as revealed and taught by Jesus Christ the Son of God.

... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor 10.31).

Christian spirituality is centered in God

- To be what God wants us to be and to do what God want us to do is the sole meaning of our human existence. The fulfillment of the prayer "Thy will be done" is the heart and soul of all spiritual effort and activity.

I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy (Lev 11:44).

... as He who called you is holy, be holy yourself in all your conduct; since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:16).

- The teaching that man must be holy and perfect like God Himself through the accomplishment of the will of God is the central teaching of the Orthodox Christian faith.

*"Man is called to become by divine grace all that God Himself is by nature."
(Maximus the Confessor (7th c.)*

- God wills and helps His creatures to be like He is, and that is the purpose of their being and life.
 - As God is holy, man must be holy.

- As God is perfect, man must be perfect, pure, merciful, patient, kind, gentle, free, self-determining, ever-existing, and always, for eternity, the absolute superabundant realization of everything good in inexhaustible fullness and richness
- . . . so man must be this way as well, ever growing and developing in divine perfection and virtue for all eternity by the will and power of God Himself.
- The perfection of man is his growth in the unending perfection of God.

Christian spirituality is centered in Christ.

- Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God who was born as a man of the Virgin Mary in order to give man eternal life in communion with God His Father.

In Jesus Christ “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (Col 2.9).

- When one sees and knows Jesus, one sees and knows God the Father (Jn 8.19, 14.7–9). When one is in communion with Jesus, one is in abiding union with God (Jn 17, Eph 2, Rom 8, 1 Jn 1).
- The goal of human life is to be continually “in Christ.” When one is “in Christ,” according to Saint John, one does God’s will and cannot sin.

Jesus Christ is “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14.6).

- He speaks the words of God. He does the work of God. The person who obeys Christ and follows His way and does what He does, loves God and accomplishes His will. To do this is the essence of spiritual life.
- Jesus has come that we may be like Him and do in our own lives, by His grace, what He Himself has done.

Spiritual life is life in and by the Holy Spirit of God.

- A person can abide in Christ, accomplish His commandments and be in communion with God the Father only by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in his life.

If you love Me [says Christ], you will keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you (Jn 14.15–17).

When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. . . . He will glorify Me, for He will take what is Mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is Mine . . . (Jn 16.12–15).

- The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and is sent into the world through Christ so that human persons can fulfill God’s will in their lives and be like Christ.
- The spiritual fathers of the Orthodox Church say that the Holy Spirit makes people to be “christs,” that is, the “anointed” children of God.

. . . God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us. . . . Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to Him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through His Spirit which dwells in you . . . for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God (Rom 5.5, 8.1ff; cf. 1 Cor 2, 6, 12–14; Gal 5).

- It is the classical teaching of the Orthodox Church, made popular in recent times by Saint Seraphim of Sarov (19th c.), that the very essence of Christian spiritual life, the very essence of life itself, is the “acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God.” Without the Holy Spirit, there is no true life for man.

Man is the Temple of God's Spirit

In the scriptures it says that God breathed into man, the “breath [or spirit] of life” (Gen 2.7). This divine teaching has given rise to the understanding in the Orthodox Church that man cannot be truly human, truly himself, without the Spirit of God.

“Man is body, soul, and Holy Spirit.” (St Irenaeus – 3rd c.)

- This means that for man to fulfil himself as created in the image and -likeness of God—that is, to be like Christ who is the perfect, divine, and uncreated Image of God—man must be the temple of God's Spirit.
- If man is not the temple of God's Spirit, then the only alternative is that he is the temple of the evil spirit. There is no middle way.
- Man is either in an unending process of life and growth in union with God by the Holy Spirit, or else he is an unending process of decomposition and death by returning to the dust of nothingness out of which he was formed, by the destructive power of the devil. This is how the Orthodox spiritual tradition interprets the “two ways” of the Mosaic law:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse, therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord, obeying His voice and cleaving to Him, for that means life to you (Dt 30.19–20).

It is this same teaching that the Apostle Paul gives in his doctrine of the “two laws” at work in the life of man.

For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. . . . For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom 7.14–8.17).

- Christian spiritual life depends on the conscious choice of the “way of life.” To “choose life” and to walk in the “way of life” is the way that man shows himself to be in the image and likeness of God.

