

Face yourself

• *How* •
*to overcome
your passions*

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FACE YOURSELF

Part I

**How to overcome
your passions**



“Zolotoye sechenie”
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This book is for those seeking that which is absent in their lives and for those looking for true happiness, inner peace and love.

There are no hidden secrets, rituals or rites — the key is and always has been in our hands.

Those who are genuinely seeking to comprehend the true meaning of life and acquire an understanding of the reason behind their individual circumstances will find plain and simple answers from the distilled essence of knowledge passed on to us by Saints and Holy Men spanning some 2,000 years.

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Foreword

There is a delightful parable about a sincere young man who at the age of twenty asked the Lord to change this unjust world. Ten years passed, but the world remained the same. At the age of thirty the young man again addressed the Lord with another request this time to change, at least, his village. Another ten years passed but the village remained the same. This time the young man asked the Lord to change his neighbors, and then later to change his own family. Nonetheless, everything remained the same. At the age of sixty he requested the Lord to at least change, his evil wife, but still God remained deaf to his request. At last, at the age of seventy, he pleaded to God: “Oh, Lord! Finally I understand. Could You please help me change myself?” To which the Lord replied: “You know, today you have taken your first step towards Me”.

Most people are so busy with criticizing and correcting their surroundings that it never occurs to them to think about their own imperfections. The cause is our ego- the cravings of our soul. It is our ego and that “helps” us see the imperfections in other people creating in turn an illusion which prevents us from any critical examination of ourselves. Unfortunately, quite

often our ego manages to maintain this illusion throughout our whole life.

Comparatively few of us manage to dispel the myth of our perfection created by our ego and to honestly examine ourselves. This material in this text is to a large extent a practical guide for all those who sincerely want, and are ready to change themselves.



Christianity today

This text is premised on the absolute and complete acceptance of the Teachings brought to earth by Jesus Christ. It regards all of the Holy Gospel as the indisputable and paramount Truth and it is these principles first and foremost that have underpinned this text. In addition Appendix 2 contains a selection of excellent aphorisms and maxims of numerous Saints and Righteous Men on all of the material discussed in this book.

Today's Christianity has lost its way, having distanced itself from the simple and clear words which the Lord said to us. The majority of us who regard ourselves as Christians, during the course of our lifetime manage to practice, many different religious ceremonies and other rites and rituals proclaiming we are followers of the Lord without even having read His Word. The very words for which the ancients had been waiting for five thousand years. To bring these Words to us the Lord endured pain, suffering and ultimately crucifixion.

We indeed went astray. Saint Seraphim of Sarov, said in a conversation with his disciple and true supporter Nicholas Motovilov, "...we have departed from the simplicity of original Christian knowledge, and under the pretext of enlightenment we have sunk into such dark

ignorance so that what the ancients understood so clearly seems to us almost inconceivable". The essence of the Doctrine that Christ brought to us is very simple. It is easily understood and explicitly set forth by Him in the Sermon on the Mount and in other places of the four Holy Gospel texts contained in the New Testament.

His Doctrine mentions very little concerning ceremonies and other religious practices or rituals to God, but instead draws our complete attention to firmly believe in a living God, the importance of inner spiritual work and convinces us to face ourselves, to become introspective and thereby recognize our imperfections, and discover our ego. It teaches us how not to be led by the passions of our "Old Testament" man, and how with the help of God to overcome these passions and acquire true love and spiritual purity designated by our Savior. It is only to those who have taken and completed the less easy and less speedy path does the Lord grant Paradise; that which the whole mankind has been dreaming about since ancient times.

Only once in the whole history of mankind, did the Lord come to earth and give to us those words which are of such great importance. Do not be indolent, make the effort to read these words but remember to never rank them equally with any other words pronounced on this earth.



Chapter 1

Types of passions (ego)

Before the start of any offensive against an enemy, the ultimate wish of every experienced general is to know in advance the enemy's defence plan. Accurate information regarding adversarial forces will help the general to organize an attack skillfully and precisely, resulting in fewer casualties, and achieve victory quickly. In knowing the enemy's plans in advance, a general will not allow enemy troops to close in behind him thereby he can avoid an undesirable guerilla war.

Our attack on our ego is also a war against the "Old Testament" and sinful man inside us. The opposing forces have for a very long time been very successfully diverting us from the true path to God, and our underestimation of these forces will now cost us dearly.

It was for this reason that an attempt was made to make a diagram approximating the various types of passions in the form of a tree. The selection of aphorisms of Christian clerics and holy men in Appendix 2 on this issue not only provide support to and explanation of this visual representation but are also a source of other

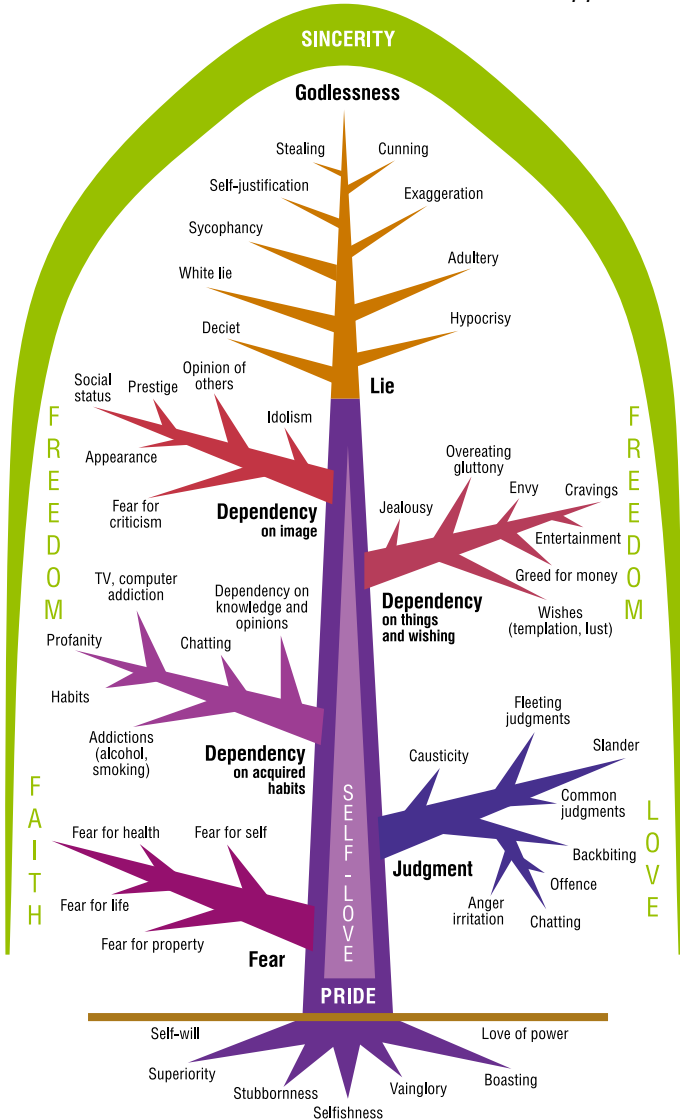
useful information. Naturally the diagram is far from being perfect and despite its shortcomings it is still of significant assistance to understanding the composition of our ego.

The ego (passion) tree (see Appendix 1)

A tree closely represents the structure of the ego which is inside of us. Any person moving towards God must remove each and every part of it — the root, the trunk, and each branch of this tree from his ego and only then will he be able to say that he has eradicated all his imperfections.

False persona

Our persona is comprised of the Divine soul and the passions which add treachery and illusion. The more passions we have, the more our persona, — that is our conscious ego “me” — is insincere and false. The real “me” only surfaces, after the hard and arduous work of eradicating our “Old Testament” man. We can either unconsciously cultivate our ego, following its demands, or consciously extinguish it, working on ourselves, spiritually and following the voice of God.



Pride

The root and the trunk of the ego tree is our pride. To various degrees our pride is an integral part of each of us. Although a tree cannot exist without its roots however is not that easy to recognize and admit its presence. It may take a long time to overcome and eradicate your imperfections before your own pride “allows” you to see it in yourself.

Pride is not homogeneous and its structure differs from person to person. Our pride is cultivated by our passions and we even consider some of them as a feature of our character. However these have nothing to do to our real essence or our soul.

Self admiration is the basis for our pride and the core of our ego. If love of ourselves, our bodies, and attachment to our habits completely fills our heart then there is no space left to love God and other people.

Selfishness, vanity, stubbornness, boastfulness, ambition, and other passions compose our pride. Each of these passions is like a string of a guitar, and together they sound a specific chord of our false persona. Consequently nearly all the actions of a person whose passions have not been eradicated are being performed to the accompaniment of one or more of the “pride guitar” strings.

The first thing our false persona starts to do is to take care of its own safety. This is how **fear** is born in us. Fear of losing our false persona, that it may fall ill, that our position or image in society may be diminished or destroyed thereby depriving us of something very important. Fear is the main and loyal guard of our ego. Not surprisingly people who managed to completely get rid themselves of their ego immediately forget what fear is and live peacefully with love and faith.

Judgment

Quite often the main topics in our discussions with people is judgment and criticism of others. **Judgment** is a passion, just another variation of ego. Our selfish persona never wants to be inferior and continually strives for superiority. Judgment is an easy and convenient way to exalt ourselves without making any effort. It is with the assistance of judgment and criticism that our ego is able cultivate itself.

Judgment varies both in the terms of its power and cunning. **Anger** and **irritation** are the extreme and most vivid forms of judgment. **Anger (hatred)** is the ultimate form of judgment and denial of everything. When we are angry, there is no love therefore no God in us. **Irritation** is a diluted form of anger.

Anger and irritation are followed by **taking offence, envy, backbiting and judgment**. All of these traits can with diligence become quite visible. Self pity quite often conceals a grievance against God Himself. In self pity, we usually complain about our destiny, forgetting that it is God Who is the maker of all our destinies. After these follow more subtle manifestations such as **reticence** and **causticity**. In some circumstances a person judges someone either ironically or in his thoughts, quite often without even noticing it himself.

There are also fleeting **cliché-judgments** we usually use characterizing people with a quick glance. For example, somebody can be characterized as wicked, another as stupid and so on. As a consequence, we manage to judge over a hundred people a day, without even realizing it.

Another and more vicious type of judgment is the so-called **generalized judgment**. Stating, for instance, “we are all sinners”. In reality we are actually justifying ourselves and judging the other six billion people living on our planet.

Another barely visible type of judgment is **gossiping** about other people. Trying to gossip about somebody without judging that person is not possible unless you have first completely extinguished your own ego.

So, when a person undertaking personal spiritual work reaches the level of working

on the judgment component of his ego he has to spend a considerable time skillfully puzzling out and untangle its cobwebs.

Dependencies and addictions

The next task of the ego is to create as many as possible **dependencies** and **addictions** for people of this world. According to the rules of evil a person's attention should never be free. A person who is free from his dependencies is dangerous to the ego, since that person can start thinking about the meaning and sense of life, about his soul and about God. He can, being immersed in such thoughts "unearth" an abundance of interesting information about the false truths of this world and about his own persona. This is very damaging to the ego.

The system of dependencies intertwines several branches of the ego tree. The first one being our **dependence on our acquired habits and patterns of behavior**. As a rule, we all consider them an integral part of our life. These habits and patterns include both the harmful habits which we are continually battling with and 'unharmful' habits. Sometimes we are proud of these "unharmful" habits and even embrace them as our unique features or part of our character. A person may for example be unknowingly proud of using swear words in

his speech or has a habit of talking for hours on the phone.

More recently evolved and dangerous dependencies are the **“electronic dependencies”** such as television, computers, mobile phones, etc. Our acceptance of these devices has been almost instantaneous and having been embraced they now consume our total attention.

