

The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation.” (Ps 118:14)

✠ Lecture I: Original Sin & Atonement ✠

✠ Original Sin(s)⁺ in the Orthodox Perspective:

It is written, “God created man **in His own image; in the image of God** He created him; male and female He created them” (**Gen 1:27**). Adam and Eve were good (**Gen 1:27**); they had a ‘good’ human nature that was created ‘in the image of God’.

After the fall, this image was distorted; the human nature was wounded, weakened and damaged by sin. Corruption, a predisposition and a tendency to sin invaded the human nature. It is written that Adam begot a son **in his own likeness, after his image (Gen 5:3)**. In other words, Adam begot a son in his own ‘distorted’ image. Therefore, St. Paul said, “we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were **by nature** children of wrath, just as the others” (**Eph 2:3**).

Our corrupt human nature is born with the Adam’s sin because we were in the loins of Adam while he sinned even though we did not actually eat from the forbidden tree. St. Paul described a similar situation regarding Levi when his father Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek; “Even Levi, who receive tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him” (**Heb 7:9-10**). Levi was a descendant of Abraham, but because he was still in the loins (seed) of Abraham when he paid tithes to Melchizedek, Levi is said to have paid them also.

St. Paul also said, “.. by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners” (**Rom 5:19**) King David also said, “I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (**Ps 51:5**)

Moreover, this corrupt and sinful human nature that we received is sentenced to death by God (Gen 3: 19) for “the wages of sin is death” (**Rom 6:23**). Thus death reined over all humanity as St. Paul said, “Through one man sin entered the world, and **death through sin**, and thus death spread to all men, **because all sinned**” (**Rom 5:12**).

In addition to the above, the whole creation was also affected by the fall, God told Adam, “Cursed is the ground for your sake” (**Gen 3:17**). God has given dominion of the world to Adam and due to Adam’s sin “death entered the world” (**Rom 5:12**). Therefore, St. Paul said, “The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now” (**Rom 8:21-22**).

✠ In a Nutshell:

1. Human nature is born corrupt having a predisposition and a tendency to sin.
2. Human nature is born with Adam’s sin.
3. Human nature is born sentenced to death by God.

⁺ H.H. Pope Shenouda analyzed the original sin in his book ‘*Adam & Eve*’ and concluded that they were guilty of 27 sins!

✠ Redemption & Atonement:

Sin is an offense against God, King David said, “Against You, **You only**, have I sinned and done evil in Your sight” (**Ps 51:4**). This he said even though he sinned against Uriah the Hittite and his wife Bathsheba. The weight of that offence is proportional to the status of the offended party. Sin is, therefore, considered unlimited because it is committed against the unlimited God. Consequently, any sin requires unlimited atonement.

- This atonement should be provided by a person who is:

1. Unlimited → To be able to provide this unlimited atonement the Savior has to be unlimited.
2. Sinless → The Savior has to be free from sin to be able to redeem others, or else he would need salvation himself.
3. Human → Since human beings committed the sin, therefore, a human being should pay the price.
4. Mortal → Since the wages of sin is death (**Rom 6:23**), therefore, the savior has to be mortal.

- Our Lord Jesus Christ is:

1. Unlimited → He said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. Who is and Who was and Who is to come, the Almighty” (**Rev 1:8**)
2. Sinless → Archangel Gabriel said to the Virgin, “That **Holy One** who is to be born will be called the Son of God” (**Lk 1:35**). Our lord said, “Which of you convicts Me of sin?” (**Jn 8:46**)
3. Human → Our Lord was called the Son of Man several times, also, the Bible documents that on several occasions He was thirsty, hungry, tired, sleeping, etc...
4. Mortal → Even though our Lord is immortal due to His divinity, he assumed a human nature that was liable to die.

✠ The Ransom:

Our Lord said, “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a **ransom** for many” (**Mk 10:45**), St. Paul said, “There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a **ransom** for all” (**1 Tim 2:5-6**). The word ‘ransom’ suggests some kind of payment and someone to whom this ransom is paid. The question is, “To whom was this ransom paid?” Origen and some early fathers suggested that this ransom was paid to the devil but the Church rejected this idea.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III clarified this issue and said, “The ransom was paid to the Divine Justice. The Old Testament sacrifices were symbols of the sacrifice of the cross. These sacrifices were not offered to the devil but were offered to God. Hence, holy fire came down from heaven and consumed them (**1 Kg 18:38**), and it is written that God “smelled a soothing aroma” (**Gen 8:21**) after the sacrifice of our father Noah. Since sin is committed against God (**Ps 51:4**) then the price of this sin should be paid to God Himself, the devil has no right to ask or to accept a ransom. The devil is just an accuser (**Rev 12:10; Job 1**). On the cross our Lord offered Himself to the Father (**Lk 23:46**) and not to the devil.”

