

PLAY TO WIN THE BATTLE WITHIN!

by

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For God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

*For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; **but that the world through Him might be saved** (emphasis supplied).*

He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.¹

...

Then said Jesus unto them again, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep.

All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them.

I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.²

...

Without faith in Jesus Christ no one can return to God and enter the Kingdom of Heaven. 2) No one, even though he believes in Jesus Christ, can be called a disciple of Jesus Christ or live with Him in Heaven, unless he acts and lives as Jesus Christ acted and lived on earth. 3) No one can follow Jesus Christ without the help of the Holy Spirit. 4) Whoever wishes to receive the Holy Spirit must use the means given us by God for that purpose. [St. Innocent, Metropolitan of Moscow, Enlightener of America³]

God so loved us that he gave His only-begotten Son, Who came to save those who believed in Him. Faith in Jesus Christ is essential. We are to emulate the way Christ acted on earth whilst He was here. We are not to conform to the world; rather, we are to confront it with the love of Christ. Our spiritual goal is deification in God's energies. Our struggle involves the battle within. The battle within our hearts continues throughout our lives.

According to St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain:

The arena, the field of battle, the site where the fight actually takes place is our own heart and all our inner man. The time of battle is our whole life.⁴

When does the battle within begin?

It commences upon our baptism:

For it (note: Unseen Warfare – our inner crusade for God and against evil) teaches not the art of visible and sensory warfare, and speaks not about visible, bodily foes but about the unseen and inner struggle, which every Christian undertakes *from the moment of his baptism, when he makes a vow to God to fight for Him, to the glory of His divine Name, even unto death* (emphasis supplied).⁵

Our fight is against the hatred spewed forth by Evil forces:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places (St. Paul in Eph. 6:12)⁶

What are our spiritual weapons for the battle within?

With what weapons are warriors armed for this unseen warfare? Listen. Their helmet is total disbelief in themselves and complete absence of self-reliance; their shield and coat of mail – a bold faith in God and a firm trust in Him; their armour and cuirass – instruction in the passion of Christ; their belt – cutting off bodily passions; their boots – humility and a constant sense and recognition of their powerlessness; their spurs – patience in temptations and repudiation of negligence; their sword, which they hold ever in one hand, is *prayer whether with the lips or within – in the heart*; their three-pronged spear, which they hold in the other hand, is a firm resolve in no way to consent to the passion which assails them, but to repulse it with anger and wholehearted hatred; their pay and food, sustaining them in their resistance to the enemy, is frequent communion with God, both through the mystery of the Holy Eucharist, and *inwardly*; the clear and cloudless atmosphere, which enables them to see the enemy from afar, is a constant exercising of the mind in the knowledge of what is right in the eyes of the Lord, and a constant exercising of the will in desiring only what is pleasing to God, *peace and quiet of the heart* (all emphases supplied).⁷

Our weapons are quite substantial, and the Devil no match for them, *if* we execute them well. It is similar to actual warfare in that even a well-equipped modern army may fail if its will and execution do not match its strengths!

Who wins this struggle?

Only the resolute who never yield:

For know and understand, that in this unseen war *all* (emphasis supplied) are losers except a man who never ceases to struggle and keep his trust in God; for God never abandons those who fight in His armies, although at times He lets them suffer wounds. So fight, everyone, and do not give ground; for the *whole thing* (emphasis supplied) is in this unceasing struggle.⁸

Who did Christ come to save?

His own:

But Christ did not become man in order to save this world which abides in wickedness. Rather, He came to save His own from the world, to pull them away from the ranks of the evil one, to unite them to Himself and to deify them by grace, and with them to save the entire groaning creation. The world is walking the way of death. It is following the ruler of this world, the enemy of God. *I do not pray for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me* (St. John 9:17).⁹

Please take note that Christ does not call His people into *physical* battle against others. He challenges us to do spiritual battle within ourselves. *True* Christianity breeds love, not hatred. The Messiah, when He came, shocked the Jews because they expected a completely different one. Their Messiah was to be their earthly king, a sort of 'Errol Flynn or Arnold Schwarzenegger' who would fight for their earthly expectations. Although they had waited for Him for centuries, they rejected him and hung Him on the Cross:

The Jews awaited the Messiah for centuries, and when He came they did not accept Him; instead, they hung him on the Cross. And why? Because Christ was not what they were waiting for. And that is why they were not able to recognise the Messiah in His person. They were waiting for an earthly king, a world conqueror. They awaited someone who would subject all the races of the world at the feet of the nation of Israel, who would force the Roman rulers of the world to bow and worship him, who would give power and glory to his followers.¹⁰

His coming stunned them. Instead of such a conqueror, He was the opposite. He ‘conquered’ through His disciples following Him of their own free will. He was gentle and humble, had no material wealth and consorted with ‘undesirables’:

When they saw Him poor and humble, meek and full of peace, one who offered no earthly goods but spoke of heavenly things, and not only that, but even asked them to *deny* (emphasis supplied) the earthly and tangible so that liberated they could reach the heavenly and intangible, they realised He was not for them.¹¹

Such a humble Christ is anathema to all who seek the pleasures of this life. These “do not want Him as ruler of the future age, but of the present one”:

These people (note: those not interested in the truth of Christ but only in secular power) want to be called Christians without really being Christians. Most of them believe that they are true Christians, because they do not know what Christianity is and confuse it with philosophical theories and ‘world theories,’ to use a favorite term of theirs. In actuality, they are followers of the Antichrist like the Jews of Christ’s times, like the Jews of every age.¹²

They desire a pliable submissive ‘christ’ who caters to their earthly whims and tells them what they want to hear.

Don’t be one of them! Don’t ‘go along’ with the world, turn into yourself, to your heart, isolate the antichrist influences of modern society, reject calls for so-called ‘unity’. If ecumenical unity is preached from the bully pulpit, resist by running to your own kind of catacombs. As a True Orthodox Christian, you know that spiritual unity already exists. The overwhelming majority has simply left the True Church. Remember that these large numbers mean nothing. If they mean anything at all, it is probably that True Christianity does not exist within the opulence of their buildings.

Christ anticipated that there would be few of the faithful when He returns:

When the Son of man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth? (St. Luke 18:8)

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat:

*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** (emphasis supplied) there be that find it.*

(St. Matthew 7:13-14)

The fullness of Christ's Church is present in each local True Orthodox Church, no matter how small. The beginning of our faith "is the heart's ability to grasp that the truth speaks in the small book called the Gospel, that in that commonplace church of poor and faithful people, God descends and dwells".¹³ Our salvation depends on playing to win the battle within'!

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ St. John 3:16-18

² St. John 10:7-9

³ *Indication of the Way Into the Kingdom of Heaven* at St. Vladimir's Russian Orthodox Church in Exile website at <http://www.stvladimirs.ca/library/indication-conclusion.html> , p.1.

⁴ *Unseen Warfare* (Foreword), (ed. By St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain and revised by St. Theophan the Recluse), St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, N.Y., 2000, p. 72.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 71.

⁶ *id.*, cited on pp. 71-72.

⁷ *id.*, p. 72.

⁸ *id.*, p. 89.

⁹ Alexandre Kalomiros, *Against False Union*, IV. Salvation From The World, (tr. from the Greek by George Gabriel, Prologue by Photios Kontoglou), Second Edition, St. Nectarios Press, Seattle, Washington, Revised Appendix, 2000, p. 7.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 9-10.

¹¹ *id.*, p. 10.

¹² *id.*, p. 9.

¹³ *id.*, p. 36.