The vortex of habitual dependencies robs a person of the healthy desires of his soul cultivating instead temporal desires and indifference to everyone. Quite often, laziness, lack of will, indifference, apathy, depression and inattentiveness are the outward manifestations of such a person.

The next branch of “dependencies” is the **dependence of a man on objects, thoughts about these objects and also wishes concerning them.** Sometimes people in these dependencies find themselves categorizing their surroundings into spiritually “comfortable” or “uncomfortable”. If a “close” friend or relative starts behaving in a way we don’t like, he is immediately moved out of our category of close friends and those near and dear to us.

As a consequence of cultivating in himself a dependency towards objects, a person inevitably ends up worshipping its universal symbol – money.

Another **branch of dependencies** directly concerns our false persona. It is insufficient for

our pride to create our false persona, it needs our “me” to be highly valued and well regarded by other people. As a result, the majority of people spend their whole life cultivating a persona that will be worthy the envy of other people. Incredible amounts of time, effort and endeavors are wasted to support soap bubbles such as our **status in society, titles, awards, a prestigious education, our outward appearance and trendiness**. In the acquisition of these we move away from God, Who is replaced by cold-heartedness and idolism.

Deceit

Dependencies and addictions deprive us of the ability to correctly view the true essence of things. Sometimes our passions encourage us to commit sin, so we can acquire and keep all the “valuable things” which we depend on and in particular, tempt us to forsake honesty.

This is how the **temptation to lie** appears. At the very beginning this temptation is very subtly couched as a “**white lie**” which may be merely not speaking up. However it gradually becomes less subtle and more crude. Then the lie of **self-justification** becomes an aid in distorting our consciousness and we are no longer able to see the events around us in their true light. It is not by chance that in Christianity the devil

is also called the evil one. The self-justification of a deception has no limits. It is rare to find a criminal who considers his actions to be wrong. It is only God Who can help a person living in a mire of deception, make his way back to the territory of sincerity and honesty.

One of the most cunning types of lie is **obsequiousness** or **sycophancy**. We often nod in approval, wishing not to disappoint other people and ourselves, which in turn reinforces their acceptance of their own egotism and selfishness. As a result, those people are being deprived of the opportunity to understand their passions, and to start struggling against them, which would enable them to move closer to the Lord.

Selfish thoughts

Another task of the ego is not to leave us free of thoughts for a single minute, and to permanently switch our mind from one thought in the branch of “The ego tree” to another. As a consequence, a person spends his whole life constantly making judgments and thinking about his dependencies and fears.

Of course the above is a very general summary of the structure of ego within us. It will help you to understand the appearance of the ego and its structure. You then need to ask God to show you your shortcomings and ask

Him to help you overcome them. It is not a question of whether or not to ask for God's help in this instance — it is essential to do so. There is no one but our Father Who knows us perfectly, and only He can help us reduce our ego and rid us of our passions.

Another and possibly the most important process which provides an understanding the structure of our ego is to take a critical view of ourselves thereby identifying the place for the Lord's "axe" to strike and cut off our passions. The strike point is critical. For example, if we only see the manifestation of "exaggeration" in ourselves and if we do not examine any further, then we "cut off" only that branch. If however after time we see "exaggeration" in ourselves and understand that it is a part of "deceit" then the whole limb of "deceit" is cut off and all other branches of "deceit" get weaker with the time.

However, the most damaging strokes to our ego are those when we cut the roots, i.e. when we reach the passions of "pride", our false "me". If during "exaggeration" we ask ourselves a question why we told a lie, we will realize that the genuine reason of our lie was the wish either to make another envy us or to gain prestige. In both cases it is a manifestation of our vanity.

This is the same true for every small part of the ego. A person never does anything wrong, unless it is necessary for some part of his false

“me”, for the passion of “pride”. So, spend less time cutting of branches and attack the roots of your passions.

Results of your work

Let us briefly consider the results of this work. A person, who really does his best to extinguish his ego, will always feel the results of his endeavors. Thus, the process of extinguishing the ego of deceit leads a person to sincerity and honesty. Eradicating our dependencies and addictions results in an incomparable feeling of inner freedom. Ridding ourselves from judgment and criticism develops in us a true love towards people. Strengthening of our faith in God gives us joy and the gradual reduction of all our fears. On ridding ourselves from all passions and their root – pride – our heart will become permanently joined with God, and God will grant us His Divine Grace. This Grace will be on those poor in spirit – in secular spirit – about whom the Lord was talking about and for which this blessing is granted to us (St. Matthew, 5:3). Quite often, in Christianity, passions are called spirits, for example, the spirit of judgment or the spirit of slyness.



Chapter 2

How to extinguish passions (ego)

Extinguishing passions (ego)

It is quite clear from the previous chapter, what we are likely to encounter on our path to extinguishing our passions. **To commence efficient and productive work, we first need to correctly arrange our priorities. Only the Lord, through the Holy Spirit, can free us from our passions. For Him to do that, it is a prerequisite that we must first have a sincere desire to be free of them.** Only then will the Lord grant his help through the Holy Spirit, the Light which **“enlightens each person coming into this world”** (St. John 1:9).

What are our passions and ego? It is the muck that we have been voluntary collecting during our lifetime, every time we yield to sin. Recall your childhood. Did you have any pride or a false persona? Did you have any dependencies, addictions or deceit? Of course not. All of these we acquired later in life.

The most difficult stage in the struggle against our passions is in the initial stage of

our spiritual journey. This is the time when our ego fiercely, with all its strength, opposes any critical examination of it. It will be practically impossible to proceed without complete sincerity and significant intestinal fortitude. However if a person, is able to find the strength and the will to commence the fight with God's help against those of his passions he can identify, then without doubt this will be an inspiration to him. Isn't it astonishing that if day after day we honestly see and acknowledge, for example, the manifestation of irritation in ourselves, and if we repent and ask the Lord for help, in reality this manifestation will get weaker?

The struggle against our ego is a sincere search of passions in us. Our discovery of and intolerance to our imperfections is a prerequisite to the Lord directing His Holy Light to dissolve them. Only careful observation of each of our actions, sincere repentance our wrongdoing and a genuine desire not to repeat our wrongdoing weakens our ego.

When in his spiritual work a person rises to a level at which he starts enjoying the process of identifying his passions it is a sign that there has been a significant shift and that he has understood that which is truly important. Once this level is achieved then it is most unlikely that anything will now divert him from the path.

It is also very helpful to systematically update the list of your passions. The people around you will be your best assistants in that regard. Many people take pleasure in criticizing others. Use their enthusiasm and check your reaction to their criticism. Re-read your list often and ask God to help you recognize all of your passions. In a relatively short time you will see some fundamental results.

Humility is the best defence to help us withstand the attacks of our ego. However it is very important not to confuse this wonderful method with tolerance. Tolerance is the development of an attitude of coping with unpleasant situations and it simply strengthens the ego in such a way that a person begins to regard himself as being resistant and hardy. Humility is an absolute acceptance of any situation and regarding it as being very useful for our soul while at the same time having complete trust in God in its resolution. Humility leads to the dissolution of our ego as a whole and gives rise to tranquility, mellowness and serenity.

Complete eradication of the ego is impossible without absolute sincerity. As it is the Lord Who takes upon Himself nearly all of the work, of razing our passions. All that is required of us is to critically assess ourselves and to repent.

The process of diminishing of our ego becomes more obvious with time. For a person

who commences this work with all sincerity, it will take just several months to notice the first fundamental results which will confirm that he is on the right track.

The true indicator of the lack of a particular passion in us is our psychological stability. That is, when the passion appears in some situation or another, we have no negative reaction to it.

While working on extinguishing our ego, all our efforts should be directed to candidly view our passions and have the desire to eradicate them. It is for this purpose that the Lord gives us His Holy Light with which to dissolve them.

A person who having started despising his sinful nature, very quickly and almost instantly receives help from the Lord in the form of His Divine Light. The Holy Spirit is from God Himself Who clearly sees our efforts to rid ourselves of all our uncleanness and provides his help.

There will be no spiritual progress in a person without him fighting against his individual passions. There will be only be a cultivation of his spiritual ego. Genuine spirituality is the complete absence of any passions in a person. The whole purpose of the Divine teachings is to show us our passions and sins. The sole purpose of evil is to help us skillfully justify our misdeeds.

Reading the works of the Saints and righteous men, who paid particular importance to this issue, is of great assistance in the process of revealing and eradicating of our passions. For example Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, (in particularly the fifth volume of his work “Passions and Virtues”), is a shining beacon on this topic. His living language and enormous practical experience give us an opportunity to look at our passions from a dozen of different angles and, with the help of God, to uproot them. Nearly all the different passions in man have been microscopically examined by him.

Help from our surroundings

The Lord always precisely and without error carefully places the souls of his children in this life. All the people around us — members of our family, our colleagues, friends, or just our acquaintances — are far from random people. All of them are sent to us by God to provide us with support in our spiritual life. Quite often we are unhappy, critical, judgmental or even angry with them forgetting that judgment, anger and irritation are our passions which prevent us from entering the Kingdom of God. That is why the people around us are the mirror that reflects our ego and all our passions.

Since quite often we are not very happy with our circumstances we dream (and sometimes even take some action) to change them. However, we keep forgetting that these people were sent to us for the salvation of our soul. Our surroundings unmistakably reflect the whole disfigurement of our ego. Our surroundings are the medicine given to us by the Lord Himself for our healing and for the uprooting of our passions. Something we cannot do without his help. Ask yourself, how can we see our passions, if there be no outward manifestation of them?

We can escape from everyone and in our own opinion be free. However this would only stifle and slow down the growth of our spirit because the process of eradication of our passions will become retarded or may cease altogether. Trying to avoid the Lord's remedy is the beginning of self-treatment, which will inevitably cause us harm. Of course, this does not apply to people, who leave this world in the service of God. By daily paying attention to our negative reaction to other people we discover our passions which may be in the form of judgment, irritation, anger, deceit, envy and all other possible passions. If upon realizing their manifestation in us and we ask the Lord to deliver us from them, only then we can heal our souls with the help of God. Put another way, we cannot without God's medicine heal our souls. A person by rejecting

such help makes the task of the salvation of his soul far more complicated.

If we want to help the people around us, first and foremost, we should start working on ourselves, on our own judgementalism and other passions of our soul. Venerable Seraphim of Sarov said: ***“Acquire a peaceful spirit, and around you thousands will be saved”***. Only a person, who, with the help of God, has already eradicated his passions really knows how to help others prevail. A person who only theoretically understands, but does not have the practical experience is just pronouncing hollow words in which neither his heart nor God have participated and so do not effect change in the people around us. For this reason it is only by working on ourselves will we be able to really help the people around us become better. In the worst case scenario we will spend our life far away from everyone because our soul, filled with passions and will never feel happy for a long.

When in the beginning of our life we refuse to take steps to avoid taking the gentle medicine the Lord prescribes, then inevitably we are administered a more potent and bitter treatment. In circumstances where we reject the help of God, He sometimes has no option but to place us into an impossible situation from which we cannot escape.

A person working on the eradication of his passions day after day will see the manifestation

of love inside him. It is this love about which the Lord said: ***“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another”*** (St. John 13:35). Other people will not irritate you any longer. The Lord does not avoid us, but day after day, year after year, nurtures us helps and supports us with love and tolerance. This is something about which we should regularly remind ourselves in the course of our spiritual work.

When someone patiently and persistently works on his passions, he eventually becomes kind, calm, and loving. People around him gradually start changing, as they notice his conduct and feel his love towards them. It was the Lord Who said: ***“...but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”*** (St. John 4:14). It was a long time ago that, God told us where the real help comes from in the process of changing people around us.

