

CHAPTER FOUR

THE PREPARATION OF JUSTIFICATION

The Calling for Salvation is addressed to all men, even to those who were Baptized while infants and who became Regenerated in Christ and members of God's Kingdom but neglected to become active Orthodox Christians. The Calling is addressed externally through the preaching of the Word of the Holy Gospel. Those who accept it are awakened from the lethargic sleep of sin. In most cases, those who are Called resist by using the excuses of external or internal obstacles. In such cases, in order to remove these obstacles, God uses different pedagogic methods that differ from case to case and from person to person.

These methods are used in order to make man cooperate and to freely accept the "Calling." In addition to the effective Action of Divine Grace, which awakens those who are being Called, the methods used are varied. Hence, the manner of the Awakening and the period of Preparation might be shorter or longer. The knocking¹ might continue until the sinner finds himself in a good psychological condition and opens his heart to accept the Calling. Nevertheless, at the proper time, unforeseen by man, the Lord knocks first at the door of his heart and because sin corrupts him, man is unable to rise by his own power, regardless of his goodwill and intention. He is unable to achieve the new Creation, Regeneration and newness of Life in Christ. The Lord, Who first knocks, awaits the response from those whom He Calls: not just simply for them to remain as passive instruments of the Preparation Grace, but by their actions, according to their capabilities of co-working with Him.

This cooperation (synergy) of those who are being Called by Divine Grace is proclaimed as necessary by Holy Scripture as well as the Holy Fathers. Thus those who accept the final Calling and have been Awakened, receive the first Radiance of Divine Light. Under Its guidance, they are led to realize their sinfulness, to desire freedom and to return through repentance, in faith to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, Who is their Saviour. It is obvious, that this Work of the Preparation Grace, in order to bring it to a good conclusion, requires the cooperation of the free will of man since even after his progress in the newness of Life, he can fall because of spiritual relaxation, thereby slowing down or even completely terminating his Salvation.

Assuredly, God is the One Who removes external and internal obstacles in the path of Preparation Grace, which arise in the soul of each of those who are Called.

1. The Universality of the Calling by God

Since God "*desires all men to be Saved and to come to the Knowledge of the Truth,*"² He addresses the saving Calling to all. According to the Parable of the Great Supper,³ those who were first honoured to participate in the festival, refused the invitation and "*all with one accord began to make excuses.*"⁴ Although the invitation was general, many did not wish to accept, even after the second Calling "*the servant said, 'Master, it is done as Thou*

¹ Rev. 3:20.

² 1 Tim. 2:4.

³ Luke 14:16-24. Matth. 22:1-14.

⁴ Luke 14:18.

Commanded, and still there is room,”⁵ and “the Master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.’”⁶ Then, among those who were seated at the dinner, “a man” was found “who did not have on a wedding garment”⁷ and he was immediately excluded from the Wedding Feast. This is the reason for Christ to proclaim: “... many are called, but few are chosen.”⁸

Truly, in many Christian countries where the Holy Gospel is spread, countless numbers of people, although entitled “Christian,” do not show any interest in listening to or practising the Commandments of God and therefore, even from those who are Baptized, only a “few” are “chosen.” Those who are Baptized during their infancy become participants in the newness of Life in Christ and are incorporated into the Kingdom of God as members of His Church. The Grace of the Holy Spirit acts upon them, fully Regenerating them, not only externally but also internally granting them all the Gifts. Nevertheless, they are not fully active members of Christ in awareness and conscience. Even more importantly, they are not perfected in Christ: “to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”⁹ Divine Grace holds these souls by accepting them and numbering them among the people of God, preserving within them the seed of the newness of Life in Christ in a dormant condition, powerful and waiting to be awakened at an appropriate moment.

Thus Preparation Grace can be distinguished:

1. in the “general Grace” (“*gratia generalis*”), which acts even upon those who are outside the Church, to those who completely ignore the Holy Gospel and for the first time hear of it; and even to those who are within the Church through Holy Baptism; and
2. in the “special Grace” (“*gratia specialis*”), which acts powerfully upon those who accept the Calling in their hearts.

