



## THE WAY OF A MYSTIC

### *Exploring a Mystical Approach to Faith*

- ❖ Class 1—What Is a Christian Mystic?
- ❖ Class 2—The Foundations for a Mystical Life
- ❖ Class 3—Stories of the Mystics
- ❖ Class 4—Becoming a Practical Mystic

## *What Is a Mystic?*

So the beginning of the answer to the question, “What is mysticism?” must be this: Mysticism is the passionate longing of the soul for God, the Unseen Reality, loved, sought and adored in Himself for Himself alone... A mystic is not a person who practices unusual forms of prayer, but a person whose life is ruled by this thirst.... so the mystic, because of that loving and devoted attention which we call contemplation... comes to know a spiritual reality to which we are deaf and blind. He knows it, but he cannot describe it; as we know but cannot describe the atmosphere of our own country, our own home.

- Evelyn Underhill, *Life as Prayer*

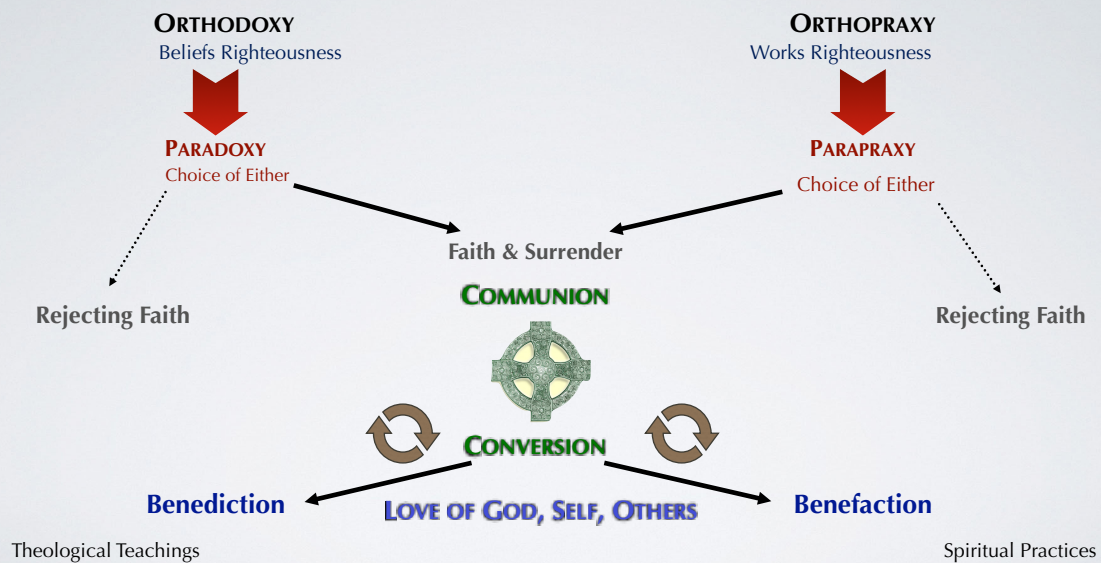
## *Thomas Kelly, The Eternal Promise*

Our task is not to work for [God], but to yearn for God to work through us and to join our sensitivity to God’s working, already going on inside the lives of others. For wherever we go, there God has preceded us. To whomever we speak, God has first been speaking to her or him. And our task is to urge people to listen to their inner Teacher. Within all people the heavenly Educator is at work, tenderly, patiently, speaking inside of rich and poor, educated and ignorant, black and white. And the church’s task is first of all to call men to a listening life, a life of internal listening to the inner promptings that are already going on.

## *We often misunderstand what a mystic is*

- ❖ **It doesn't mean being a special person**, having extraordinary spiritual powers, having special experiences, or having a certain "spiritual" personality.
- ❖ **Mystics rarely stand out from the crowd** and rarely demonstrate attributes the larger culture (even religious culture) values.
- ❖ **Mystics don't see themselves as special**—they struggle just as much as we do with the realities of life.
- ❖ **They don't see a division between the secular and sacred**, but seek the sacred in everything.
- ❖ **No one really "is" a mystic**, but instead pursue a more "mystical way."
- ❖ **Some abuse the word promote themselves**, and like false profits, use it to make a profit.