Once again pay attention to your surroundings, and take note of how you react to them and what relationship or influence your passions have to your reactions. Notice how a passion resists revealing itself to you. Ask God to rid you of it and only then will it start to diminish. You will notice both the people around you and your relationship to them will change. Free from passions, you will always be a happy person, loving God and the people around you.

That is what God's love and help does to those who, without objection, meekly and honestly accept all the medicine from God.

Repentance

Repentance is the soul aching after committing sin. It is disappointment in oneself for being weak, feeling guilty before the Lord, and sometimes before others and feeling the hurt of sullyng your soul. The strength of repentance is not in its duration but in its sincerity. The acknowledgment of sin without repenting is tacit approval of the sin. Formal repentance without the heart grieving for what has occurred is a cunning trap of evil trying again to lead us away from what is important and to leave the sin unrepented.

Asking forgiveness is repentance in action. As the wise say "*Each time we say 'sorry', our pride melts*". Repentance without the words 'Forgive me' is a cunning victory of our passions over our soul.

Extinguishing pride (ego)

Our pride and its passions are the trunk and the root of the whole ego tree. It is our pride which is the basis of our false persona "me" which

is the initiator of all of our sinful thoughts and deeds. It follows that if we want to remove the source of such thoughts, we have to carefully look for “the commander” of these thoughts.

That is why the quickest way to eradicating our ego is to search for the real initiator of our sinful thoughts. This may be our selfishness, stubbornness, vanity, arrogance, or other passion of our pride.

If, after discovering our sinful thought, we do not forget to determine and see in ourselves its “author”, then we have done our part of the work in extinguishing our ego in the most efficient way. The tree with the partially cut roots will not survive for very long.

The multi-sidedness of some passions (ego)

Some passions can have several manifestations in us. For example, deceit can consist of a “white lie”, acquiescing by silence, slyness, flattery, self-justification, etc. Quite often a person sees only one of these passions. Only truth is singular; however, a deceit always has in reserve dozens of alternatives similar to the truth.

In order to eradicate any part of our ego, we first need to be able to see it, acknowledge its presence in ourselves and repent. It is only in these circumstance that God will send His

Divine Light. The Lord does not help us get rid of the sores which we do not see in ourselves and which we consider to be the norm. Don't be afraid to use a pen and paper and with the help of your intuition write down the particulars of the passion you are working on. As an additional aid you may chose to show this list to the people close to you and who know you very well. Their love to criticize is of priceless assistance which you should thankfully accept. Use your past experience frequently. By using such a many-sided approach in extinguishing our ego, our work will be more efficient and less time consuming. Our past is an invaluable personal encyclopedia of previously revealed manifestations of our ego. Each passion, including the tiniest one, has already left dozens of its imprints in previous situations. Every day God shows us the manifestations of our ego one after the other. If you, as an experienced hunter, with the help of your intuition, periodically list through this "encyclopedia", you will very quickly reveal all types and subtypes of your passions and with the help of God eradicate them.

Individual and hidden types of passions (ego)

There is another more concealed type of ego, the essence of which needs to be examined. For

example, in your work in acquiring meekness and modesty, carefully watch your behavior and attitude towards people. For instance you may not be paying any attention to your aggressive driving, selfishness in fulfilling some work task, or jealousy in sport. As a result, you regularly support and even cultivate your ego in these hardly recognized activities.

Another example is when you are a collector of something. Irrespective of whether these are rather expensive or very cheap items or whether the collection is large or consists of only a few things. Your ego does not care what snare you are in; the main thing is that you have been caught. As a consequence, it is possible to cultivate serious pride and dependency by possessing, for example, a few of ancient coins or umbrellas of unusual coloring, or in fact any number of things. The size of collectors ego's are sometimes much bigger than the ego of multimillionaires and politicians.

The sequence of work with these passions is the same: acknowledgement of their existence within you, recognition of and noting their manifestation in your everyday life, repentance and sincere desire to eradicate them.

The structure of spiritual work

While working on your passions it is very important to work in the right sequence. The ego

having realized that a person has undertaken this work seriously, quite often tries to interfere in his work by excessiveness. For example, a person starts to examine his feeling of being offended by someone. Immediately his ego starts sending him thoughts like: “Yes, you have been offended. But you have also been offended by this person and that person”. As consequence, the person starts thinking about the dozens of times he has felt offended but in reality he is thinking about none of them. Merely enumerating your passions and looking at them superficially will not lead to their elimination. There is no room for God in such a congestion of thoughts. It is by far more useful and efficient to go through each of your passions individually, realizing and accepting your wrongfulness and sincerely repenting. It is when we take on such work ourselves that the Holy Light will help extinguish our passions.

The advice of Holy men helps us to correctly organize the sequence of our spiritual work on the eradication of our ego. It is best to work on your passions daily at a time most convenient for such an activity. The rest of your time is better spent opening up yourself to God’s Holy Light through prayers and constant attention to your current behavior.

It goes without saying, that this is an approximate order for your spiritual work. Optimally each person should apply it to their

particular life circumstances and current ability within the demands of daily life to achieve the best possible result.

Intuition (thoughts from God, God's Voice)

Our intuition is the voice of God, being heard by our soul. The Christian name for intuition is “**thoughts from God**” or “**God's Voice**”. Quite often intuition surfaces in comments such as “my soul doesn't accept it” and in other expressions. Our **conscience** is also one of its manifestations. Metropolitan Veniamin gave a perfect characterization of intuition: “***The soul has its own, much deeper intellect — intuition, which is the inner perception of truth***”. The main object of intuition is to ensure that a person fulfills his principal task on the earth, namely to cleanse himself of passions and to come to God. Any information which will help us in this process will be quite persistently provided to us by God. It will be difficult for a person to see all the types of passions inside him, unless he learns how to work with his intuition an invaluable gift from God through which the Lord prompts us.

In his work with intuition, the main task of a person is to honestly and implicitly accept

the answers from God revealing his passions, without trying to justify himself

There will always be a sign given to a person if he is really following the voice of God or whether he has trusted the voice of his ego. If after doing a certain action your conscience is bothering you or you are trying to convince yourself you have acted correctly or are trying to find arguments in your favor then you can be certain that you have definitely done something wrong. Your inner discomfort or dissatisfaction is God's assessment of your action and this assessment should help you realize your wrongdoing. If you do something right then you feel easiness and inner comfort and your conscience does not reflect on the matter.

A person working honestly and sincerely with his intuition, shall more and more often hear in his heart the quiet and warm voice of God among the continuously judging, irritated and chattering voices of his ego. With time and attentiveness the voice of our ego will become more and more discernible.

The person who listens to and trusts his intuition begins to live according to a different set of rules. The more he relies on the voice of God, the less mistakes he makes, both in his everyday life and in his spiritual work. ***“He that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit”*** (St. John 15:5).

Progress of intuition

In its hunt for knowledge, mankind has completely forgotten intuition, which is a simple method of communicating with God for any reason. As a result, we devote half our life to the process of acquiring knowledge second hand, without thinking to look inside ourselves in order to find this magic gift from God.

As a rule, each of us has a number of our own experiences of personal contact with the Lord. Following His voice is always positive for us and vice versa. For example, if for no particular reason we felt we did not want to go to somewhere but did then often we regretted it. Sometimes the reverse, where we did something quite randomly and later were astonished how successfully everything turned out. At that time our ego was unable to hamper us using our intuitional experience to draw conclusions useful to us. So, any efforts directed to the development of our communication with God will provide us with the best education in the world and, moreover, it is free. Just think how absurd it is that people try to learn from the experience of successful individuals in various spheres yet those individuals have often not studied much at all and relied on spontaneity and their intuition, It is possible to develop our intuition with time. The best way is to rid ourselves of our ego by working

on our passions. As the ego diminishes in a person so too does its voice weaken inside us thus reducing all “interference” to hearing God’s voice.

It is possible to distinguish our intuition and differentiate it from the voices of our ego by paying attention to its subtleties and tone. The voice of our soul is always soft and calm. It never makes us rush and calls for calmness, peace and love. While it makes no attempt to be at the forefront we can always hear it if we choose. The voice of the ego is always loud and dominating. This voice is always arguing about something, judging someone and making us bustle, passionately wish for something or hate someone. The intonation of these two voices is so different that you can easily learn to distinguish them in a relatively short period.

How to start working with intuition

It is not difficult at all to work with intuition. You can easily master some techniques and then to appeal to God for help on any questions.

First, you need to know the exact question, the answer to which you are seeking from Above. In the initial stages it is better to receive an answer to the first question before

asking God another. This is to prevent confusion in your mind and at the same time, to attune yourself to the intonation of the answer and gradually to get familiar with it. This may become a permanent practice leading to the most interesting conversations with the Lord.

Having asked a question, it is necessary to properly “attune” yourself to receive the answer. If possible, stop any intensive thinking and, instead, just start drawing, or knitting, or gaze at nature. God’s answer usually comes without a delay. It is short and does not give rise to any debate in your soul. Try to remember the intonation and tone of the answer.

At every stage your ego will keep on trying to interfere in the process. Be certain that the answer you receive does not involve any bustle, tenseness or anxiety.

Abilities of intuition in the struggle against passions (ego)

The main purpose of intuition is to bring about in a person consideration of the sinfulness of that person’s life and the necessity to change himself. That is why all the information about your passions and wrongdoings will be immediately provided to you by the Lord in any form you ask. In such questions God’s voice will be especially clear.

For example, if you ask a question where you went wrong today and you will immediately receive a detailed response. You can ask a question about a particular passion or regarding several passions. You can ask for this information in relation to a day, a week a year or for the whole period of your life. There are no limits for using God's help in this issue — what you need is a sincere will to accept the answers.

Further questions should include inquiries as to the best sequence of working at your passions. Each of us has his own individual ego, and, everyone has his own way of diminishing his ego. Quite often some passions are invisible as they hide behind the passions you have already revealed and if you start working on the passion you have revealed then you will progress quickly. The Lord will always tell you where the best place to start is and what to do next.

Attention to thoughts

Our thoughts are the primary weapon of the ego, and in the hands of such cunning and an experienced opponent this weapon is incredibly effective. It takes considerable time and energy to learn how to spot and repulse the assaults of evil. Do not lose heart

as the Lord is always completely in control of all situations. Nothing happens without His will.

God and evil never rest in the battle for our souls. Thoughts from both sides pop up into our heads, seeking to reach our hearts and to gain footing there. If we want the Lord to win this battle, then we must concertedly and actively reject the thoughts of His opponent. You must start with complete and absolute attention to all your thoughts. This issue is crucial to our spiritual work. It is not by accident that Jesus rated alertness equally important with prayer.

Thoughts from the “left” and “right”

In his third volume “Spiritual Struggle”, the Elder Paisios of Mount Athos sets forth invaluable detailed information on how to succeed in this “military campaign” for the benefit of every soul moving towards God. The thoughts, sent to us from each side — by the evil one and by the Lord; — can be categorized as thoughts from the “left” and thoughts from the “right”. Our success in opposing the “left” evil thoughts depends mainly on how competently and sincerely we fight this battle.

Initially, it is sufficient for a person to start confidently and uncompromisingly distinguishing these thoughts in himself. Your intuition, guidance provided by Christian righteous men, and also this book will help you in this process. The thought, which genuinely has been characterized as “left”, falls under and is incinerated by the Holy Light. Undertaking this kind of work allows us to accumulate priceless experience in resisting evil thoughts.

Evil thought itself cannot do any harm to our soul. It can be compared to the roadside billboard that you can simply pass and forget a few seconds later. It is worse, when the thought manages to stir up some kind of interest in us. Next the thought is accepted and subsequently we take steps to manifest it in our life. This is the way that evil permeates into our soul and expands its territory there. Without our approval and consent it can only tempt us by thoughts. Our sin can be forgiven only by the Lord, in response to our sincere repentance.

