

“God Became Man in Order to Destroy the Works of the Devil”: St Symeon the New Theologian



St. Symeon the New Theologian Abbott, Monastery of St. Mammars in Constantinople, (AD 949 - AD 1022). One of 3 orthodox saints canonized as “theologian” (the others being St. John the Apostle and St. Gregory of Nazianzus).

St. Symeon the New Theologian (AD 949 - AD 1022)

John the Theologian says, *To this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil* (1 John 3:8). The works of the devil are every kind of sin: envy, lying, cunning, hatred, hostility, remembrance of wrongs, slander, cunning, hatred, hostility, remembrance of wrongs, slander, anger, rage, pride vainglory, lack of mercy, covetousness, thievery, unrighteousness, evil lust, quarrelsomeness, dissatisfaction, irritability, ridicule, making oaths, forgetfulness of God, lack of human mercy, and every other evil. And so for those who are called Christians and do such works of the devil, what benefit is there from the fact that they are called

Christians, when the manifestation of the Son of God has not destroyed in them these works of the devil?

If anyone will say that some of those who are like this explain the Divine Scriptures, theologize, preach Orthodox dogmas--let them know that it is not in this that the work of Christ consists. John the Theologian does not say, *to this end was the Son of God manifested*, that certain ones should theologize and orthodoxize (that is, pride themselves on their Orthodoxy--*tr. note*), but *that He might destroy the works of the devil*. Concerning such ones, I shall say that first one must clean the vessel of every filth, and then place in it the myrrh, lest the myrrh itself become defiled, and in place of fragrance there should come from it an evil smell. The Son of God, the Word, did not become man in order only that men should believe in the Holy Trinity, glorify it, and theologize about It, but in order to destroy the works of the devil. In whomever among those who have received the faith of Christ the works of the devil shall be destroyed, to him may be entrusted the mysteries of theology and Orthodox dogmas. But those in whom such works have not been destroyed and who turn out to be tangled up in them for the dishonor and blasphemy of God, in essence such ones stand in the same rank with the pagans to whom it is forbidden and prohibited even to enter into the temple of the Lord and to pray to God there, and not merely to read the Divine Scripture and explain it, as it has been written. *But unto the sinner God hath said: Why declarest thou My statutes and takest up My covenant in the mouth? Thou hast hated chastisement and hast cast out My words behind thee* (Psalm 49:16-17). He who does not take to his heart the laws of God hates the chastisement and correction which are inspired by the words of the Lord and stops up his ears lest he hear the Word of God which declares concerning the future judgment and the recompense to sinners, or concerning the unquenchable fire of gehenna and the other torments of hell, or concerning the eternal judgment from which no one can escape once he has been subjected to it. He who does not strive with all his strength to have the commandments of God ever before his eyes and to keep them, but rather disdains them and prefers what is contrary to them and brings this into act--such a one casts the words of God behind

him.

I shall explain this by the following example. When God clearly commands, *Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand* (Matt 4:17), and again, *Strive to enter in by the narrow door* (Luke 13:24), and he who hears this does not only not wish to repent and to force himself to go through the narrow door, but spends all the days of his life in great carelessness, adding to his previous sins every hour new ones, and gives repose and comfort to his body above what is needful and even more than is decent, which serves as a sign of the broad and spacious path which leads to perdition and not the narrow and most sorrowful path which leads to eternal life--then is it not evident that such a one casts behind him the words of God, that is, disdains them and does his own will, or to say it better, the will of the devil? Indeed, St. David thus depicts one who casts behind him the words of God: *If thou sawest a thief, thou didst run with him; and with the adulterer thou hast set thy portion. Thy mouth hath abounded with evil, and thy tongue hath woven deceits. Thou didst sit down and speak against thy brother, and against thine own mother's son didst thou lay a stumbling-block; these things thou didst, and I kept silence. Thou didst think an iniquity, that I should be like unto thee; I will reprove thee, and bring thy sins before thy face. Wherefore, understand these things, ye that forget God, lest He snatch you away and there be none to deliver you.* (Ps. 49:19-23).

Do you see how such a one has forgotten God and is worthy to receive greater punishment than the godless who do not know God at all? For, having known God, as the Apostle says, he does not glorify Him as God, but rather abuses Him, doing the works of the devil. Therefore he is an enemy of God, even though he might seem to be the most trustworthy teacher of divine dogmas and Orthodox theology. And it is impossible that such a one should faithfully proclaim the divine dogmas and theologize; for how is it possible that a mind which is darkened by a defiled conscience should think rightly and purely? Only he who has been released from the works of the devil and constantly contains God in his memory can faithfully proclaim the mysteries of God as no longer being bound by the works of the devil. From these works may we all sometime also be

delivered and receive the Kingdom of Heaven in Christ Jesus our Lord, to Whom may there be glory forever. Amen.

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