The Nature of Sin

To be unrighteous and to do wrong is to sin. Original Greek meaning is “missing the mark.”

Scriptural Expressions of Sin and their Implications

Fall	Movement down and away from an original high and lofty state.
Stain	There was once an original purity that has been defiled.
Transgression	Movement against that which is primarily right.
Guilt	Reveals prior innocence.
Estrangement	Indicates one was first “at home” living in a wholesome condition.
Deviation	One has gone off his original way.

- Man’s being and life are naturally positive and good.
- Evil and sin are parasites on that which is primarily perfect and whole.
- Sin is not considered normal or natural.
- To be truly human is to be righteous, pure, truthful and good.

Spiritual life, in this sense, consists of only one thing: not to sin. Not to sin is to be like God and His Son Jesus Christ. It is the goal of human life.

Not to sin is the goal of human life. But in fact all people do sin. It is for this reason that the possibility to be freed from sin and to overcome sin comes through the saving work of Christ, who forgives the sins of the world.

If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the expiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. ...by this we may be sure that we are in Him: he who says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked (1 Jn 1.8–2.6).

God is Love

Man’s love has its origin in God. God’s love always comes first. Men are to love God and one another because God Himself has loved first.

When the world became sinful and dead, “God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son . . . not to condemn the world, but to save the world” (Jn 3.16, 12.47).

But God shows His love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us (Rom 5.8).

God's love for man and His world in Christ is given in the Holy Spirit. This love is the first and greatest "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5.22), "for God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5.5).

Thus God who is Love enters into union with man through the Son of His love by the Spirit of love. To live in this divine love is the spiritual life.

The Church understands four types of love:

Agape	The action of perfect goodness for the sake of the other. This is the most basic meaning of love: to do everything possible for the well-being of others. God Himself has this love as the very content of His being and life, for "God is agape." It is with this love that spiritual persons must love first of all.
Eros	Erotic love is no sin when it is free from sinful passions. It can be the utterly pure desire for communion with the other, including God. All spiritual writers have insisted that such love should exist between God and man as the pattern for all erotic love in the world between husband and wife. Thus the mystical writers and spiritual fathers have used the Old Testament's Song of Songs as the poetic image of God's love for man and man's love for God.
Philia	The third type of love is friendship—phila. This also should exist between man and God. Man has no greater friend than God, and God Himself wants to be man's friend. According to the scriptures, the very purpose of the coming of Christ was to dispel all enmity between God and man, and to establish the co-working of Creator and creature in the fellowship of friendship. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants [or slaves], for the servant does not know what his master is doing. But I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father, I have made known to you (Jn 15: 13–15).
Storge	or familial love, refers to natural or instinctual affection, such as the love of a parent towards offspring and vice versa.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength. This is the first and great -commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets (Mt 22.37–40, Mk 12.30–31, Lk 10.27, Lev 19.18). There is no commandment greater than these (Mk 12.31).

A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13.34).

Personal Prayer

- All the virtues and powers of God are attained primarily by prayer.
- Without prayer there is no spiritual life.
- Prayer must be in secret (“go into your room”):
 - Literally closed off from others
 - Or – Enter within yourself, praying secretly in your mind and heart at all times
- God knows the needs of His people.
 - Man prays in order to unite his mind and heart with God.
 - He prays in order that God’s will would be done in his life.
 - He prays so that whatever he needs from God would be given.
 - He prays so that he would consciously and with full awareness express the fact that all that he is, has and does is dependent on God.
 - It is man who needs to pray. It is not God who needs man’s prayers.
- True Christian prayer must be brief.
 - It must be simple and regular.
 - It must not be many-worded.
- Every prayer directed to God in faith is answered.
 - This does not mean that what is asked is always given, for God knows better than the person who prays what is good for him.
 - For this reason the spiritual teachers warn man against being too long and insistent in his concrete demands of the Lord.
 - It is always best to pray: “Give what is needed, O Lord. Thy will be done.”