One may distinguish the “Calling” as being either “external” or “internal.” Both are included in the Work of the Preparation Grace. The activity of Grace does not cease, as it uses the means of the external Calling to influence the interior Calling of the one who is being prepared. By using the term “external Calling,” we usually mean that which is done through the Holy Gospel. St. Paul teaches: “How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach unless they are sent?”¹⁰

It is also a fact that, among those who have been proven to be Elect, at first and before the inner Calling which awakened them, they were listening to the Word of God but did not show any interest and remained indifferent to its Calling. Also, other people who were against the principal of hearing the Word of God, being disobedient and spiteful, were

⁵ Luke 14:22.

⁶ Luke 14:23.

⁷ Matth. 22:11.

⁸ Matth. 22:14. Matth.19:30; 20:16. Mark 10:31. Luke 13:30.

⁹ Ephes. 4:13.

¹⁰ Rom. 10:14-15.

changed and freed, **as prophesised by the Righteous** Isaiah: “... *and the instruction of the Lord, even the Lord, opens mine ears, and I do not disobey, nor dispute.*”¹¹

Trials, illnesses, deaths, financial difficulties, deliverance from bodily dangers, meetings, friendships with various persons: the **experiences of which** Divine Providence uses to prepare **one** for the acceptance of the **Calling** and to soften the soul of those who are being **Called by Divine Grace**. But, this **upliftment** is not done by force **or** without the participation of man’s free will. The pedagogic methods used by God aim to make man **agree** willingly and freely. Consequently, the means of **Preparation for** those who are **Called** differ according to their characters and idiosyncrasies, which **everyone** has. Hence, the **Path** that each one who is **Called to follow, can be shorter for one but longer for others; more difficult**¹² **for one while easier for others; narrower**¹³ **for one but wider for another.**

For example, the way by which St. Paul the Apostle¹⁴ was **Called** differs from **that** of St. Nathanael¹⁵ or **St. Andrew** and **St. Peter**¹⁶ or the two brothers, St. James and St. John,¹⁷ or St. Philip,¹⁸ or in **general, any of the Twelve.**¹⁹ Most of the **Holy Apostles** were **Called** to the Apostleship without any **intense** crisis or external events. The thief on the cross turned to Christ **in** his last moments of **life.**²⁰ The sisters of St. Lazaros knew Christ in a different way **than** St. Mary Magdalene,²¹ or the adulterous woman,²² **even** or the Samaritan woman.²³ **The Achaeans,**²⁴ **Cornelius the Centurion,**²⁵ **the Ethiopian eunuch,**²⁶ **and the Philippian jailer**²⁷ **all believed in Christ in their different ways.** In other words, no one should believe that the **Calling** by God is **a momentary Act.** It is prepared **by Divine** Grace **over** a long period, according to the character and personality of each person.

It is possible that before the final **Calling** of a person, **one** may go through many clashes with **Divine** Grace in order to be **Awakened.** **Eventually one acknowledges one’s** sinful way of life and **turns** to Christ, **receiving a newness** of Life in Him. **However, one** will never be able to **pinpoint** the exact moment when the **Preparation** Grace **began one’s** final **Calling** to **Salvation.** This final stage, when the seed of the new and immortal **Life** has been **sown** in man’s heart, will always remain a **Mystery,** for God “*even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by Grace we have been saved).*”²⁸

¹¹ Is. 50:5.

¹² James 1:2-3, 12. 1 Peter 1:6-7. Rom. 5:3-4. Job.

¹³ Matth. 7:13-14.

¹⁴ Acts 9:1-18.

¹⁵ John 1:45-49.

¹⁶ Matth. 4:18. John 1:37-42.

¹⁷ Matth. 4:21.

¹⁸ John 1:42.

¹⁹ Matth. 10:1-4. Mark 3:13-19. Luke 6:12-16.

