

The Freedom of the Person (Protopresbyter Efstratios Karatsoulis)

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The issue of freedom is of great importance in the Orthodox view of humankind. According to this, people are made to be free. Freedom is the result of the fact that we're made in the image of God and have the opportunity and potential to use our independent power to reach the state of being in the likeness of God. This isn't an innate potential, but is effected through grace, through our encounter with God.

Freedom in Orthodox theology isn't a free decision made from among a variety of choices. Real freedom is the transcendence of choices, of necessity, of corruptibility and sin. We experience real freedom when we're removed from the passions that bind and restrict us. Our ontological freedom begins initially with our withdrawal from and severance of the passions, with our interaction with the uncreated energies of God and with our encounter with Christ. In Orthodox tradition, freedom isn't an idea, but a person. And this person is none other than the Person of Christ.



People are free to follow the road to Christ and His Kingdom. In the spiritual life, our freedom plays a defining role in our salvation. In the sacrament of confession, the spiritual guide doesn't exercise authority, doesn't impose and doesn't give orders. He or she respects the personal freedom and particular personality of each of their spiritual children. Real parentage isn't sadistic, but sacrificial, and the more the parents reduce their own personality, the greater the benefit to those in their care. The selfless presence of a spiritual guide who doesn't impose but is a constructive force is what is required in a spiritual relationship.

Such spiritual guides aren't interested in acquiring some form of mechanical obedience, but rather they attempt to bring their spiritual children to spiritual maturity, so that they can decide for themselves. Spiritual guides help people to uncover their deeper self and, by the Grace of the Holy Spirit, to overcome narrow human boundaries and to attain salvation. It's the combination of our freedom and Divine Grace that brings us salvation. Neither Divine Grace without our cooperation, nor our efforts without the aid of the Holy Spirit will bring us to salvation. Our freedom and responsibility as independent factors in the task of our salvation are to be understood in this context.

Freedom is an internal state bound up with the truth and has no connection at all with external alternative free choices and opportunities. Carl Rogers understood that the freedom of Western culture is unproductive and limits us to choosing between certain alternative solutions and choices all the time. His own stance was that real freedom is the opportunity for us to choose whatever we really want at any time and in any circumstances. He called this internal existential freedom. This

freedom gives us the courage to discover areas previously unknown to us and to make new revelations about ourselves and the world. It also gives us the opportunity to discover the meaning of life within ourselves.