



LIFE APPLICATIONS “1 CORINTHIANS”

Chapter 3

DO I BOAST?

Have you ever met someone who claims that he or she is better than you, simply because he or she is a member of a particular group? Did you find yourself resenting that person, thinking about all the ways in which he or she was not better than you? Unfortunately, some Orthodox Christians believe that they are better than the non-Orthodox, and spend a great deal of time proclaiming their alleged superiority. In the words of St. Paul, such people “boast in appearance and not in heart” (2 Corinthians 5:12).

We should be pleased to be Orthodox Christians, and glad to be members of the Orthodox Church. St. Cosmas Aitolos, an eighteenth century Christian, proudly proclaims, “All that is of our Church is good holy, both in soul and body.” St. John of Kronstadt, a Russian Christian who lived into the early twentieth century, further tells us,

In the Church especially is accomplished the mystery of the cleansing from sins. Reverence, therefore, the place where your soul is cleansed from all impurities, where you are reconciled to God, where you receive the true life of the spirit. How many times the Lord has here granted me the cleansing from my sins, without which I could not have enjoyed God's gifts...the gifts of peace and joy, and earthly blessings besides! Glory to Thee, Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Notice what St. John says about the things we receive in the Church: they are “God’s gifts.” Your life, your membership in the Church, and the mysteries you receive in the Church, are all gifts from God. You are incapable of creating these things yourself, and you could never “earn the right” to receive these things on your own. You are a Christian, and receive the mysteries of God in His Church, solely because He is so generous that He accepts you and works within you.

Telling others that you are superior to them because you are an Orthodox Christian is therefore not merely irritating: it is dishonest. You would be lying, not only about yourself and your personal holiness, but also about God, because you would be claiming personal credit for something that He graciously gives to you.

St. Paul tells us, “Where is boasting then? It is excluded” (Romans 3:27). St. John Chrysostom therefore says, “See how great faith is, in that it has removed us from the former things (i.e., our reliance upon our observance of God’s laws) and does not even allow us to boast of them.”

This does not mean that you should not tell others about the blessings of being an Orthodox Christian, and convincing them of their need to enter into a full relationship with God through His Church. It means that you remember that what you are offering them is the opportunity to receive from God the same gracious gift you have received. As St. Romanos the Melodist, a sixth century Syrian saint, explains,

You were not worthy of having what you possess and what you keep through the grace of the giver. Do not hesitate, then, to distribute to those who ask, just as the woman of Samaria once shared. For having drawn from the well by herself, she shared with others what she received. No one asked her, and yet she gave to all ungrudgingly of her free gift. She thirsts, yet gives lavishly, not drinking, she gives to drink. When she has not yet tasted, still as one who is drunk, she cries out to those of her race: 'Come, I have found a spring; is not this the One who furnishes Exceeding great joy and redemption?'

When you feel inclined to boast about yourself, remember St. Paul's words to the Galatians, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14).