²⁰ Luke 23:42-43.

²¹ Luke 8:2.

²² John 8:3-11.

²³ John 4:1-26.

²⁴ Luke 19:1-9.

²⁵ Acts 10:1-48.

²⁶ Acts 8:26-40.

²⁷ Acts 16:25-34.

²⁸ Ephes. 2:5.

2. The Moment of Grace is Unforeseen. Who Are the Elect?

It is obvious from the above, that the time of Grace for each man, as well as who the **Elect may be**, is unforeseen. What we can say about the time when the Preparation Grace begins its **Work of Awakening and returning** this or that soul, is **that**, as **seen** from the Parable of the Workers of the Vineyard,²⁹ the **Work of Grace**, which ends in the final **Calling**, has its own time for each and every one **who is Called**. **Some** are **Called** from “*their infancy and first age, others after their childhood are coming to the good faith in God,*” others are led to it **in** their old age, and others “*at the time of their departure at the eleventh hour are Called.*”³⁰ **We cannot say anything concerning** the determination of this time, for the **Work of Grace acts where** we do not hope and at a **time when** we do not expect, proving “*the last will be first and the first last.*”³¹

It is not a rare phenomenon **for those who** appear to us as being closer to the Kingdom of Heaven **to be** overtaken and replaced by persons **annihilated and rude**. St. Paul stresses, “*God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His Presence.*”³² And the Grace of God presents so many wonderful and **inexplicable** phenomena when **Calling** men, that anyone who follows up on **the methods and the manifestations** of God’s Grace can only cry out: “*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His Judgements and His Ways past finding out. For who has known the Mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?*”³³ Thus, **according to the judgment of men, those who are** of high moral standards, because they seek by their own struggles to reach a higher level of life, **are abandoned by Grace, while men of low moral standards, are preferred by God as Christ warned us:** “*Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the Kingdom of God before you.*”³⁴

Extraordinary natural talents **or** exceptional gifts do not secure **the saving Preparation** of Grace. Although these gifts are not obstacles **to** the saving Grace of God, nevertheless many gifted people are pushed aside by God’s Grace because of their pride, whereas many unknown and insignificant, illiterate and completely uneducated, and even slow **minded**, are raised **by Grace** as teachers and leaders in the Heavenly Kingdom. St. Paul stresses: “*For you see your Calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are Called.*”³⁵ “*... for they were ... from the mighty in wealth and the noble few who came to the faith.*”³⁶ This obviously proves that the Preparation Grace is being drawn by some kind of intention and attribute, which can exist in the unwise **as well as** in the wise, **in** the rude and in the noble, **in** the educated and in the illiterate, and generally, speaking in all

²⁹ Matth. 20:1-16.

³⁰ Origen, *To Matthew* 20:1, in **B**, v. 13, p. 416.

³¹ Matth. 20:16; 19:30. Mark 10:31. Luke 13:30.

³² 1 Corinth. 1:27-28.

³³ Rom. 11:33-35.

³⁴ Matth. 21:31. Luke 7:29, 36-50.

³⁵ 1 Corinth. 1:26.

³⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus*, III, 48, in **B**, v. 9, p. 211.

men regardless of their age, **gender**, **ethnicity**, language or **skin tone**. Thus, according to St. John Chrysostom, St. Paul “*was not presented only by his Calling, but ... by his good intention,*”³⁷ “*which became his medicine to see again*” and to acknowledge his Saviour, whereas “*Elymas the sorcerer*”³⁸ did not have any good intentions and remained in his blindness.

What is this “*good intention*”? It is the intention to acknowledge the **Truth** and to submit to it. It is the desire of the heart for **Justice** and **ill will** towards injustice. It is acknowledgement of our sinfulness and the desire **for Salvation**. This “*good intention*” draws **the Preparation Grace near** and makes the human soul “*worthy to receive the Enlightenment*” of it. This “*good intention*” is like a spark, unquenchable and unlimited. **It remains** covered by a thick **layer** of dust because of man’s weaknesses and **faults, being unable on his own** to free himself from the filthiness of sin and to develop the cleansing fire **that burns sinful passions and Regenerates** the human soul.