### THE WAY OF THE MYSTIC



## THE RESTRICTIVE WAY OF *ORTHOPRAXY*

**ORTHOPRAXY**  
Works Righteousness

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Works Righteousness

**ORTHOPRAXY** is an attempt to be righteous through “right works”:

- Focusing on Law in a way that’s judgmental, self-focused, and self-righteous;
- Motivated by salvation—church, giving, and religious practices in order to save myself and get into heaven;
- Doing good deeds so that God will notice how good I am and reward me here on earth or in the afterlife.

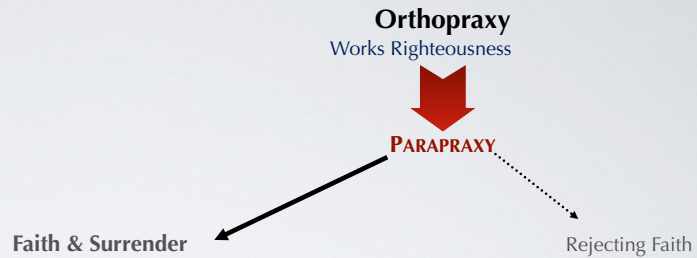
**ORTHOPRAXY** is what the Reformation struggled against, and what Jesus taught against:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’

“But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’

“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”(Luke 18:9-14)

## THE PROBLEM OF PARAPRAXY gets in the way of orthopraxy...



**PARAPRAXY** is the inability to truly and fully do what is good despite our good intentions:

- It is the problem of sin that causes us either not to do the what God wants, or to do it for the wrong reasons;
- It is the problem expressed in Romans 7:15-20, which states:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do--this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it."

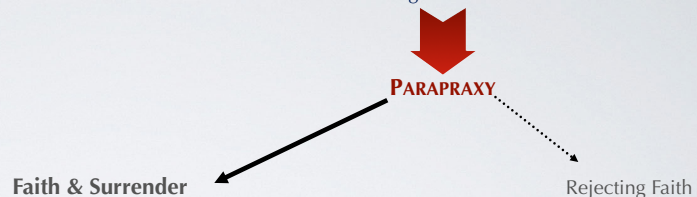
- It is the attempt to substitute religious practices for a relationship with God.

**Eventually orthopraxy falls into parapraxy, which leads us either to inner conflict or to reject faith.**

## THE ENTICING WAY OF ORTHODOXY

**Orthodoxy**  
Beliefs Righteousness

**Orthopraxy**  
Works Righteousness

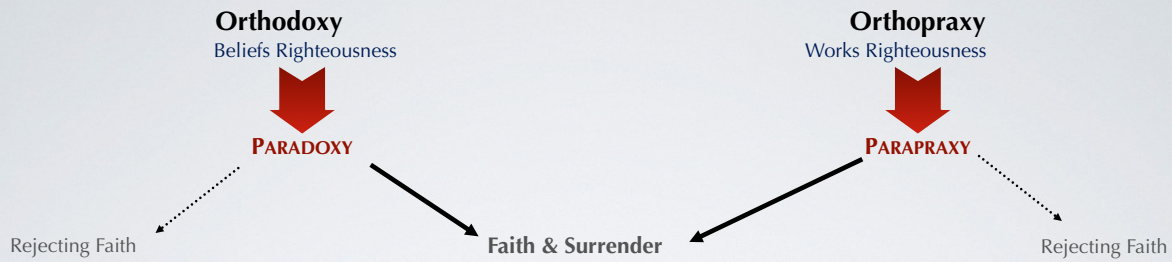


**Orthodoxy** = the pursuit of the *right* beliefs about God, Christ, Christianity, and Christian faith.

An emphasis on orthodoxy leads to:

- Trying to save myself through knowledge of the Bible, Christian theology, Christian dogmatics, and the teachings of the church;
- Obsessing about having the "right" theology, the "right" beliefs, and the "right" understanding of God and Christ.
- Believing that the key to faith and finding God rests in logic and rational thinking--that if we have the right beliefs and understanding, we can find God--an approach that substitutes beliefs about God for God.

## THE PROBLEM OF PARADOXY is an impediment to orthodoxy...



**Paradoxy** is the reality that the essential teachings of Christianity are rational contradictions. For instance:

- How can God be one and three at the same time?
- How can God be incarnated in a human, and then die, and then be resurrected by God?
- How can we follow teachings that tell us that to be strong we have to be weak, to be rich we have to be poor, to receive we have to give, to save ourselves we have to lose ourselves, to be exalted we have to be humbled, to live we have to die?