Liturgical Prayer

- Liturgical prayer is not simply the prayers of individual Christians joined into one. It is not a corporate “prayer service” of many persons together. It is rather the official prayer of the Church formally assembled; the prayer of Christ in the Church, offering His “body” and “bride” to the Father in the Spirit.
- It is the Church’s participation in Christ’s perpetual prayer in the presence of God in the Kingdom of heaven (cf. Heb 7.24–25, 9.24). The model of liturgical prayer is in the book of Revelation, and not in the gospel events of Jerusalem or Galilee.
- In the Orthodox Church there is no tradition of corporate prayer which is not liturgical.
- When a person participates in the liturgical prayer of the Church, he can only do so effectively to the extent that he prays by himself, at home, and in his own mind and heart. The one who “prays without ceasing” is the one who offers and receives most in liturgical prayer.

The Lord's Prayer

In heaven	He is everywhere and over all things.
Hallowed be Thy name	God's name is holy and should be treated with respect and devotion.
Thy Kingdom come	<p>A prayer for the end of the ages. Christians want this so that God's Kingdom would fill all creation with divine glory and life.</p> <p>Also</p> <p>The invocation of the Holy Spirit to come upon us and cleanse us and dwell within us.</p>
Thy will be done	The person who prays must be ready to obey, whatever the consequences.
Daily bread	<p>Speaks to all of our bodily needs and whatever we require to sustain our lives in this world.</p> <p>Also</p> <p>Because it literally says our "essential" or "super-essential" bread, is often understood in the spiritual sense to mean the nourishment of our souls by the Word of God, Jesus Christ who is the "Bread of Life;" the "Bread of God which has come down from heaven and given life to the world".</p>
Lead us not into temptation	Means that we ask God not to allow us to be found in situations in which we will be overcome by sin. It is a prayer that we be kept from those people and places where wickedness reigns and where we in our weakness will certainly succumb. It is a prayer that we will be liberated from the deceit and vanity of our minds and hearts, from the carnal lusts that dwell in our bodies. It is a prayer that God Himself would be man's shelter and refuge (cf. Ps 91).
Deliver us from evil	There are but two ways for man: God and life or the devil and death. Deliverance from the devil means salvation and redemption from every falsehood, foolishness, deceit, wickedness and iniquity that leads to destruction and death.

Other Types of Prayer

<p>Intercessory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus prayed for His people in praying to his Father. He Himself is the only competent intercessor for men before God. Jesus prays eternally to His father on behalf of His creatures. • In the name of Jesus, Christians are commanded and empowered to pray for each other and for all creation. • Can be made for every “good gift” from God for the sake of the salvation of others. • God has heard, or rather, more accurately, eternally hears, the cries of His people. He considers man’s prayers in all that He does in His dealings with men. Thus it is the case that God does not wait to see what we do or how we will pray. He considers our actions and prayers from the perspective of eternity. • If we understand this we can see how our prayers are considered by God, for ourselves and for others. We can understand as well how we can pray even for those who are dead, whose lives on this earth are over and done. For the Lord does not hear our prayers “after” something is finished, because for God there is no “after” at all. • If we fail to pray, this too is known to God, and it takes its effect in God’s plan of salvation. Therefore we have to “pray for one another” and our prayer will have “great power in its effects” through the eternal and providential action of God.
<p>Unceasing</p>	<p>In his letter to the Romans, Saint Paul instructs Christians to “be constant in prayer” (Rom 12.12). In his first letter to the Thessalonians he says simply, “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5.17).</p> <p>Two ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A regular rule of prayer at specific times each day putting our whole mind and heart into that work • Unceasing prayer we pray with conscious awareness at every moment of our lives. Example: The Jesus Prayer (“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”)
<p>Meditation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meditation differs from prayer, even from silent prayer, in that meditation is thought about God and contemplation of His word and His works. • Meditation normally begins by reading from the holy Scriptures, the Word of God. It is the slow and attentive reading of the Bible, or perhaps the writings of the church fathers and saints, not for the purpose of gaining information, but for the purpose of communion with God. • Reading the Psalms is often useful in this regard. • There is also the type of meditation and contemplation done totally in silence. This type of meditation, for a person of unceasing prayer, will be the “prayer of silence,” with the “bubbling spring” of the Jesus Prayer as its only foundation and background. In such contemplative prayer and prayerful contemplation, the spirit of man becomes one with the Spirit of God (cf. 1 Cor 6.17).