St. John Chrysostom observes that this “*good intention*” is neutral and “*to be Called is not from our worthiness, but from the Grace.*” This “*good intention*” attracts **Divine Grace because Divine Kindness** is unlimited. Without the **Divine Visitation, however**, this “*good intention*” would have disappeared **due to** the inheritance of the old man **and** not being known even by him who **possessed** it. Nevertheless, “*if the Father draws and the Son guides and the Holy Spirit enlightens, those who are not drawn nor guided, nor enlightened*” are deprived of this unseen **Spiritual Attribute** and for this reason “*do not offer themselves worthy to receive this Enlightenment.*”³⁹

3. The “*Good Intention*” Although Weak is Necessary

How weak this “*good intention*” is to create the newness of the new **Creation** in Christ, is manifested in the words of St. Paul the Apostle, who characterizes the faithful in Ephesus as being before their return, “*dead in trespasses and sins,*”⁴⁰ and presenting “*the exceeding greatness of God’s Power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty Power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right Hand in the Heavenly places.*”⁴¹ St. Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople, observed: “*Really the might of His Power, which is above any power, is manifested in the Work of our return and Salvation*” because, “*having become dead to all passions and sinful thoughts, He raised us and gave us Life by accepting us in the glory of His Faith.*”⁴² St. John Chrysostom also observed that “*from the same Power, which raised Christ, He drew us to Himself.*”⁴³ From the above one can understand how insignificant the role of the “*good intention*” of man is in the **Work** of his **Recreation** and how much the **Divine Kindness** offers in helping to raise and **Regenerate man**. **This** is truly a **Grace** and a **Gift**.

³⁷ St. John Chrysostom, in Migne, *P.G.*, 51, 143.

³⁸ Acts 13:8.

³⁹ St. John Chrysostom, *To Matthew*, Homily 69, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 58, 650. *Ibid*, *To Psalm 115(116)*, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 55, 322.

⁴⁰ Ephes. 2:1.

⁴¹ Ephes. 1:19-20.

⁴² St. Photius, in Migne, *P.G.*, 101.

⁴³ St. John Chrysostom, *To Ephesians*, Homily 3, § 1, in Montfaucon, v. 11, p. 19.

Man does not remain completely inactive at the first moments of his “**Calling**” by Divine Grace. He has within him a spark **that is lit** at the time of God’s Visit, as St. Justin the Philosopher and Martyr **said**: “*to make the beginning is not ours*”⁴⁴ and, as St. Cyril of Jerusalem **added**, that God “*is He Who plants and waters; it is God’s to grant, but it is yours to receive.*”⁴⁵ It is obvious that “*not simply the Grace acted, but also those who wanted*” and **who** did not **resist or rebuke it**. Thus “*the giving of the Grace is of God; but the offering of faith is of man.*”⁴⁶

This is **clearly** manifested from the Divine Invitation to “*Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you Light,*”⁴⁷ as well as from the Book of Revelation, according to which **our** Lord stands at the door and knocks.⁴⁸ God is **the first to move** towards the sinful man who is **Called** to be **Awakened**. The Lord our God knocks on the hearts of those who are able to hear **and who open** the doors of their soul. Hence, **Divine** Grace first acts, **whereupon** man should **respond**, regardless of how weak his intentions **may be**. For this **reason Holy Scriptures state**: “*Turn to Me, said the Lord of Hosts, and I will turn to you.*”⁴⁹ **Sinners, too**, call upon God saying: “*Turn us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be turned; and renew our days as before.*”⁵⁰