*Eventually the awareness of paradoxy leads to inner conflict, which leads many to reject faith.*

CHURCH RIGHTEOUSNESS

**Orthodoxy**  
Beliefs Righteousness

NAMES RIGHTEOUSNESS

**PARADOXY**

Rejecting Faith

LITURGICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

Faith & Surrender

SPIRITUAL RIGHTEOUSNESS

GIFTS RIGHTEOUSNESS

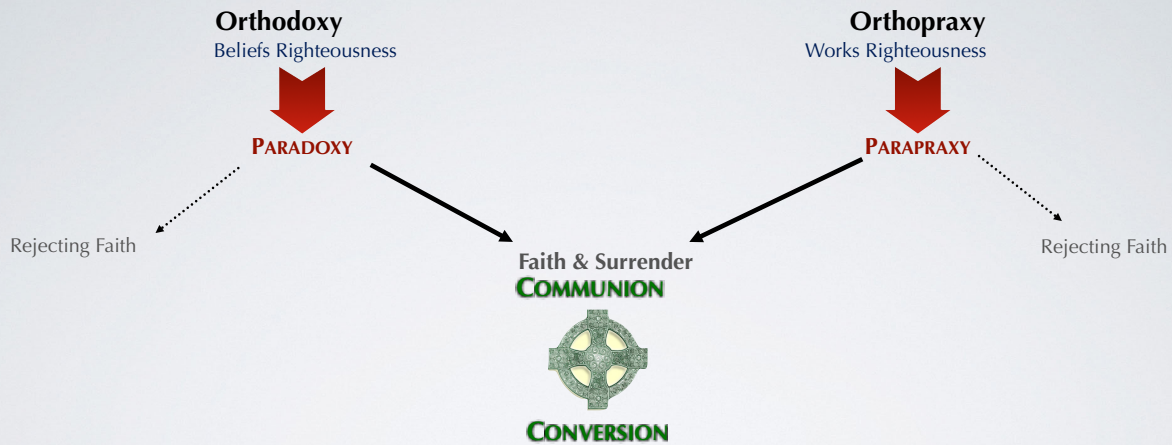
**Orthopraxy**  
Works Righteousness

**PARAPRAXY**

Rejecting Faith

## The Problem of Righteousness

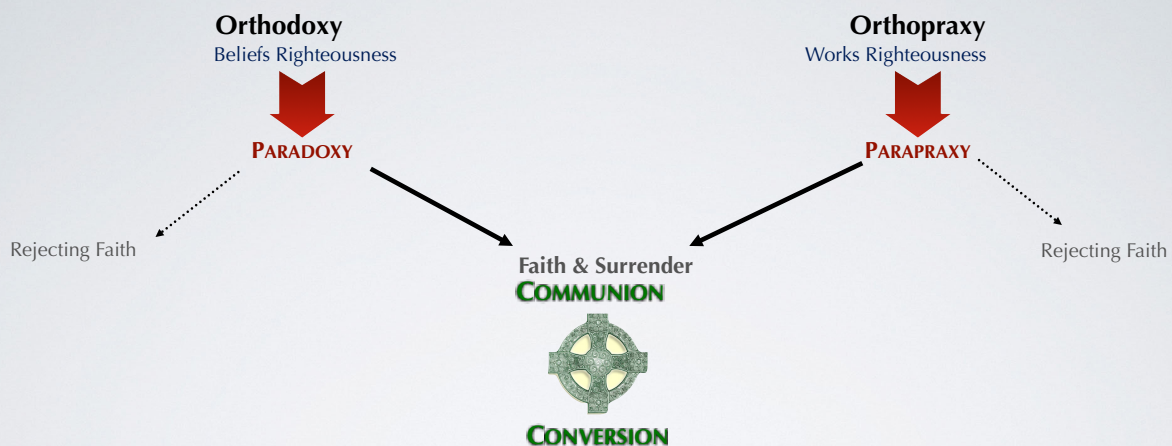
## THE MYSTICAL WAY IS THE WAY OF COMMUNION AND CONVERSION



The way of communion and conversion is the mystical way—the way of faith and surrender that leads us to:

- Emphasizes loving God with all our minds, hearts, souls, and strength, and others as ourselves (Luke 10:27);
- Emphasizes giving up the attempt to be “right” in practice and belief in order to simply surrender to God and have faith in God;
- Emphasizes trusting God to guide us to right beliefs and practices.

