

Transformation, Salvation, Deification

by Hieromonk Damascene

The sermon emphasizes the importance of transformation, salvation, and deification in the Orthodox Church, highlighting the need for continual growth and union with God.

Scripture: John 15:19, Romans 12:2, Philippians 2:13, 2 Peter 1:4, 1 John 3:2

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Deification"

Description

Hieromonk Damascene delves into the theme of transformation, emphasizing the call for Orthodox Christians to be citizens of the Kingdom of God by renewing their minds and being transformed. He explores the theological meaning of transformation, insights from the Holy Fathers, practical suggestions for achieving transformation through watchfulness and prayer, and the significance of authentic love in spiritual growth. The sermon highlights the continuous process of deification and union with God, stressing that salvation in Orthodoxy involves a profound change within ourselves through God's Grace, leading to deification and transformation into the likeness of Christ.

Transcript

The theme of this Conference--"Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind"--is a rather daunting theme to talk about, because it is so vast and all-encompassing. It touches on the whole purpose of our lives as Orthodox Christians. Our Lord Jesus Christ said: I have chosen you out of the world (John 15:19). We have been called out of this world in order to become citizens of another world: the Kingdom of God. That Kingdom begins now, in this life, continues after we leave this world, and will reach its consummation at the Second Coming of our Savior. In order to dwell in that Kingdom, to be its citizens, we must be transformed.

Be not conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind (Rom. 12:2). These words from the Epistle of the Holy Apostle Paul to the Romans help to introduce a Divinely inspired teaching on spiritual transformation. In this talk, I will speak first about the theological meaning of transformation in the Orthodox Church. Then I will provide a commentary from the Holy Fathers concerning St. Paul's teaching on transformation. Next, I will offer some practical suggestions concerning the way to transformation, with an emphasis on watchfulness and prayer. Finally, I will speak of authentic love as the primary mark of genuine spiritual transformation.

As I said, the theme of transformation points to the purpose of our life. That purpose is unending union with God--deification, theosis. But deification is not a static condition: it is a never-ending growth, a

process, an ascent toward God. We do not reach the end in this life, nor even in the life to come. St. Symeon the New Theologian, who attained what might be called the highest possible degree of union with God in this life, said: "Over the ages the progress will be endless, for a cessation of this growing toward the end without ending would be nothing but a grasping at the ungraspable." [1]

Our union with God is a continual transformation into the likeness of God, which is the likeness of Christ.

I, like many of you, have come to the Orthodox Church from a Protestant background. Every once in a while, a Protestant will ask me the question: "Are you saved?" It is difficult to answer this question in a way that a Protestant would understand, because the Protestant conception of salvation is so different from our Orthodox understanding. Recently I read Clark Carlton's book *The Life*. He is a former Protestant himself, and well understands the Protestant mind. He makes the insightful point that, in Protestantism, salvation means simply changing God's attitude toward you, so that you can go to heaven. According to this understanding, it literally only takes a few minutes to be "saved." [2]

In Orthodoxy, on the other hand, salvation is viewed in maximal rather than minimal terms. In his book *Orthodox Spiritual Life* according to St. Silouan the Athonite, Harry Boosalis of St. Tikhon's Seminary writes: "For the Orthodox Church, salvation is more than the pardon of sins and transgressions. It is more than being justified or acquitted for offenses committed against God. According to Orthodox teaching, salvation certainly includes forgiveness and justification, but is by no means limited to them. For the Fathers of the Church, salvation is the acquisition of the Grace of the Holy Spirit. To be saved is to be sanctified and to participate in the life of God--indeed to become partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Peter 1:4)." [3]

In Orthodoxy, salvation means not simply changing God's attitude, but changing ourselves and being changed by God. Salvation ultimately means deification; and deification, as we have seen, entails transformation. It is being united with God ever more fully through His Grace, His Uncreated Energy, in which He is fully present. As we participate ever more fully in God's life through His Grace, we become ever more deified, ever more in the likeness of Christ. Then, at the time of our departure from this life, we can dwell forever with Christ in His Kingdom because we "look like Him" spiritually, because we are shining with the Grace of God.

Many years ago, in 1982, I took a trip to the Holy Land. I was still a catechumen then, and was planning to be baptized back in California only a month or so after I returned from the trip. I remember one day when I was in Jerusalem, in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, standing on Golgotha, at the place where Christ was crucified. I was crossing myself. An elderly lady who was standing next to me asked me where I was from. I believe she was Greek. When I told her I was from America, she said, "You're from America, and you're Orthodox?" I said I wasn't, but that I was soon to be, God willing. Then she looked at me piercingly, and emphatically said, "When you are Orthodox, you can become holy."

That was an affirmation for me concerning the life's path I was about to embark on. I heard those words right there on Calvary, where Christ died for my salvation so that I could become holy, so that I could have the Grace of God within me at Baptism, so that I could continue to acquire the Grace of the Holy Spirit, so that I could become deified.

With his Incarnation, death and Resurrection, Christ redeemed human nature, opening the path to deification and even to the redemption of the body that will occur at the General Resurrection. That is the objective dimension of our salvation. But while our nature has already been saved, we have to personally

appropriate that salvation. That is the subjective dimension of our salvation. Christ has already come to us; it is up to us to come to Him and be united with Him.

When we read Orthodox teachings on transformation, holiness, and deification--and even more when we read of people who have reached a high degree of holiness--all of it can seem far beyond us. In one sense, it should seem beyond us; that is, we should feel we have a long way to go, because we do. However, we should not feel that holiness and deification are ultimately out of our reach. Each one of us is called to it. When I think back on what that lady told me on Golgotha twenty-three years ago, I think about what I have not done to become holy, to be transformed into the likeness of Christ, to be "saved" in the maximal Orthodox sense of the word. I am sure that each one of us here can think of what we have not done, how we could have done more in all the time we have been Orthodox Christians. But that should not lead us to despair. Rather, it should lead us to repentance, to a desire to rededicate our lives to Christ, to the thought of what we can do to be saved, to be deified, from this moment forward.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/hieromonk-damascene/transformation-salvation-deification/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net