Hence, the **Holy** Fathers of the Orthodox Church stress the cooperation of man and his duty to do his best during the different stages of the preparation of Grace. For “*those who do not want, God does not force them, but those who want He draws them.*”⁵¹ “*God, when you want, you will have; for and even before you wanted, He came to you, and when you had your will turned away from Him, He was Calling you, and when you turned to Him, He placed within you fear, and when you were afraid to confess, He comforted you.*” And “*He, Who had created you without you, does not justify you without you wanting. He made you ignorant, but He justifies you wanting.*”⁵² St. John Chrysostom again observed: “*... neither is faith from us,*” “*for it is a Gift from God.*” “*He has planted the faith within us, He gave the beginning.*” “*He will bring also the end.*”⁵³ “*If God Himself acts, we must offer the goodwill. If you will want, then He will activate the ‘to want’, and He gives us willingness and work. For, if you will want, then He will increase your wanting.*” And “*without the help of God no one can be saved, for we know, that before the Divine Help and Grace, according to the words of the Lord saying, that: ‘Without Me you can do nothing’⁵⁴ ... Because God’s is the ‘surplus’, His is the ‘all’; but it is ours to come and to want, God’s is to ‘rise’ and to bring to the end.*”⁵⁵

In other words, **like one** who falls into the water but does not know how to swim **and who** is saved from certain death by the **skills** of a sailor who **rushes** to **assistant** him, he then learns to swim through the continuous support of his teacher. **Similarly**, he who is in the

⁴⁴ St. Justin, the philosopher and martyr, *Apology I*, 10, § 4, **B**, v. 3, p. 166.

⁴⁵ St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis*, I, § 4, in Migne, *P.G.*, 33, 373 and 376.

⁴⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 10, § 2 and Homily 46, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 76 and 257-258.

⁴⁷ Ephes. 5:14. Is. 26:19 and 60:1-3.

⁴⁸ Rev. 3:20.

⁴⁹ Zach. 1:3.

⁵⁰ Lam. 5:21.

⁵¹ St. John Chrysostom, *To John*, Homily 10, § 2 and Homily 46, § 1, in Migne, *P.G.*, 59, 76 and 257-258.

⁵² St. Augustine, *In Psalm XXXII*, 12; and *Sermo* 169, 13, in Trempelas, *Dogmatique*, v. II, p. 273, note 12.

⁵³ St. John Chrysostom, *To Ephesians*, Homily 4, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 62, 33. *Ibid*, *To Hebrews*, Homily 28, § 2, in Migne, *P.G.*, 63, 193.

⁵⁴ John 15:5.

⁵⁵ Jeremias, in Karmeris, *The dogmatics*, v. I, pp. 412-413.

depths of the waves of sin, is saved from spiritual death by the assistance of Divine Grace. He is subsequently exercised and prepared for the victory and submission of death through the continuous cooperation with Divine Grace, which pours out its new Gifts through new manifestations and the efforts of the free will of the responsive man.

4. Stages in the Work of the Preparation Grace.

The various stages that the Work of the Preparation Grace goes through till it brings the one who receives its benefit into the new Creation in Christ and Regeneration, can easily be pointed out by some indications of Holy Scripture. From the: “*Awake, you who sleep,*”⁵⁶ one can conclude that the first stage of the Preparation Grace is the Awakening of the one who is being Called. This is not man’s Regeneration. The sinful man who is alienated from the Spiritual Life, is distracted from the sins of the flesh and all worldly things, which absorb all his attention. He begins to realise that besides the material world and himself, there is also God’s Kingdom and this draws his attention.

“*And Christ will give you Light*” indicates the Divine Invitation. In other words, “*Christ will Enlighten you.*”⁵⁷ Simultaneously with the Awakening of the sinner, the first gladsome Radiance of Divine Light fall upon him. This supernatural Light will spread and Enlighten the sinful man. This period is critical and dangerous in the history of man’s return.⁵⁸ At this time man faces critical moments when he can reject Divine Grace, although he might have wanted “*for a time to rejoice in its Light.*”⁵⁹ Because of moral relaxation he can let the time of Grace pass by and the period of Awakening to remain inactive. Consequently the Work of Grace is interrupted and so he is counted among the “*many who are Called*” but not amongst “*the Elect.*”⁶⁰ The example given in the Book of Acts, according to which St. Lydia showed interest in following St. Paul to the place of “*worship*” to hear the word which was preached and that “*the Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul,*”⁶¹ presents to us an advanced stage of Awakening and a higher level of Enlightenment.

