

Spiritual Warfare: St. Philotheos of Sinai from the Philokalia



Icon of an unknown Desert Hermit

Our Holy Father Philotheos the Sinaite
“Forty Texts on Inner Wakefulness (Watchfulness)”
in

The Philokalia, Writings of the Holy Mystic Fathers in which is Explained how the Mind is Purified, Illuminated, and Perfected through Practical and Contemplative Ethical Philosophy, Vol. 2 (of Selected Readings) compiled by St Macarios of Corinth and edited by St. Nicodemos the Hagiorite, Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, Belmont MA, 2009, pp. 307-342.

34. First there is suggestion; then, coupling; then, assent; then,

captivity; then, passion, endowed with intimacy and continuity--it is here that the victory in the fight against us is won. For thus is it also defined by the Holy Fathers.

35. Now **Suggestion** is, they say, a bare thought, or an image of a thing which happens to arise newly in the heart and to appear to the mind. **Coupling** is to converse, either with passion or without passion, with what has appeared. **Assent** is the pleasurable inclination of the soul to the thing seen. **Captivity** is the forcible and involuntary leading away of the heart, or continuing communion with the chance thing, causing communion with the chance thing, causing even our best state to disappear. **Passion** they call chiefly that which lurks in the heart for a long time passionately. Of all these, the first is sinless; the second is not such altogether; the third is or is not such, depending upon the state of the striver; and combat is the cause either of crowns or of punishments.

36. Captivity is different at the time of prayer and when we are not engaged in prayer. But passion is undoubtedly subject either to repentance or to future torment. Therefore he who resists the first, that is suggestion, or regards it without passion, has at once cut off everything shameful. This is the combat of evil demons against both Monks and non-Monks, and the defeat or victory, as we have said. The consequences of victory are either crowns (for those who have defeated the demons) or penalties for those who have fallen and have not repented. Let us, therefore, struggle mentally against them, lest we translate their evil purposes into sinful deeds. Instead, cutting sin off from our heart, we shall find within us the kingdom of heaven. Let us preserve the purity of our heart and continuous contrition towards God through this most beautiful work.

2. Therefore, those who are struggling mentally ought with all their strength to select spiritual practices from the Divine Scriptures and apply them to their mind like hygienic plasters. And from early morning, Scripture says, it is necessary to stand bravely and relentlessly at the gate of the heart, with strict remembrance of God and unceasing prayer of Jesus Christ in the soul, and by means of mental guarding destroy all the sinners of the land; and in a state of ecstasy and intensification of faithful remembrance of God, to cut asunder the heads of princes, for the sake of the Lord, and the beginnings of hostile thoughts, since we perceive in mental toils, too, a certain divine working and order. And it is indeed necessary to act thus, using every effort, until it is time for eating. After this, having thanked the Lord Who, solely through His love for men, fills us doubly with food--both in spirit and in body--we must spend our time in remembrance of death and meditation on it. And the next day we must again powerfully perform the morning work. For even if we act thus daily, barely shall we succeed, with the help of the Lord, in escaping from the snares of the incorporeal (or mental) enemy. When these practices (i.e., remembrance of God, the Jesus Prayer, remembrance of death and meditation on it) continue in us, they give birth to these three virtues: faith hope and love.