

This last statement is an important component to communicate to those in the Slavic culture, whether Eastern Orthodox or Baptist. From their perspective, the purpose of obedience is to secure salvation; it is a journey towards perfection to find favor with God.

But there is a substantial difference between Eastern Orthodox and Arminian Slavic Baptist thinking on this issue. The Eastern Orthodox Church asserts that *theosis* is an eternal journey—it is a process that begins in this life but does not end until sometime in eternity. No one seems to know the endpoint of the journey for any one individual. Slavic Baptists, however, understand that *theosis* is completed upon death. For Slavic Baptists, being on the journey with a proper confession and proper effort before God in this life finds favor with God and reaps the eternal reward in the next.

Thus, both those within Eastern Orthodoxy and many Slavic Baptists agree on the necessity to find favor with God through one's personal effort in this life, but they disagree on the terminus of the effort. For the Eastern Orthodox Church, the terminus is nebulous—sometime in the eternal future—evidenced by acquiring enough grace through participation in the sacraments and venerating the icons.⁹⁹ For Slavic Baptists, the terminus for finding favor is definite—in this life! Their gospel, then, can be appealing to the Eastern Orthodox mind because the attainment of *theosis* is guaranteed in a shorter time period. The effort required to secure this salvation is reduced from an indefinite, even eternal striving, to a definite, temporal one limited to this life.

But finding peace with God through personal effort is abhorrent to Him because it is a man-centered effort. The Eastern Orthodox and Slavic Baptist gospels are similar to

⁹⁹ Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 276.

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other world religions. From their perspective, entering into the presence of God is merely a matter of being a good person and living the correct lifestyle. The difference with the world is at the starting point of the process. The world begins with self-effort absent any initial assistance, the Eastern Orthodox and the Arminian leaning Slavic Baptist need the work of Christ on the cross to initiate the process.

Why are both abhorrent to God? Because they rob him of his glory. כבוד in the Hebrew¹⁰⁰ and δόξα in the Greek¹⁰¹ both carry the idea of ‘bringing honor.’ God is very clear that He does not share His glory with anyone (Isa 42:8; 48:11). What is the glory of God is a question that deserves an entire paper unto itself but for now it will need to suffice to make only a few comments as it relates to Jesus’ work on the cross.

Paul states in Rom 1:16 that the gospel—not man’s efforts—is the power of God for man’s salvation. He builds this argument in Rom 4:20 stating Abraham’s belief, or faith, in God’s promise of a son (Isaac) was glorifying to God and resulted in his justification. In Rom 5:2, Paul says that a person’s hope in Christ’s work on the cross glorifies God.

In 1 Co 1:16, Paul also argues that the cross—not man’s effort—is the power of God for man’s salvation. Paul doubles down in verse 18, stating that the cross is God’s demonstration of power in the life of the believer in contrasts to the non-believer who considers the work of the cross foolish. This statement should strike the conscience of

¹⁰⁰ Brown, “כבוד” BDB, 458.

¹⁰¹ “Δοξέω, Δόξα, Δοξάσω, Συνδοξάζω, Ἐνδοξος, Ἐνδοξάζομαι, Παράδοξος.” TDNT, Gerhard Kittel, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:237. Kittel notes the close connection in meaning between כבוד and δόξα.

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every Eastern Orthodox or Arminian leaning Slavic Baptist, and should be developed in any preaching of the gospel among the Slavs.

In Eph 1, God's choice, predestination, and foreknowledge of the elect are cause to praise His glory in the gospel, which is expressed through His grace (see verse 6 specifically). In Phil 1:11, praise and glory are given to God for His work of salvation in the believer's life.

Peter also expresses his understanding that salvation is solely the work of God to His glory. In 1 Pet 1:21, Peter explains that God raised Jesus from the dead and returned Him to the glory which He had before the creation of the world. This work of God, he says, is where Christians are to put their faith and hope—in Jesus' work, not their own! He follows this up in 2 Pet 1:3 where he says it is the divine power that gives us "...everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." God's glory is on display at the cross—the cross is His work, His effort, His labor—only a monergistic effort!

Synergism in salvation robs God of His glory. This can be illustrated by the sentiment offered by John Meyendorff, an Eastern Orthodox scholar, who defends synergism by saying, "Since the age of the Fathers the Orthodox church has always upheld the doctrine of **synergia**, that is, the collaboration between divine grace and the free will of man on his way toward God. We are all saints by grace, but we must become saints by our acts and our whole being."¹⁰² This is an anathematized gospel. It is this synergistic understanding of salvation that must be upended in gospel preaching among the Slavs—among the Eastern Orthodox for salvation among the Arminian Slavic

¹⁰² Tarasenko, "The Historical and Doctrinal Influences of the Russian Orthodox Church on the Soteriology of the Russian Baptists," 75.

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