

# THE SOWER

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RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ABROAD.

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## The Parable of the Sower



Jesus Christ went to Capernaum and stood at the shores of the Sea of Galilee. A large number of people gathered. He climbed into a boat and sat down, while the people stood on the shore, and He began to teach the people using parables.

Jesus said, "A sower went out to sow. As he sowed, some seeds fell along the path and were trod down and the birds came and devoured them. Some seeds fell on stony ground, where there was not much earth, and immediately they sprang up, because there was no depth of earth, but when the sun was up, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. Some seeds fell among the weeds and it choked them and they yielded no fruit. Yet others fell on good ground and they did yield fruit that sprang up and increased."

Later, the disciples asked Jesus what this parable meant and he explained, "The seeds are the Word of God. The sower represents those who sow the Word of God. The ground is the hearts of people."



The ground near the path, where the seeds fell, symbolizes those who are inattentive and lacking concentration and whose hearts are not open to the Word of God. Satan easily overcomes them and pulls them away from God, so that they do not believe and do not find salvation.

The stony ground symbolizes those who are irresolute and weak in their faith. They eagerly listen to the Word of God, but it is not set in their souls. Their faith falters at the first temptation, or difficulty, or when persecuted for believing the Word of God.



The weeds symbolize those whose belief in the Word of God is overcome by daily concerns, riches, or various vices.

The good, fertile ground symbolizes those with a good heart. They are attentive to the Word of God, keep it within their good souls, and patiently try to carry out all that it teaches them.



*Their fruits are good deeds, for which they will inherit the Kingdom of God.*

## **A Fruitless Argument**

**Most Reverend Georgiy (Kravchenko), Bishop of Bolgrad and Belgorod-Dnestrovsk**

Unfortunately, the question of whether “official” Orthodox churches in the World Council of Churches (WCC) have grace or do not have grace is a constant issue among anti-ecumenists. Many of these churches have accepted the new calendar and are continually injecting new heretical “religious” principles into the life of their church, which leads, of course, to the dilution of the doctrinal teachings of the Church, which is a deadly sin in the eyes of God and the Holy Church. Throughout all of this, the main point is lost, how does one remain faithful when a church has changed from within and not sin before God and the Holy Church?

We are all well acquainted with the Gospel parable of the wheat and tares and know that the Head of the Church, Jesus, forbade Apostles James and John to cast fire from above unto the sinful people, saying, “you do not know what kind of spirit you are of,” for the Son of God did not come to destroy the souls of man, but to save them. (Luke 9:54-55) We also believe that God revealed only as much of Himself as is necessary for our salvation. All that is left unknown is a divine mystery, which is not known even to the angels. We do not have the right to direct God on where and how to act, especially as we are taught by the Orthodox catechism that, “The Church is holy, even though it contains sinners. Sinners who do not purify themselves through true repentance do not prevent the Church from being holy. Unrepentant sinners or the visible or hidden actions of church officials will be cut out like dead elements from the body of the Church by God’s judgment, and in this way, it remains holy...”

The second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> rule of the First and Second Councils clearly and definitively lays down the law on how the faithful of the Holy Church should act in circumstances similar to those in which we presently find ourselves in: “If one of the bishops, metropolitans, or patriarchs begins to preach any heretical teaching that has been condemned by the councils, then the other clerics and faithful have the right and are even obliged (before the matter is considered by a council, as cited in the 15<sup>th</sup> rule of the First and Second Councils), to immediately leave the bishop, metropolitan, or patriarch they are accountable to. Note that not only will they not be subjected to any canonical punishment, but on the contrary they will be worthy of praise, for in doing so, they did not condemn or rise up against actual, lawful bishops, but against false-bishops and false-teachers. They did not cause a schism in the church, but on the contrary prevented a schism in the church and avoided dividing it.” Bishop John of Smolensk, who correctly and in complete accordance with the study of the canons, points out in his commentary of this rule, that a cleric will not be guilty, but rather will be lauded for leaving his bishop, if the latter “is preaching any heretical teaching openly and publicly in the church, revealing that it is premeditated and leading to an obvious contradiction of the church and is not expressing simply his personal opinion, which can just as easily be retracted by him personally, without disturbing the peace of the church.”

St. Maxim the Confessor, martyred for Christ’s Truth, wrote, “I categorically refuse to having anything to do with heretical bishops, but rather hold fast to the faithful course of the historical Church, that of Christ, the Apostles, and the Council Fathers, for if you fall away from the visible Church, you separate yourself from the hidden, which is inseparably linked to the former. The pure, sinless Bride of Christ, free of any blemish or imperfection, dwells in the being of the historic Church, with its episcopate begun by God, and its salvific mysteries.”

This should be enough for us to understand that the question of grace or the lack of grace should not trouble the anti-ecumenists, but rather, they should concern themselves with the question of the earnestness of their resistance to heresy and the matter of saving souls. Currently, among the anti-ecumenists, we observe

how some of them, who profess to be defenders of the truth, have erased the first part of the 15<sup>th</sup> rule of the First and Second Councils from their memory and are inventing “their” new heresies, which HAVE NOT BEEN CONSIDERED BY THE HOLY COUNCILS OR THE FATHERS. Then they accuse everyone else of these “heresies” and then triumphantly separate themselves from everyone else “based on the second part of the 15<sup>th</sup> rule of the First and Second Councils.”