Likewise, our good thoughts also increase their territory in our soul, only this time to expand God’s presence. That is why we should learn to look at this world without evil thoughts but instead with love and warmth. About this there can be no doubt. Our Lord seeing this world loves it and everyone living in it. We should try to follow in his example.

It is not easy to sincerely look upon each person with love and warmth, but it is extremely necessary as it is only behind this door where Heaven waits.

Our ego is both cunning and experienced, so do not expect easy or prompt results on your spiritual journey. This work requires effort for many months and sometimes years. “Left” thoughts will never give up their attempts to take up residence in us. However as our heart is cleaned by the Lord, their chances for success diminish.

Wandering thoughts

Wandering thoughts, which make our mind hover in different spheres, sometimes do no less harm to us than our “left” thoughts. Bad thoughts are vivid and if we, having taken the path of battling against them, practice diligent observation we will begin to notice them rather quickly. If our ego senses this success, it changes tactics, and starts sending us wandering and neutral thoughts.

However “mail” to our heart only comes from two addresses and if a sender is not the Lord, it means it is His enemy who is cunningly stealing our time and distracting us from our important spiritual journey.

“Driving off” selfish thoughts

In the course of our lifetime, we all reveal ourselves through our thoughts, words, and deeds. Do not think that our thoughts are any less meaningful than our words or deeds. In the Holy Gospel Jesus in a particular relevant text said: ***“but the things which proceed out of the mouth, come forth from the heart, and those things defile a man”*** (St. Matthew 15:18). The Lord regards our sinful thoughts just as importantly as our words and deeds. It is very reason that it is so important in our spiritual work to maintain vigilance regarding our thoughts.

It is always very useful to develop in oneself the ability to recognize at the very beginning the appearance of sinful thoughts. The stage at which we notice the attacks of selfish thoughts on us will affect how well we can repulse them. For example it is like our reaction to a fox which sneaks into our chicken coop. If you notice the fox after it has already taken a chicken then you all you can do is mourn your loss. However if you manage to catch the fox committing the crime then the perpetrator may end up with a stick across its back and after that it will definitely have less desire to return. However if you are very vigilant and catch the fox at the entrance of the chicken coop and this time

you whack the stick across its nose (the most sensitive part) then after such an encounter it will have lost most of its motivation to sneak into your chicken coop and more likely start to consider another coop altogether. This is similar to that which occurs to our thoughts. Only the stick is replaced with the Holy Light that dissolves our negative thoughts with differing strength depending at which stage we identify the thought.

The above method refers to a defensive tactic. There is also a more effective method. A person, who starts searching within himself for the concealed passions with vigor and persistence, becomes similar to a fox hunter. The Lord will always show a person exactly where the fox dens are located. It is not difficult to reason that a fox will abandon such dangerous territory at the first opportunity.

About glances

Let us talk about the way we gaze or glance. Both the Lord and the evil one can direct our gaze. If you diligently pay attention to your gazing for one day, you will easily notice dozens, or maybe even hundreds, of attempts of our ego to direct our gaze. We only glance at something for a second or two. We can't intervene in this process with the help

of our vigilance as, for example, in the case of thoughts. This is why our ego never loses an opportunity to direct our gaze at anything that will draw us into a whirlwind of wishes or contemplation of worldly topics such as TV programs, commercials, current events, etc. Today God has little left to show us that will give us cause to remember him. Therefore in all these instances we should consider who the initiator of a particular glance was and we should react accordingly.

Meekness and humility

Meekness is the best way of reducing and diminishing both our pride and our ego as a whole. That is why it is very important to understand what meekness really is.

Meekness is inseparably linked with sincere faith in God. Meekness without faith, or the one based on rational faith, is called patience. A patient person has to often persuade himself about the righteousness of events happening around him. He also is unable to completely dismiss the expectation of a “successful” outcome.

A meek man does not have such expectation. He is in a permanent state of complete and committed faith in the wisdom and righteousness of everything happening around him.

For such faith, the Lord sometimes reveals to him the true sense of the events happening around him.

A person wishing to acquire meekness must first concentrate on strengthening his faith as meekness is inseparable from true faith. Everything is very simple as a person who is unable to completely and implicitly trust God, cannot acquire absolute meekness and get rid of his anxiety.

About faith in God

All people have faith. People were created by the Lord in such a way that they cannot exist unless they firmly believe something. Some believe in science, some in different theories of happiness for mankind, some in wise and fair politicians while others believe in beautiful and eternal love. Unfortunately, they do not believe God very much, if at all, especially nowadays as regrettably their future depends on it.

People, who manage not to lose and even to multiply their virtues in our age of pragmatism and hypocrisy, are particularly valued and appreciated by the Lord. It is solely this high degree of faith which differentiates these people from others. So how and can we strengthen our faith in God? Saint

Seraphim of Sarov said to one of his visitors: **“you cannot make a non-believer believe in anything”**. This is true, as it is impossible for a person to strengthen their faith by themselves, or in fact do anything by themselves on their spiritual journey. It is solely the Lord Who can give faith to those people who really aspire to it

Through prayer the Lord can raise the level of faith of a person until he can begin to notice some Divine manifestations in his life. However, active participation in the process by the person himself is necessary to consolidate his faith. In this event the Lord will send a person examples of His Providence on earth. A person seeing these examples should not ignore them but must break his old habits of using earthly explanations and to exchange them for new ones, provided by God, and thereby, gradually, strengthen his faith.

Consolidation of faith, God's miracles

This subchapter is devoted to a more detailed description of the process of how with God's help, a person can consolidate his faith in Him. The process of consolidation can be compared to the building of a “temple” inside us. Like any earthy construction, we need

to know how to build and have the construction materials.

The core knowledge about this construction, and its unshakable foundation, is the teachings of the Lord brought to us in the texts of the Holy Gospels and His Commandments. As for the building materials these are the little miracles that the Lord sends to each of us, that give birth to our reciprocating love towards Him. Our personal experiences of contact with Divine manifestations during our life are the bricks from which the temple of our faith will be built. All other miracles described in the texts of the Holy Gospels, as well as the miracles experienced by many Saints, also help in strengthening our faith.

It is useful to feel that the Lord's love towards us by the examples we witness. It is appropriate to mention here the words of Saint Isaac the Syrian: ***“A heart that hasn't experienced God's protection is unable to hope for or rely on God”*** (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

God gives us the bricks for building his temple of faith within ourselves. These bricks are the events and occurrences in each of our lives which cannot be explained from the logical or earthly point of view. Quite often we refer to them as miracles. It is these examples we should lovingly collect, and in remembering them, strengthen our faith.

Unfortunately, for the majority of people, these precious “bricks” given to them by God simply lie about like builder’s rubble in the “backyard” of their memory. An appropriate extract from the Ascetical Homilies is ***”Gratefulness on the part of the recipient spurs on the giver to bestow gifts greater than before”*** (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian). Why would the Lord provide new examples of His Providence to us, if we do not remember and do not appreciate all that He has previously provided?

That is why the temple of our faith is mainly in embryo. The attention that the Lord has given us is the most valuable thing we have ever had and yet we do not even recall it. It is only after we have gathered and carefully arranged the bricks the Lord has already given us, only then will He give us new ones which will fill our hearts with true faith, love and gratitude.

Seeing God’s Providence to you

Sometimes in our life it is useful to see the big picture comprised of numerous separate events. It is necessary to always remember that it is God that gives us all of life’s lessons and the situations we find ourselves in, for

the sole purpose that we may see our sinfulness and to waken us so that we may start working on eradication of our passions and thereby come to Him. Never hesitate or be shy in appealing to the Lord as often as you can seek His explanation of the circumstances you find yourself in.

All of our life we are in the Lord's school. If while "learning at this "school" we are mindful of the main purpose and do that which pleases God, the lessons in this school are simple. If we stray from the right path then the Lord starts reminding us by a variety of unpleasant things, starting with the minor annoyances and problems in our life. If we don't try to understand or refuse act rightly, the Lord has to send us more serious lessons and greater unpleasantness and troubles. The salvation of our soul is the only purpose of this life both for us and for Him.

Be mindful of the events around you. If, for example, you can't get access to a computer or you are not able to book a ticket, do not waste your time and energy to "force" the situation. It would be better to ask yourself, why is this happening?

At the same time, it is very important not to go to the other extreme and start perceiving absolutely all events as some kind of sign sent to you from the Heavens. Do not develop in yourself a new mania.

About prayer and petitions to God

Prayer has an enormous force and meaning as it is the most direct way of communicating with the Creator. God's response will depend upon the direction, and the sincerity of our intentions, prayers, requests and wishes. It is these that will determine the steps God takes towards us.

In His incarnation on the earth, the Lord did not hide any of his expectations of each of us so that we may have the opportunity of Eternal Life. The essence of His demands is clearly and simply set forth in Christ's Sermon on the Mount, in the Holy Gospel according to Saint Matthew, as well as in many other parts of the Holy Gospels text.

Many people have tried to interpret spiritual issues. Yet there is only a one single undisputable instruction from God as to how to reach Him. These instructions come from the words of Jesus Himself in the Holy Gospel and any deviation from these instructions will lead us away from Him.

In the "Lord's Prayer" which is the only prayer left to us by God, He teaches us to always and in everything submit to the will of God and trust it. ***"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"*** (Matthew 6:10).

In the Holy Gospel, Jesus repeatedly tells us to submit to will of His Heavenly Father and in our prayers to him.

The Lord does not need long and formal appeals to Him which we do out of habit: ***“And when you are praying, speak not as much, as the heathens. For they think that in speaking much they may be heard”*** (Matthew 6:7).

Then the Lord gives us the order of priority in our spiritual requests to Him. ***“Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God, and his justice, and all these things shall be added unto you”*** (Matthew 6:33) and in addition: ***“For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things”*** (Matthew 6:32).

There is no need for the Father to speak hundreds of languages that His children from all over the world speak. He understands perfectly the language of their hearts. If our mouth talks to Him but our heart is silent then our Heavenly Father does not hear us. ***“But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him”*** (St. John 4:23).

And here is one more very important instruction of the Lord: ***“Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven: but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven”*** (Matthew 7:21).

This means that a prayer itself isolated from the spiritual actions of a person, as well as nonobservance of His Commandments, will not provide entrance into the Heavenly Kingdom.

Only that person who with the help of God has cleansed himself of all passions, who has long been engaged in spiritual work in accordance with the strict demands of the Lord, and who is aspiring to spiritual perfection can hope for entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven ***“Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect”*** (Matthew 5:48).

That is why any steps in the direction of cleansing ourselves and striving for spiritual perfection will give rise to repeated responses of the Lord supporting and helping us to achieve this. All our prayers seeking help so as be able to see our passions and to eradicate them will be heard and fulfilled by our Heavenly Father as the first priority. This is of course, is subject to us doing our part of this spiritual work. With such an approach to life, all the rest — according to His own words — will be added to us.

Now about our requests to God. They are inevitable. We are His children, and what He wants most of all is for us to come to Him. That is why all our requests regarding this issue are fulfilled by Him with particular

pleasure. Ask Him questions and beg Him for help – it is a normal for children talk to their parents. Ask Him what is wrong within you, what you have to be aware of in yourself, and what you have to work at and eradicate. Ask Him to help and support you in all your difficulties on this path so that at the end of your journey you can join with Him.