## CYCLE OF CONVERSION & COMMUNION

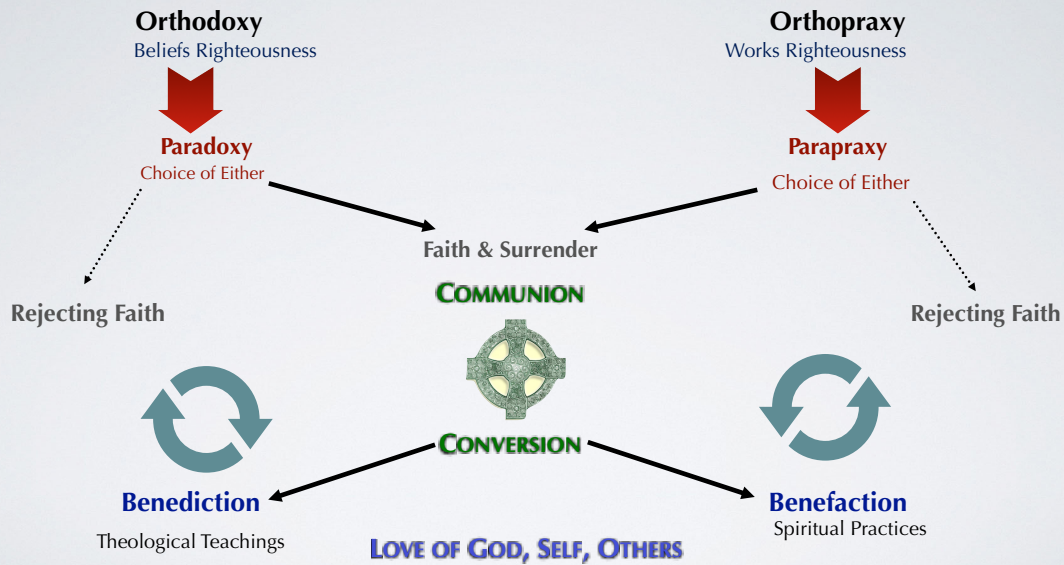


**Communion with God eventually leads to a conversion of the soul**, a conversion expressed in John 3:3, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again [from above]”

This may lead to a “born-again” experience, but really is more of a mystical transformation that often takes place without our awareness

Conversion leads back to greater communion with God and others, which in turn, leads to deeper conversion.

## THE WAY OF THE MYSTIC



### So who is a mystic?

A mystic is someone who has **abandoned** her- or himself **to the mystery of God**, the way of Christ, the life of being led by the Holy Spirit.

A mystic is someone who **lives in an ever-growing openness to God** in everything.

- \* She/he has strong beliefs and a commitment to compassionate acts, but is much more interested in how they build a relationship with God.
- \* She/he is immersed in a tradition, but is open to God in everything.
- \* She/he spends life falling deeper and deeper in love with God, and letting that love flow through her or him.



**Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ***

Everyone naturally wishes to have knowledge, but what good is great learning unless it is accompanied by a feeling of deep awe and profound reverence toward God? Indeed, a humble farmer who serves God is better than a proud philosopher, who neglecting himself, contemplates the course of the heavens. The person who truly knows himself seems common in his own eyes...

If you want to learn something that will really help you, learn to see yourself as God sees you and not as you see yourself in the distorted mirror of your own self-importance. This is the greatest and most useful lesson we can learn: to know ourselves for what we truly are, to admit freely our weaknesses and failings, and to hold a humble opinion of ourselves because of them. Not to dwell on ourselves and always to think well and highly of others is great wisdom and perfection.

**Frank Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic***

I feel simply carried along each hour, doing my part in a plan which is far beyond myself. This sense of cooperation with God in little things is what so astonishes me, for I never have felt it this way before. I need something, and turn round to find it waiting for me. I must work, to be sure, but there is God working along with me. To know this gives a sense of security and assurance for the future which is also new to my life. I seem to have to make sure of only one thing now, and every other thing "takes care of itself," or I prefer to say what is more true, God takes care of all the rest. My part is to live this hour in continuous inner conversation with God and in perfect responsiveness to His will, to make this hour gloriously rich. This seems to be all I need think about.

**Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation***

Faith is not just conformity, it is *life*. It embraces all the realms of life, penetrating into the most mysterious and inaccessible depths not only of our own unknown spiritual being but even of God's own hidden essence and love. Faith, then, is the only way of opening up the true depths of reality, even of our own reality. Until a man yields himself to God in the consent of total belief, he must inevitably remain a stranger to himself, an exile from himself, because he is excluded from the most meaningful depths of his own being: those which remain obscure are unknown because they are simple and too deep to be attained by reason.