In this way they transform the act of standing for the purity of the Orthodox faith into something unlawful and calamitous to the soul, for it is exactly such people who are condemned by the first part of this rule. Those who “under the pretext of various accusations, leave their prelates and cause schisms and divide the oneness of the Church.” There is but one conclusion, the grace of God is a two-edged sword and depending on the free will of a believer can either spare or cleave that person. Therefore the tragedy for those who profess to be faithful Christians, but who nevertheless depart from Christ’s Truth either by word or deed and sow discord and temptation in the Church is that the grace of the Holy Spirit, which they knowingly disobey, stands in judgment of them, as stated by Apostle Paul (1Corinthians 9:2-9). Therefore, the discord, mutual accusations and division among the anti-ecumenists in this question is quite harmful and fruitless and only pleases the enemies of Orthodoxy.

+Georgiy, Bishop of Bolgrad and Belgorod-Dnestrovsk

## **WHAT IS ORTHODOXY?**

**Most Reverend Joseph (Hrebinka), Bishop of Washington, D.C.**

The Orthodox Church celebrates the Triumph of Orthodoxy on the first Sunday of Great Lent. On the second Sunday of Great Lent this triumph of Orthodoxy is again addressed and delved into further. In our present day, there are so few people who have a correct understanding of what Orthodoxy is, and what its essence consists of, even among those who are the most educated, those calling themselves theologians, and even among clergy. They approach this question in a purely formalistic and external way, and respond in an all-too-primitive and even naïve way, not penetrating into its depth and not seeing the fullness of its spiritual content.

Contrary to the superficial viewpoint of many Orthodox, Orthodoxy is not just one of many numerous Christian confessions, or, as is referred to these days, “denominations. “ Orthodoxy is the true teaching of Christ in all its purity and fullness, not distorted or perverted by any human fabrications or sophistry. It is the teaching about faith and piety, that is, about life in faith. Therefore, only those who think, feel, and live in an Orthodox manner can be considered Orthodox. Furthermore, it has to be understood and known that Orthodoxy is not anything and everything that is officially called Orthodox, for in our extremely grievous, false and evil times, unfortunately it is already an indisputable fact that false- orthodoxy is manifested more and more in our world, and that the Antichrist in his time will try to replace Christ.

Orthodoxy is not just an earthly organization led by hierarchs, but the mystical body of Christ, the head of which is Christ Himself (Eph. 1:22-23). It is made up not only of clergy but also of true believers in Christ. Granted, the Church cannot be completely severed from the earth, because she includes people like you and me living on earth. Therefore, the “earthly” element is unavoidable in her make-up. But for Her eternal goals, the less there is of the earthly, the better.

One of the basic criteria by which we can distinguish the true Church of Christ from false ones, of which there are many, and also check ourselves to see if we are Orthodox, is the truth. The Holy Apostle Paul teaches that the Church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15). There cannot be any falsehood in Her. She is not the Church if in Her name something is put forth anything whatsoever that is false. We also have to remember that the Church, as well as God who established Her, is outside of time. If it is said, even by hierarchs, that something in the

Church is outdated, that we have to be “with the times,” this is already a sign of a false church, no matter how authentic she may look on the outside.

And so, checking oneself in Orthodoxy, one should also remember and be guided by the truth, and ask oneself, "Do I really believe and live how the Orthodox Church teaches?" and answer this question truthfully to oneself. If one answers truthfully, one can go further; if not, there is no going on. The holy prophets in the Old Testament represented the betrayal of God as adultery or fornication (Ezk. 16:8-58, Ezk. 23:2-49) and it is fearful to say, or even to think, how in our present day our entire Church of Christ has turned into a brothel. Examples of this can be seen in contemporary “modernism” and “ecumenism.”

Dead formalism is foreign to True Orthodoxy. There is no place for Jesuit casuistry (playing with words) in the Orthodox Church. Outright violation of dogmas is not always apparent when the inner violation of dogma is rampant. It is worth noting that anything which seeks to change or replace Orthodoxy always starts with the breaking or rejection of fasting. People ignore Lent, but manage to keep strict diets. We should again remind ourselves of the words of St. Seraphim of Sarov. "Whosoever does not fast is not a Christian." May the Lord protect us from this.

Amen.

## **An Appeal from the President of the ROCA Assistance Fund**

**Dear faithful members of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad!**

Monasteries are the spiritual havens for Orthodox Christians. They are centers for religious education and preserving the traditions of the Church. By the grace of God we have several monastic communities located throughout the world, including:

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**ROCA Assistance Fund  
PO Box 7119  
Falls Church, VA 22040**

We will be grateful to you for any financial assistance you can provide.

Thank You,

Dimitri Gontscharow

President

ROCA Assistance Fund

*Церковно-общественный орган Русской Православной Церкви Заграницей. Адрес редакции: [eanydiocese@gmail.com](mailto:eanydiocese@gmail.com)*

*Для домашней доставки, пришлите свое имя и адрес по [eanydiocese@gmail.com](mailto:eanydiocese@gmail.com) или*

***The Sower**, PO Box 7119, Falls Church, VA 22040.*