It is very important to understand that God likes helping us but not to do our work instead of us. All we have to do is to honestly see our passions, to see their manifestation in our everyday life, to sincerely repent them and to further ask God for help to get rid of them. He will never release us from this work. That is why there is no sense to beg Him to deliver us from our passions whatsoever. In response to such a plea He will start showing us our specific ulcers. However a request seeking help in eradication of our specific passion, which we do see in ourselves, alongside with our sincere repentance and endeavors to resist this passion, will be heard and acted on. Ask God to fill your heart with love towards Him and to other people, His children, and the ability to forgive and so on. Quite often he is asked petty things, but what he really wants is to gift to His children something incredibly valuable. Unfortunately, nowadays almost nobody asks Him for such a gift.

There is something more. The worst thing that can happen on your journey to God is that you can lose your bearings. Taking into account the capability and experience of evil in these issues, there is a high likelihood of such an occurrence. That is why we should ask God to lead us on our way, to stop us from getting lost and point out to us all the traps laid by our ego.



Chapter 3

About judgment

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this issue. It is no wonder that during His incarnation on the earth the Lord gave it great attention. (See the chapter “While Reading the Holy Gospel”). What is so special here? Why is it so important not to judge people and to always forgive them? In order to understand this enormous, and at the same time very simple truth, let us have a look at the essence of judgment.

It is not a secret that all people around us sin in different ways. If we tend to judge these people, gradually we will judge nearly all the main types of passions and sins — people’s imperfections. On the other hand, if someone firmly takes a nonjudgmental path then with time he will have to forgive actually all types of a person’s passions that is, in its essence, all the facets of ego

Now let us see how this relates to us. We need to accept a truth which is very important to us. **A person, who judges somebody for a certain sin or misdeed, invariably has a tendency to similar sins himself.** For example,

if we judge somebody for telling a lie, it means we ourselves have a tendency to lie, and if we reproach other people for being greedy it means we ourselves struggle with generosity. Quite often a person who judges someone for a particular imperfection has a similar or even worse one in himself.

Our ego by no means wants to accept this, but there is a good way to verify the validity of this fact. Usually we are surrounded by dozens of people dear to us and whose character we know perfectly well. These people like judging other people. Just watch them. Try to notice at least a single case when the person judging someone does not have the same imperfection as the one being judged. If this is the case for everyone then it means we ourselves are not any better. Jesus was speaking to us and not someone else when he said the following words ***”Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?”*** (Matthew 7:3). The person, who has eradicated with God’s help at least one of his imperfections, will never blame other people for the same imperfection for he knows perfectly well what an enormous struggle it requires to rid ourselves of it.

So, what is the conclusion? **A person, who is doing his best not to judge a certain imperfection in the others, is actually working at**

his own imperfection. While a person, who is trying not to judge other people at all, will be working on and gradually eradicating all his own imperfections and thereby will be filled with true love.

If we really love someone, we are unable to judge them for anything. The only thing we can experience is the feeling of compassion to them.

Our judgments in the past

People, who indeed got rid of the habit of judging other people or being offended by others, palpably feel in themselves a different warmth in their heart and joy descending on them. Each time we judge someone, even a little or maybe not even openly, it is similar to wrapping our heart in a plastic bag through which God's love will never penetrate or able to touch our heart. This is how we cut ourselves off from God's Grace. Until we find the answer to this vital question then irrespective of any previous success or merits peace and joy will never come into our heart.

That is why you should pay special and urgent attention to this imperfection in yourself. Try to notice all the times when you judge your friends and also do not ignore fleeting judgments you make when you merely glimpse at someone. Learn to look at people in the

same way the Lord looks at people — that is with love, patience and with hope and faith in them. Only then will the world around you become bright and joyful. God always does what He promises.

In addition to the present, it is necessary to take a tour of our past where each of us still keep alive hurt and offence caused to us by other people during our lifetime. We do not feel the weight of these because we have grown accustomed to their burden. It is like getting used to driving a heavily laden truck; you only really feel the difference when you drive it after you have completely unload it.

Ask God to show you the most serious harbored offence and judgments from your past. Your ego will try to take you away from this process, either by distracting your attention or by the plethora of minor events. Brush away its voice and write down on a sheet of paper the names of those people whom you have harshly judged. Roll each name around in your heart until you experience a warm feeling towards this person. Do this with every name. In addition look through this list once or twice a week and check if you have retained the same warm feelings to these people. Quite often our ego likes reverting to its familiar territory. Later in a similar manner you can move on to minor sins.

Next ask the Lord about other serious “debts” which you have accrued. It can be very

helpful to use books which list existing sins and passions. The book “The Experience of Building Up of a Confession” by Archbishop John (Krestiankin) is ideal for this task. It is written in a simple language, is easily understood and it will help you not to “overlook” any of your “debts”. It is useful to repeat this process from time to time because as we clean our heart, we are acquiring the ability to see new “layers” of our past sins.

It is also very important to understand the aim of this work and not to go to the extreme. We have to completely and sincerely rid ourselves of past burdens and to spend our time monitoring the present. It is useful to return to our past sins only if thoughts of pride start appearing in us.

It is wonderful if you feel an additional desire to go to a church and confess your sins. The more your repulse your sins, the higher your desire to get rid of them completely – the better it is. It is important to remember that the essence of sincere repentance is only in the depth of remorse.

The sequence of working on our judgments from the past

The order of your work at your past perceived affronts, grievances and judgments is approximately the same as when you work

at your present imperfections and passions. Try not to work simultaneously at multiple names or incidents as haste is not required here. One thoroughly worked over incident, accompanied by a sincere repentance, will be by far more effective than a dozen superficial ones. It is more important to clearly see your lack of attention to detail in one circumstance or another. Do not forget to also take a break after processing different events in your life.

The person who superficially sifts through his past sins is similar to treasure hunter digging a hole expecting to find several treasures simultaneously. Having reached the cover of one of the treasures, he immediately keeps digging for the next and in the process buries the treasure just found.

The aim of all this work is not so much in seeking your sins but in achieving the understanding that many of our past actions were committed not because of love and kindness, but were the results of us acting under the influence of our numerous passions for example, vanity or flattery. It is very useful to keep this in mind during our lifetime and to be vigilant as to the real motivation of all our actions. Do not forget to ask in your heart for forgiveness from all those whom we have once offended, and from God. Always be grateful to God for opening your eyes and enabling you to truly see yourself.

Fleeting judgments

The ego of judgment has a lot of tricks and traps. It is the ego that covers up our heart from people, from the Lord and from the feeling of love and joy. That is why this type of ego will try to do everything possible to maintain control over our everyday situations up to the very last moment, or at least try to interfere with them. The result of interference by the ego of judgment is always evident. Look at the faces of those who often judge other people and everything will become clear to you. Unfortunately, a warm smile is something that rarely makes an appearance on their face.

It is useful for a person who is committed to eradicating the ego of judgment in himself to know one of the ego's "special" tricks, — fleeting judgments. These are short judgments or clichés which we automatically use as a definition while casting a glance at someone and which our ego tries to quickly cover up by new events. For example, having cast a glance, we can characterize or typecast one person as wicked, another one as stupid, and still another one as stout, or not good-looking. These actions however disguised are still common judgment which causes the same consequences to us. A dead mosquito does not care whether it was just killed by accident or

was being hunted immediately before — the result is the same.

In order not to fall into this trap we need get ourselves ready to look at people in the right manner, irrespective of their appearance or behavior, and to be permanently vigilant while assessing them. Each person, just like you, is God's creature. We are all brothers, actually although we are of different ages. Certainly, yesterday we behaved even worse than they do. Yesterday the Lord forgave us and today he is forgiving them. We need to try to look at them in the same way as our Heavenly Father looks at them - with patience, faith and love.

The Lord created things in such a way that people around us are a kind of mirror, reflecting back into our hearts the feelings which we send out to them. It is very easy to verify this fact. Having understood and accepted this conclusion, you will not unwittingly make random judgments. Yet still this is not everything.

With the help of the same "mirrors" we can clean our own heart, if instead of judging them, we start sending them patience, faith and love. This exercise will be of great spiritual use to us. Firstly, we start experiencing warmth in our heart, and, secondly we are moving towards a way of thinking which is similar in some respects to the way in which our Creator thinks towards people.

Love

A person, who day by day does his best to acquire a non-judgmental mind set and who is continually battling against his passions, will inevitably reach the territory of true love. Our Divine soul is a precious vessel. If you keep thoroughly polishing a golden bowl, it can't help but glitter. This is not some cheap love to which humanity has become accustomed to, and which is treated as the norm. This norm examined closely reveals that more than half of our arch-enemies were but moments ago our "dearest" friends.

True love does not depend upon anything — it just exists. Such kind of love does not disappear and does not decrease because of the wrong behavior of other people. A light-bulb provides light for everyone irrespective of whether they use it or not.

Mankind always throughout its existence had examples of true love although quite often it does not see or understand it. A mother's love towards her children if not muddied by the interference of ego is true love. A mother always forgives and justifies the actions of her children. The Lord left us true love on earth so that each person could feel and touch it during his lifetime.

In men this kind of love mainly surfaces during the period of winning the heart of his

beloved. A heart can be conquered only by love and it is this period when men do hundreds of touching, heartwarming and stupid things. They forget words such as “pragmatism” and “rationalism” and exist in a state of love and happiness, which is quite often incomprehensible and amusing to others. However for the person in love — the only important reality is love which he will not give up for anything. This is a true feeling because love is God, and that is the only thing of value outside the boundaries of this earthly world.

There are also numerous other cases of true love in our life. In such instance a person who puts another before himself and the Lord inevitably allows such person to experience the feeling of true happiness, because Love is one of the names of God. ***“By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one another”*** (St. John 13:35).

God's love to us

How many times can we forgive our children who have acted contrary to our instructions? One, five, ten times? Now count how many times during our life the Lord has forgiven us our mistakes and our stubbornness.

Every day He provides us with different types of lessons beneficial to our souls in

a variety of everyday situations, arranging necessary meetings with other people and furnishing an assortment of life decorations in order to help us come to a right decision. All of this he does for the singular purpose so that one day instead of us being blinded by our pride and selfishness to hopefully hear us meekly say the words “forgive me” and see our sincere repentance.

There are several lessons every day, thousands in a year, hundreds of thousands in a lifetime. All of this is for our sake, our benefit and our salvation! How does the Lord punish us for such low achievements? Hardly at all for we punish ourselves by depriving ourselves of the Kingdom of Heaven.

This is how great God’s love is towards His children. The Lord’s words that there is a celebration in Heaven when one single sinner repents is not an exaggeration.

The way to the Lord because of love and because of fear

The path to the Lord was shown to us by Jesus in the Holy Gospels texts is the only path. However, people follow this path with different feelings. Some follow because of their love of God and joy towards Him, but others may follow out fear of being punished

for an unrighteous life. It is understandable that the smaller number of passions that remain in us, the greater we are able to feel love towards God.

In order to really understand the attitude of our Holy Father to various matters we can take a simple example from our everyday lives. The Lord created us in accordance with His image and likeness and put inside us a small piece of His soul. So, when experiencing kind and loving feelings, we can understand the feelings of our Father towards us.

Take this example. Leaving our home for work in the morning, we ask our son to make dinner for us. If having come home, we discover a perfectly set table and, moreover, a well cleaned home, our heart will be over-filled with love to our son. As a consequence you will hardly skimp on anything for such a child.

If however we see that our child has been enjoying himself somewhere all day long, and, having only recalled our request at the very last moment, he started carrying out our request out of fear of being punished, then our attitude towards such child will be quite different.

The same principal applies to people taking the path to God. Those that remember the words of Jesus: ***“If you love me, keep my commandments”*** (St. John 14:15) and

execute them with love, may expect the same attitude from the Lord towards them. It was not without reason that the Lord said: ***“If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you”*** (St. John 15:7).