The Fruit of this Enlightenment appears to be general faith, which consists of the full acceptance of the Truth of Divine Revelation that is preached and which, through the Enlightenment of the mind, takes over the whole inner man. He then becomes conscious of his sinful condition. Moved by Divine Grace, and in fear of sin he seeks the Way of Salvation, acknowledging Jesus Christ as his Lord and Saviour and returning through true Repentance to Him. “*Wash and be clean; remove your iniquities from your souls before Mine eyes; cease from your iniquities; learn to do well; diligently seek judgment, deliver him that is suffering wrong, plead for the orphan, and obtain justice for the widow. And come, let us reason together, says the Lord: and though your sins be as purple, I will make them white as snow; and though they be as scarlet, I will make them white as wool. And if you be willing, and hearken to Me, you shall eat the good of the land: but if you be not willing, nor hearken to Me, a sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken this.*”⁶²

⁵⁶ Ephes. 5:14.

⁵⁷ St. Photius, *To Ephesians 1:19*, in Migne, P.G., 118, 1240.

⁵⁸ Martensen, *Dogmatique*, p. 598.

⁵⁹ John 5:35.

⁶⁰ Matth. 20:16; 22:14.

⁶¹ Acts 16:14.

⁶² Is. 1:16-20.

Those who heard the words of St. Peter on the Day of Pentecost,⁶³ accepted **them** with all their hearts and acknowledged their guilt. *“They were cut to the heart”*⁶⁴ and in true repentance they said to St. Peter: *“Men and brethren, what shall we do?”* And as St. John Chrysostom says: *“they were not just convinced, but were cut to the heart and realized their deeds”* and with trust were willing to do whatever the Apostles **instructed** them.⁶⁵ Parallel to this, the **Philippian Jailer** *“trembling”* and with great humbleness *“fell down before Paul and Silas”* and asked them: *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”*⁶⁶

The **Awakening** is the inner **Enlightenment** **that** arises the interest **in hearing** the saving **Truth** **that** opens the hearts of men **with understanding**. The acceptance of this **Enlightenment** **and general** faith, which is not restricted to the mind but influences the whole inner man, is the acknowledgement of one’s sinful condition and a broken heart, fear of the **Divine Justice** for **one’s** crimes, the seeking and recognition of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as one’s Saviour and Redeemer and the **return to Him** in **Repentance**, is the **work** of the **Preparation Grace**, from **whence** it begins **and where** it ends.

The *“return”* is an essential **expression meaning that** the **Work** of the **Preparation Grace** comes to a good **conclusion**. It is the starting point for the creation of the new **Creation** in the sinner. It is obvious that this is the **Work of Grace** **that** the sinner is unable to **achieve** by his own **efforts**. It is **only** attained when his will submits willingly and freely to the **Grace** **that** has awakened him. The *“return”* is conjoined to **Repentance** and consists of a duty and an obligation even for those who are already **Baptised**, but **who** have not experienced it, although they are incorporated into the Body of the Orthodox Church. They must also come to full awareness, to realize their sinfulness and with humble heart **turn** with complete faith to the Saviour, placing their lives under His **Leadership** and **Providence**. All those who are saved in Christ cannot do it of their own accord. They **have to** pass through the stages of **Awakening** and **return**, **as well as** the whole **Work** of the **Preparation Grace**, regardless **whether** this period is **short or lengthy**.

⁶³ Acts 2:14-36.

⁶⁴ Acts 2:37.

⁶⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *To Acts*, in Migne, *P.G.*, 60, 63.

⁶⁶ Acts 16:30.