

BAPTISM, WORKS, AND FREE WILL

—by Saint Symeon the New Theologian—

Baptism does not detract from us our free will and our ability to choose. It liberates us and renders us capable of no longer being subjugated to the devil against our own will. After baptism, however, it is up to us either to remain willingly within the commandments of our Lord and God Jesus Christ, in Whose name we were baptized, and to walk upon the path of His laws, or to abandon this straight path and return to our enemy and adversary, the devil.

During holy baptism we receive the remission of our sins, we are liberated from the ancient curse, and we are sanctified through the presence of the Holy Spirit. However, we do not acquire the perfect grace (referred to in the verse: **“I will dwell within them and I will walk amongst them” (2Cor. 6:16)**) at that moment. This perfect grace belongs to them who have unwavering faith and who express this faith with their works. Because when we deviate toward evil and obscene deeds after baptism, we lose entirely the sanctification we acquired through it. Thereafter, with the appropriate repentance, confession, and tears, we acquire the forgiveness of our sins, and subsequently sanctification and divine grace.

Whoever, after their baptism, succumbs to the desires of the evil one and carries out everything the evil one suggests, estranges himself from the sacred womb of divine baptism, according to the words of the prophet David: **“from the womb, sinners are estranged; even from the belly, they are gone astray” (Ps. 57:4)**. In doing so, we do not change or become distanced from the nature from which we were created. We were created by God very good (because God does nothing that is evil), and while subsisting in the same nature and matter with which we were created, we carry out the things we desire and choose voluntarily, whether they be good or evil. It is something similar to a knife. Whether a knife is used to accomplish something good or bad, its composition remains unchanged: it continues to be steel. This is how man is as well: he acts and carries out whatever he wants without changing his nature.