If the people are being motivated solely by the fear of being punished, and if they start recalling the Lord and His Commandments only after having received the reminders from Him in the form of illnesses and different problems in their lives, then such travelers are of far less value to the Lord. These words were directed to such people: ***“And why call you me, Lord, Lord; and do not the things which I say?”*** (St. Luke 6:46).

There is little to add except that the only useful fear is to fear for your own soul. The person having this fear starts treating both his life and his spiritual work with responsibility.

Spiritual pride, vanity (spiritual ego)

There is pride inside each of us, unless we have eradicated it in ourselves. That is why there is always a danger of spiritual pride appearing in us which may arise from our spiritual work. The old and perfectly visible

types of secular passions can transform with time into the new and far less visible passions. Outwardly, we may seem righteous and even pious, but from inside we may conceal the whole tree of “spiritual ego”

The structure of such a spiritual ego can be rather volumetric. Actually, any type of our secular passion can develop into a spiritual aspect. For example, a greedy person may develop the ego of **spiritual greediness** in himself. The distinctive feature of this ego will be similar to a person easily donating large sums of money for the construction of a cathedral. Yet, at the same time such person does not have any desire to help those close to him and it is that which is of more importance to God. The fact is that in donating large sums to works pleasing to God completely veils the real picture and prevents a person from critical analyzing all his other passions.

Taking **spiritual offence and spiritual judgment** are likely to be the most common types of spiritual ego. This type of ego is very close to taking offence in the usual sense, but in this case we refuse to accept somebody else’s views if they differ from our own. In the overwhelming majority of cases, in the initial stage of progress, such an ego emerges in regard to close relatives or loved ones who do not change and remain in their previous

consciousness. That is the very same consciousness we had resided in until recently. As a result, a spiritual distance is created when we start to divide people around us — “before kindred” and “others” according to their spiritual features. The person inevitably loses the ability to easily communicate with those who he has categorized as “strangers” regarding their perceived spiritual state. Some people outgrow this as a consequence of their spiritual work, but others remain the same. The correct spiritual state is when you do not avoid anybody even in your thoughts and you always communicate with everyone easily and with love.

Individuals’ desire for fame can easily develop into **spiritual vanity**. If a person starts to feel proud of, and positively assesses his spiritual successes and virtues then by such thoughts he inevitably inflicts great spiritual harm by cultivating his spiritual ego. No less harmful is criticism of people around us.

It is always useful to remember that all of our talent and any success in life is a gift from God. It is only by always bearing this in mind and realizing the true essence of things that genuine love of and gratefulness to God start appearing in us and pride and vanity begin to disappear as the ground beneath them erodes.

The sequence of eradication of the spiritual ego is the same as the process of extinguishing of the common ego. As always paramount to acknowledge the presence of a certain type of ego in ourselves, sincere repentance and observation of its manifestation in our lives. A sincere desire to rid yourself of the ego will be followed by the Lord sending His Holy Light which will with time complete the work necessary to rid you of this ego.

Manifestation of spiritual pride (spiritual ego)

Manifestations of our spiritual ego are impossible to conceal either in their outward manifestation in a person, or at the level of feelings and perceptions in the people communicating with that person. Any type of spiritual ego is a passion, and from time to time it becomes visible. This type of ego in people manifests itself in anger, irritation, taking offence and judgment, although these manifestations may be concealed. Such people often, like teaching and reproaching other people, arguing and proving their point, being motivated quite often by their spiritual vanity. Moreover, its most vivid feature is that the person is always openly or secretly

irritated by criticism and does not like to ask for forgiveness.

Do not let the “spiritual” reasons of these external manifestations of these passions mislead you. The spiritual ego, also, if not to a larger degree, hides our heart from God. That is why people who do not understand the real essence of the lessons of God’s Providence on the earth perceive that which is happening around them as wrong or unfair.

People, who have eradicated their ego, have indeed joined their heart with the Lord. They correctly perceive the God’s Providence in relation to other people and always merely admire the work of the Father on this earth. There are no, and there cannot be, any “negative” events around us, otherwise it would contradict the omnipresence and kindness of God and his concern for us.

*Spiritual pride,
hidden pride (spiritual ego)*

The foundation and root of the spiritual ego is also pride, but this time a spiritual pride. The degree of its manifestation can differ significantly from clearly evident to practically unnoticeable. If it is easy to recognize a “loud” and conceited person

by his appearance and behavior it is not as easy to recognize those who have concealed pride. These people may seem rather pious outwardly, but inside they may harbor the whole tree of this ego.

It is possible to distinguish people having spiritual pride from truly Righteous men by the use of feelings and perceptions. Each spiritual teacher can share only that spiritual wealth which he has. The righteous man, being in God's Light transfers this Light to other people with love. Although the instructions from such righteous men are not always a pat on the back, people always leave feeling Divinely inspired, joyful and lighthearted. It was for that light that hundreds of people came daily to Venerable Seraphim of Sarov, Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Archbishop Ian Krestiankin and to many other true Christian teachers.

If however after communicating with a spiritual teacher you feel your overwhelming sinfulness, or experience gloominess or discouragement, do not doubt that spiritual "wealth" has also been shared with you but what has been shared has absolutely nothing in common with true spiritual wealth.

Also do not forget to listen to your intuition. The Lord always knows with whom you are associating and if you ask him he will not conceal it from you.

How to diminish spiritual pride (spiritual ego) in yourself

Hidden spiritual pride is very cunning. It can conceal our heart from God making it invisible and is able to wipe out all our spiritual work. That is why it is necessary to periodically test for its seeds in ourselves. This is not difficult to do this if you are honest with yourself.

The first sign of its presence in us is our negative attitude to the criticism from other people. **A person, who works at his spiritual nature correctly, is glad for any opportunity to check and recheck himself for any passions which reside within him.**

Another sign of hidden pride is our attitude towards ourselves and to our spiritual work. If, for example, we start consider ourselves to be virtuous and doing something great in terms of spiritual growth, this is a sign of our pride or vanity.

In order to understand what type of hidden ego we have, we need to know the structure of the hidden ego as a whole. Just like visible pride, it consists of several parts. The main part is the belief in your own **righteousness and your personal strength, and vanity.** Almost always, a person having concealed pride starts believing in **his infallibility**, which will later result in either

hidden or open arrogance or haughtiness when dealing with other people. Also it is always difficult for such person to ask for forgiveness.

The order of eradicating concealed pride is the same as before. That is, sincerity in discovering and detecting of this type of ego in yourself, sincere repentance and honestly appraising all of its manifestations in your everyday life.



Chapter 4

Reading the Holy Gospel

The biggest tragedy that can befall the wayfarer on his way to God is, without doubt, to stray from the right path. That is why it is always useful to periodically check your spiritual clock with the most accurate spiritual chronometer on earth — the words of God Himself which are left to us in the texts of the Holy Gospel.

Significance of the Holy Gospel texts

It is difficult to overestimate the value and importance of the Holy Gospel texts for mankind. Never again did the Lord address his favorite creation in such a direct and easily understood way as during His great incarnation on this earth. For five thousand years He had been preparing this knowledge for the benefit of the whole humanity. During that time, the people of Israel had been sent twenty five Prophets all of whom foretold His future incarnation and

performed many significant miracles witnesses by tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of people, who lived at that time. In our whole history there has not been any other project of the Lord on this earth or revelation of Himself of this magnitude. All this helps us to correctly look at the significance of the words that Jesus left to us in His four Holy Gospel texts. There is enough contained therein for any person reading them, not to lose his way on the path to God. It is precisely for this reason that all this transpired.

However, mankind is hopelessly preoccupied with its own selfishness. Even the most plain and simple words easily comprehensible; mankind has managed to interpret in dozens of different and often contradictory ways. As a result, today the way to the Lord does not appear as a straight line upwards, but more like a spreading shrub with tangled branches some of which hang back down to the ground.

So, why don't we open the Holy Gospel once again and try to see for ourselves what He has openly left to each of us?

Sermon on the Mount

The Sermon on the Mount, delivered by the Lord Himself, is the essence of His Teaching left to us. In this Sermon, He completely sets

out his commandments in detail and specifically described a new level of spiritual cleanliness without which no one can come to God. He speaks about it quite clearly and explicitly at the beginning of the Sermon:

“He therefore that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But he that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven”
(St. Matthew 5:19).

So let us once again carefully consider the Lords teaching as set out in His Sermon on the Mount.

At the beginning of the Sermon He says that those are blessed who are poor in spirit and who mourn; blessed are also the meek and those who are pure in heart; blessed are the peacemakers and the ones that hunger and thirst after righteousness. He tells us about the sinfulness of adultery and the sinfulness of divorce. Jesus teaches us not to take an oath at all. He teaches us not to fight those who strike us, as well as to be meek and generous and to give to those who ask something of us.

Further on, Jesus teaches us not to flaunt our righteousness and to be extremely modest when helping other people.

After that He pronounces the words of the only prayer expressly left by Him to us, with His direction to say this prayer intimately and in private. He speaks about modesty in fasting and about the necessity to lay up imperishable treasures for ourselves in heaven by means of a righteous life on the earth.

He teaches us not to worry about food or clothes, but to rely on God in everything and first and foremost, seek the Kingdom of God. For that He tells us to ask Him and knock on his door looking for the “narrow gate”. Also, He warns about the danger of false prophets’ teachings and instructs us how to recognize them .by their fruits. **At the end of the Sermon He warns once again that only he who hears His words and follows them is really going to God** (St. Matthew 7:24 – 7:27).

He addresses all the above issues and some of them twice. However there is a matter in the Sermon to which the Lord returns to many times. The below citations are without commentary as they are simple and clear.

“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (St. Matthew 5:7).

“But I say to you, that whosoever is angry with his brother, shall be in danger of the judgment” (St. Matthew 5:22).

“If therefore thou offer thy gift at the altar, and there thou remember that thy brother hath anything against thee; Leave there thy offering before the altar, and go first to be reconciled to thy brother...”
(St. Matthew 5:23–24).

“Be at agreement with thy adversary betimes, whilst thou art in the way with him ...” (St. Matthew 5:25).

“But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven...” (St. Matthew 5:44–5:45).

“And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors...” (St. Matthew 6:12)

“For if you will forgive men their offences, your heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. 6:15. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences” (St. Matthew 6:14).

“Judge not, that you may not be judged. For with what judgment you

judge, you shall be judged...” (St. Matthew 7:1–7:2).

“All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them” (St. Matthew 7:12).

Again there is a strong focus on forgiveness and non-judgment. This is a very important part of spiritual work without which it is impossible to eradicate one’s ego and to come to God. The Lord Himself emphasized the importance of all the words of his Sermon both at the before and after. Is there anyone who knows better than the Lord Himself the way to Him?

The Lord’s Prayer

This prayer was given to us by the Lord Himself. Let us try to read it once again, but this time from the point of view of our struggle against our passions.

“Thus therefore shall you pray:

Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name;

Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;”

With the first words of the prayer the Lord teaches us, first and foremost, to strive towards God and to follow the will of our Heavenly Father.

“Give us our daily bread,”

It is quite obvious that the main idea of these words is not only about food. It is, of course, a more broad faith in the Father, the faith that He is always taking care of us regarding everything, both in worldly and spiritual matters. Sincere faith in the Lord and in the fairness of His Providence towards us and all people is an important basis of our spiritual progress on our way to Him.

“And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

It is forgiveness once again. These are the only words in the prayer that stipulate that this is something we must do ourselves. It is only in this case, where we entirely and completely forgive other people, that the Lord will indeed forgive us our debts.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”.

The essence of the second phrase is drawn from the first one. Note that the request “and lead us not into temptation” refers to God Himself. It follows that it is the Lord Who permits temptation because of our sins. Using modern language, He creates such circumstances in our life where we are forced to come up against our passions and start our battle against them.