✠ Nature of Salvation: (Adapted from ‘*The Stages of Salvation*’ by Fr. Shenouda Maher)

God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (**Gen 1:26**). The Church Fathers commented on this verse saying:

- 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**). The Divine Logos is alone the image of God because He is of the same essence and Godhead; we 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”!⁺ **Some** of the Church Fathers concluded that the ‘likeness of God’ would be fulfilled in the kingdom of God, in eternal life. This likeness is an infinite goal that takes an eternity of unceasing spiritual growth and Divine Revelation; this is Eternal Happiness. 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**)
- St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Augustine consider ‘the image’ and ‘the likeness’ as synonyms that were used interchangeably in the Holy Book of Genesis. However, all the Fathers agree that we grow in the likeness of God and that this likeness is perfected in Eternal Life.

✠ Deification:

⁺ 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*”.

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 theoi*).

✠ **What Deification is not:**

When the Church calls us to pursue godliness, to be more like God, this doesn't mean that human beings then become divine. We do not become like God in His nature. That would not only be a heresy, it would be impossible. For we are human, always have been human, and will always remain human. We cannot take on the divine nature of God. God said it clearly, “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 fact that He was speaking to a group of hypocritical religious leaders who were accusing Him of blasphemy makes the meaning very clear: our Lord was not using “god” to refer 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. When the Son of God assumed our humanity in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the process of our being renewed in God's image and likeness was begun. 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**) These words of St. Peter and some sayings of the Fathers were taken out of context to promote the heresy of Pantheism according to which humans are gods in nature and not just as a courtesy title.

H.H. Pope Shenouda III explained this in his book *‘Many years with people's questions’* part II, q.27, p. 55-57: he said that 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.

What St. Peter means is **partaking 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**). Those who misinterpret St. Peter's words fall into the deception of Satan who said to Eve, “you will be like God” (**Gen 3:5**), the devil convinced her that they would be divine!

✠ **In a Nutshell:**

→ The Nature of Salvation:

1. The Incarnation of the Logos restored the human nature to its original state and blessed it giving it the potential to fulfill the destiny of its creation; “The Likeness of God”. As we pray in the Gregorian Liturgy saying, “Thou hast blessed my nature in Thee”. And in the Friday Theotokia, “He took what is ours and gave us what is His”.
2. The death of our Lord on the cross gave us the forgiveness of our sins by satisfying the Divine Justice, “without shedding of blood there is no remission” (**Heb 9:22**).
3. The creation **is still** groaning and laboring with birth pangs until now (**Rom 8:22**), probably because people are still sinning. But it **will be** delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (**Rom 8:21**). As St. John said in the Holy Book of Revelation, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (**Rev 21:1**)

Q. Since the death of our Lord satisfied the Divine Justice, why then do we still die?

A. There are two kinds of deaths:

1. Physical death of the body:

Concerning this death St. Paul said, “**The last** enemy that will be destroyed is death” (**1 Cor 15:26**). This will take place in the resurrection “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (**1 Cor 15:53**), only then will we sing, “O Death, where is your sting?” (**1 Cor 15:55**). Meanwhile, this death is left for us as a reminder of the results of sin and we Christians don’t call it death anymore but a departure, “For there is no death for Your servants, but a departure” (**St. Basil’s Liturgy**), and a gain as St. Paul calls it, “To me, to live is Christ, and **to die is gain**” (**Phil 1:21**)

2. Spiritual death due to sin:

Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body and this death is the separation of the spirit from God. Therefore our Lord said to the Bishop of Sardis, “you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead” (**Rev 3:1**), in the parable of the Prodigal son the father said, “my son was dead and is alive again” (**Lk 15:24**). Our Lord combined the two kinds of deaths in one verse when he said, “let the dead bury their own dead” (**Mt 8:22**)