This phrase of a profound meaning is often not completely comprehended by us. Let us start with the request to deliver us from evil. The word “deliver” is used when we speak about making us free of something. Consequently, this “something” is not outside, but inside us. We are all afraid of a certain distant evil, not comprehending that it is always in us. It is our ego, our “Old Testament person”, our passions. The genuine wayfarer to the Lord should ask God to make us free; that is free from our ego and, from our passions.

The true meaning of this phrase is “Oh, Lord! I realize that all problems in my life are the result of my sinful thoughts and deeds. Thank You for the lessons and help me get rid of my passions”.

This is like being at school. If a pupil diligently works by himself, he is loved by both his teachers and his parents. He also has enough spare time to play. If he is lazy, then disappointed parents and teachers with accompanying punishments are his constant

companions. Moreover, in his free time he is required to make up that which he has previously neglected and his whole life is bereft of enjoyment.

“For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory for ever and ever. Amen”.

Our world is not everlasting. Some day it will fulfill the task the Lord created it for, and it will cease to exist. Jesus spoke often about its perishability and the end times. But there is something in this world which is beyond this world. These are human souls — small particles of God, Whose kingdom, and power and glory are for ever and ever. And this is the only thing of real value in this world. It is only our attitude to this which determines our place in Eternity.

The parable about talents

In one of His well known parables Jesus speaks about a certain king who, going into a far country for a long time, left some talents (pieces of money) to three of his servants. The first two servants immediately put the money to work and by the time of their master’s return had increased the principal. The last servant

decided to merely hold his talent without generating any income. Upon his arrival home, the king praised the first two servants and placed them “over many” and he took away the talent from the last servant and gave it to the servant who had made the most income for his master.

Irrespective of its outward simplicity, there is a deeper and significant meaning relating to the ascension of human soul on the earth. In order to understand it properly, it is necessary to first clearly and completely see the “talent” which is given to each person at birth and to which Jesus was referring to. Look attentively at children and to try to understand how they differ from us, adults. Why — **“...unless you may be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven”**? (St. Matthew 18:3).

The first obvious thing we notice is the sincerity and honesty of children. Until such time as their surroundings inoculate them with their own “correct” approach to life, a lie is an alien passion to them. Even after having started the practice of deceit children telling a lie do so awkwardly and shyly.

The next distinctive feature of children (which adults seldom possess) is easiness and simplicity. Children always stay as they are, until idolism starts being manifested in them. They are not burdened by cares and compli-

cated analytical work. They are spontaneous and relaxed.

Lastly, children are pure and without sin. They have not yet collected the burden of sins and mistakes, and are not encumbered by them. Consequently they are carefree, light hearted and possess inner freedom. Taken together, all these characteristics are the “talent” which the Lord gives to everybody coming into this world the very same “talent” we later lose to varying degrees. This is how it should be. Sin is part of human nature, and it is impossible not to lose at least a certain part of Gods “talent” given to us at the beginning of life. The same, as it is impossible to completely forget that taste the freedom we experienced as a child.

Each of us sinks to his own depth. That depth depends upon a person’s starting level of purity, as well as upon his decisiveness to battle against the temptations of this world. However the ability to feel the taste of sin is given to everybody, and for many of us it is what provides the first stimulus to commence spiritual work. At such times The Lord is always close by. It is actually for this reason that the vortex of circumstances exists, which we call “life on earth”.

Only very few of us manage to get our “talent” back. For that we have to work long and painstaking in the spiritual field. The first distinctive features of our success are the

recurrence of those childish feelings of easiness, simplicity, freedom and purity. **This is only the restoration of the original “talent” which is subject to return.** However, it is the seed from which we can grow great wealth, if we continue our spiritual effort.

We have to acquire that, what we did not have within us in our childhood. We have to acquire the virtues which surpass the rules of existence of this world but are the norm in the world to which we are aspiring. Divine love to everybody, meekness, sacrifice, dedication, selfless help to others — is some but not all of the “talents” which the Lord leaves with us forever.

Really blessed are those who have comprehended and deeply felt the rules of Divine Providence. That is why “theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven” is absolutely correct.

Love towards God and your neighbor

In His teaching, the Lord places these commandments in first and second place respectively and calls them the great commandments. Indeed, only love towards God and to the people around us is the measure of the direction and the extent of our spiritual work. God is Love, and while we have this

love in us we are God's children; but if we dissipate or lose this love, we become strangers to Him. Venerable Macarius of Egypt provided a nice summary, saying that even if we receive all the gifts and virtues from the Lord, we still need to move towards love of God as those with such love do not fall.

Love of God and love towards people are inseparable, and the first cannot exist without the second. A person who loves God with all his heart cannot be indifferent to His creations who have in them a part of Him. Venerable Isaac the Syrian put it as: **“He who does not love his neighbor but says that he loves God, has without realizing it gone completely astray”**.

So, how do we acquire such love? Jesus showed us the way to such love in His Sermon on Mount and in the other parts of the Holy Gospels texts. The first step to such love is to completely cease judging others and forgive them and acquire meekness. It is necessary to repent our own sins. Our love must be active towards people in the form of help and concern. A person, who permanently does this work, will definitely receive help from God and will move forward on his path.

One more thing. Do not forget to ask God to give you such love. This is the greatest gift that He can give us, but you have to deserve it.

Pharisees

“O hypocrites, Isaiah prophesied well of you, saying, This people draweth near unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with the lips, but their heart is far off from me. But in vain they worship me, teaching for doctrines, men’s precepts”
(St. Matthew 15:7–15:9).

The word “pharisees” became known to whole world long ago. pharisees are the spiritual teachers who distort God’s will on the earth and substitute their own will, commandments and earthly teachings.

Nothing was as alien to the Lord, and nothing else did He criticize as strongly and unmask during His earthly incarnation, as pharisaism. So, what is pharisaism and why was it so repugnant to God? Let us try to answer these questions in detail, and do it on the basis of what was said by the Lord Himself about pharisees in the Holy Gospels texts.

First and foremost, the Lord condemned the pharisees in that they were distorting or discarding the Word of God on the earth. As a result of such deception, people following the pharisees, may be moving not towards God but in a completely different direction.

“...Why do you also transgress the commandment of God for your tradition? For God said: ‘Honour thy father and mother’: And: ‘He that shall curse father or mother, let him die the death’. But you say: Whosoever shall say to father or mother, the gift whatsoever proceedeth from me, shall profit thee. And he shall not honour his father or his mother: and you have made void the commandment of God for your tradition’ (St. Matthew 15:3–15:6).

Further Jesus explained in detail who the pharisees really serve to and what relationship they have to God.

“...If God were your Father, you would love me. For I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I myself, but he sent me: Why do you not understand my speech? Because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do...” (St. John 8:42–43).

“He that is of God, hears the words of God. You therefore hear them not, because you are not of God” (St. John 8:47).

Many times the Lord condemned pharisees of hypocrisy and duplicity.

“...Now you pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter; but your inside is full of rapine and iniquity. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without, make also that which is within?” (St. Luke 11:39–11:40).

“Woe to you, because you are as sepulchers that appear not, and men that walk over are not aware” (St. Luke 11:44).

Jesus also spoke about the pharisees lack of true love of God and people.

“But I know you, that you have not the love of God in you” (St. John 5:42).

Many times the Lord condemned them and their devotion to rites and rituals (for example, observing the Sabbath (Saturday) they put above serving and love of people. The love of God and of people being the main commandments. Is it possible to love people without helping them? That is the true sense of Sabbath (Saturday) - to help people, thus serving God and fulfilling His commandment.

“And he saith to them: Is it lawful to do good on the Sabbath days, or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy? But they held their peace. And looking round

about on them with anger, being grieved for the blindness of their hearts, he saith to the man: Stretch forth thy hand. And he stretched it forth: and his hand was restored unto him” (St. Mark 3:4–3:5).

And there is one more citation of the Lord regarding the love that should be in a man seeking God.

“But I say to you, Love your enemies: do good to them that hate you: and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you: That you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh his sun to rise upon the good, and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this? And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? Do not also the heathens do this?” (St. Matthew 5:44–5:47).

The Lord blamed the pharisees that they mainly were seeking earthly fame and admiration from other people.

“How can you believe, you who receive glory one from another: and seek not the honour that comes from God only?” (St. John 5:44).

“Woe to you, pharisees, because you love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the marketplace” (St. Luke 11:43).

It is also obvious that pharisees were angry at any disagreement with or criticism of them. Steeped in pride they wanted to kill Him, practically after each statement Jesus made about them.

“And the pharisees going out, immediately made a consultation with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him” (St. Mark 3:6).

To Lord is displeased with those who taking the path to him, exalt themselves. The following words from the Holy Gospel clearly confirm this.

“The pharisee standing, prayed thus with himself: O God, I give thee thanks that I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, as also is this publican. I fast twice in a week: I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not so much as lift up his eyes towards heaven; but struck his breast, saying: O god, be merciful to me a sinner. I say to you, this

man went down into his house justified rather than the other: because every one that exalteth himself, shall be humbled: and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted” (St. Luke 18:11 – 18:14).

That is, the pharisee was sure that observing certain rituals, ceremonies and norms, he was thus “close” to God. In reality, it is our love that brings us closer to God, and also to our neighbor and to the above publican, as it is said in the main Commandments of God. A repentant sinner is much closer to God than a “righteous” man who has cultivated in himself conceit and who regards himself superior to others.

Jesus also warned the pharisees about their responsibility to God.

“Woe to you lawyers, for you have taken away the key of knowledge: you yourselves have not entered in, and those that were entering in, you have hindered” (St. Luke 11:52).

“Let them alone: they are blind, and leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the pit” (St. Matthew 15:14).

Pharisees are the concealed weapon of evil, used since the beginning and appear

in spiritual pastors. To think that all pharisees had remained in ancient Israel means to naively consider that evil had remained there as well.

Quite often we are all minor spiritual teachers in relation to our children, friends and those close to us. It is just as important for us to know the main symptoms of this dangerous spiritual disease, and from time to time compare, our own spiritual state with the words of the Lord about pharisees.

“Strait gate” and false prophets

“Enter in at the strait gate; for it is the wide gate, and broad way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat;

Because the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns? Or figs of thistles?

So every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down, and cast into the fire

Therefore by their fruits ye shall know them.

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth my Father's will which is in heaven' (St. Matthew 7:13–7:21).

Nowadays, in a time of all possible kinds of “freedom”, false teachers and false prophets have enormous scope. That is why we should always bear in mind the words of the Lord regarding the features by which they can be recognized. The undisputable sign of the validity of any teaching is the generous abundance of spiritual fruit.

Christianity has an abundance of these fruits at present. Several thousands of known Saints and, of course, by far larger number

on unknown ones, whose names are known only to the Lord, illuminate the path to that same “narrow gate”. No other spiritual ideology has genuine spiritual fruits including love to all people, gentleness, virtue, or anything even close thereto. As a rule, they only have a leader and his teachings.

It may sometimes seem that these leaders reside in a certain state of “grace”, but it is impossible to gain a true grace without the living God, Jesus Christ. Just consider carefully the meaning of His words to us:

“I am the true vine; and my Father is the husbandman.

Every branch in me, that beareth not fruit, he will take away: and every one that beareth fruit, he will purge it, that it may bring forth more fruit.

Now you are clean through the word, which I have spoken to you.

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches: he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same

bringeth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing.

If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered, and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. (St. John 15:1 – 15:6).

It is the primary interest of evil to confuse and divert all sincere and evolved souls from the right path to God as these people can take with them many followers. Their thirst for the Truth is so strong that it is practically impossible to stop them on their way. However it is possible to slightly deflect them just enough to prevent them reaching the “narrow gate” to the Lord.

Only our passions separate us from God. This is actually, evil residing in us. If such a person is mistakenly on the wrong path to God he can be manipulated. His passions may become hidden or not easily seen. Some may fall under the impression that they are under some form of “grace”. Consequently the path he is following and preaching to others is not a path that leads to the “narrow gate”.

These are not even close to the fruits the Lord was talking about (St. Matthew 7:13) but are the inedible fruits of evil which have absolutely no value and in fact are very harmful to us.

It is only the Teachings of the Lord, given to us in the Holy Gospel texts, that guarantees our safety and certainty that we are following the correct path to Him. Only aspiration to moral purity and love, determined by our Savior, truly leads to the “narrow gate”.

People, who accept the words of the Lord as the unquestionable Truth but, at the same time also pay some attention to other teachings and teachers, must carefully read the following lines from the Holy Gospels texts:

“All that ever come before me are thieves and robbers...” (St. John 10:8)

“And many false prophets shall arise, and shall deceive many” (St. Matthew 24:11).

“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves” (St. Matthew 7:15).

“He that is not with Me, is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me, scattereth” (St. Matthew 12:30).

“...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No man cometh to the Father, but by Me” (St. John 14:6).

God through thousands of saints and many thousands of miracles and healings performed by Him has confirmed the words spoken by him at that time. Some miracles were witnessed by many hundreds or even thousands of people; while others were simply recorded by true believers and then given to the church. Do other supposed voices of “truth” have anything similar to that? Always be very wary and alert on these matters.

Homilies of Jesus Christ

The words of Jesus Christ carry in them the enormous strength of the Holy Spirit. The systematic reading of the Holy Gospel helps us keep our mind pure from the intrigues of evil. The words of Jesus gradually bring us closer to the truth and frees us from our passions. ***“...If you continue in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”*** (St. John 8:31 – 8:32).

All saints and righteous men in unison recommend we frequently refer to the Holy Gospels texts. Venerable Seraphim of Sarov, for example, possessing phenomenal memory and remembering everything he had read

throughout his life, nonetheless, read the Holy Gospel every day.

Our ego fears no one as much as it fears the Lord and His words. That is why the first thing that evil tries to do under various pretexts is to take us away from reading the Holy Gospels texts – the very texts that are the most dangerous texts to it. This is quite understandable as Jesus with just one word could cast out a whole legion of demons.

This strength and light is contained in His words in the Holy Gospel texts. That is why in reading them, we pass God's Light through our hearts and gradually, little by little cast out our passions. Reading the words of Jesus every day is extremely beneficial to our spiritual growth.



Chapter 5

Education of our soul

About the soul

Both the Lord and evil value the human soul above all the known treasures of this world. It is not without reason that two thousand years ago evil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world in exchange for just one bow.

In our world currently devoid of spirituality, humanity does not regard the purity of human's soul as something of value. So, for evil it is has become a trading paradise. Today it buys up human's souls in the thousands in exchange for electronic gadgets and other kinds of trinkets just like many centuries ago when early colonizers were exchanging glass beads for real treasures from natives.

Nowadays in the eyes of man, the value of a soul continues to decline with each day. All the genuine treasures of the Lord in our hearts are being gradually replaced with cheap imitations cleverly made by evil. Love and kindness seamlessly give way to rationalism, benefit and purpose. Consequently there is very little of anything of any real value left in people.

However the Lord never gives up on a single human soul, and always tries to return it to His house. This struggle will never come to an end while this world exists. However this struggle has its own rules.

The rules of the Lord

Our ego plays an important part in the process of the growth and development of our soul. It is always and completely subject to God's control and performs the function of a necessary barbell or weight, the periodical lifting of which makes us spiritually stronger. The Lord puts the weights on this "barbell" very accurately, depending on the level of development and possibilities of our souls. There are also some important rules here.

Rule: The Lord never places on our barbell more weight than we can lift. He never creates a situation in our lives where we are not able to act honestly and fairly. If we say that there was a time when the circumstances were beyond us then we are just simply being evil and slandering the Lord.

Rule: It is solely the Lord Who creates and controls everything in this world. Our ego operates mainly through evil thoughts, words, people's deeds, and through our passions but solely with the permission of the Lord.

Rule: We are never left without lessons within our capability in the form of different life situations created by God. We are tested on them only after the Lord has explained to us in detail the correct behavior in the circumstances (John, 12:48).

Rule: A person is always able to exercise his own will and is always free to make a choice. The Lord and evil only lead us to the thought to commit either rightful or wrongful actions, but they never compel us. This freedom of choice, along with the corresponding energy and strength of its realization, is always left at our discretion. That is why it is man himself who is always and completely responsible for what he does and chooses in this life.

Rule: The Lord likes and respects our freedom of choice – He never comes into our life without our permission. As a Father, He is always taking care of us and is setting out our life in manner so as to help our soul wake up and grow. However, He Himself comes into our life only if we ask Him to. Evil on the other hand without our permission tries to meddle everywhere.

Rule: The last but not the least. All people on this earth are the beloved children of the Lord. God created this world in such a way as to make it possible for each person, irrespective of their level of consciousness, place of residence or color of their skin to come

to Him. Absolutely each and every person has such an opportunity, provided they sincerely believe in the Lord, seek His help and under His guidance take the less than easy path of eradicating their passions.

Medicine from the Lord

The Lord sends a variety of different medicines for our soul to each person during their life on earth. These not only help our soul to stand fast and not perish in this evil world but often heal it. However, we do not always understand the true value and essence of these medicines, and quite often think of them as punishment from God, but that is not so. The main task of the Lord is to save our immortal soul but not our perishable body which is condemned to death anyway. More often these medicines are sent to people with a ripe soul, those who are able to receive them correctly and to react appropriately.

Sometimes these medicines look like physical imperfections, everyday sorrows or diseases. Some of these medicines are sent from birth to counterbalance a certain passion, dangerous to the soul. Others may be sent later, in response to an improper way of life.

The Lord always and everywhere lets us know whether we are acting properly or not.

There are no “accidental” diseases and troubles. In this way the Lord helps us see the true cause of all our problems – our sins and passions.

A person, who truly understands the purpose and value of these medicines sent to him by God for the salvation of his soul, starts to properly see God’s Providence and His concern. Such a person becomes able to see the spiritual “imperfection” which the Lord has counter-balanced by a physical flaw, and to start his struggle against it. As a result, such person begins to correctly use the help of the Lord. If the person is later successful in eradicating his passions, everything becomes possible. However, it is always the Lord Himself Who decides how to encourage His obedient child, without causing any harm to his soul and his spiritual work.

Diseases

This is the same with diseases:- they always conceal God’s mercy. That is why, from time to time, He slows down our insane pace of life so that we have cause to remember Him and to think about our mortality and about the true meaning of life. It can also be a consequence of our sinful life and a warning that we have taken a wrong turn in our spiritual work. When

disease strikes, always ask God for the reason why it was sent to you.

In former times, during numerous epidemics in people could save themselves from death only within the church walls. In such a way the Lord was reminding people that He was above all the diseases, bringing them to Himself and strengthening their faith.

Nowadays a person who begins to understand the real meaning of various diseases sent to him, or loved ones as a warning from the Father for moving away from Him and His Commandments returns to the right path which is accompanied by healing of both body and soul.

Debts to the Lord

Many people quite often address the Lord with the various requests and wishes. If these will not do any harm to a person's soul, then fairly often He gives people what they have asked for to consolidate their faith. However, if what they wished for is an obvious excess, the Lord may grant it on credit.

God's loans are the completely fair and honest. However, He only accepts repayment in His Divine "currency". Forgiveness of people, love of people, kindness and the like — these are the Dollars, Euros, Pounds

and Roubles which the person can use to repay his old debt to the Lord and even in advance of a new one. However, if a person is not too prompt with his repayments, the Lord can impose a fine, for example, various problems in his life, obesity or any number of diseases. If the person tries through his own efforts to improve the situation he will fail — you cannot argue with God. However, as soon as he starts repaying his debt to the Lord in His currency, the situation will inevitably change for the better.

About evil (ego)

Ego's expertise or put another way evil, — is all the sins of mankind, all the deceit and cunning in the whole world for the past seven thousand years. If a person selfishly relies solely on his knowledge, experience and intellect on his way to God, he is doomed to failure. Such people are a delicious snack for the ego. The Lord can hold a person's hand and lead that person to Him. However for that to happen we must constantly keep our hand outstretched towards Him. Evil is only under God's control.

As Jesus said: ***“...without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered;***

and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (St. John 15:5–15:6).

In this life, a person must with the help of God learn how to overcome all the intrigues of evil while cultivating love in himself. Only such souls that are skilful in this struggle and loyal to Him, are of great value to the Lord. Apostle Paul rightly said that those who had not gone through necessary ordeals are not the sons of God but are illegitimate children.

Reasons for resisting evil (ego)

Why do the people not doing any spiritual work or those doing it incorrectly not feel the clear resistance of ego? The core reason is that it is the primary task of evil is to prevent us from entering Paradise. In the most unnoticeable way possible, evil diverts our soul from the thoughts about God, our passions and sins. The second task of ego is to immerse us as deeply as possible in sin. However, the primary task is much more important for evil.

The unconscious element of mankind is very similar to a herd of cows peacefully pasturing on the fenced green field next to the abattoir. The cows are properly fed, milked two times a day, and this daily routine continues until the time comes to turn them into sausage. This

is the same with people. They are being given everything necessary to sustain their bodies and fill their stomachs. Then a few times a day by drawing them to anger or irritation evil habitually makes them sin. This happens day after day, until a person occupies a cozy personal space in the cemetery, without any foolish thoughts concerning a Heavenly Kingdom.

The person who challenges this comfortable arrangement is similar to the cow that wants to leave the common pasture and starts breaking through the fence. Of course all herdsmen will rush up and start beating it. The poor cow will need to be brave and strong enough to fight for its right to freedom to avoid the abattoir. There is no other way to freedom for the cow.

Everything is by far simpler for us. On the other side of the fence we have our Father Who can help us both dismantle the fence and chase away the herdsmen. The only thing we need to do is to ask Him with love and trust. ***“I am the door. By Me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved: and he shall go in and out, and shall find pasture”*** (St. John 10:9).

A break in spiritual work

There is no standing still in spiritual work: either you are going to God or you are being

driven away from Him. It is similar to ascending a steep and slippery slope. While you continue to move your legs — you keep ascending. However, as soon as you stop moving, you immediately start slide downwards.

On the spiritual path it is not worth taking a break. It does not matter at what point you stop it is exactly from that spot that will be slowly pulled backwards. Evil does not have any weekends off nor does it take breaks. Its sole reason for existence is the orchestration of our downfall.

How sin enters our souls

Sin cannot enter us without our consent — this is not permitted by God. But evil is allowed to tempt us, it can “advertise” sin. Various enticing images, examples set by other people, friends and our parents are all very effective tools. An old saying rings true: “A picture is worth a thousand words”. This applies to both good and evil. The evil one is always trying to cultivate in us a judgmental frame of mind. A person, who often judges other people, inevitably separates himself from God, and thereby limits his ability to receive God’s help.

A person with a pure soul has his conscience and an awareness of the alien nature

of sin to guard his heart. Recall, for example, the taste of your first cigarette or a sip of beer. Astonishment and disgust were the first natural reactions of your soul — how can possibly people like it? However, if we start yielding to sin, everything can change very quickly. After a while, even the most serious sins may seem to us as nothing more than **“inevitable weaknesses of human nature”** (Sabbas the Sanctified).

Nowadays, evil has millions of options with which to tempt our soul. The whole world is now reminiscent of a market. Everything we see around us evil uses to draw us in. In this age only the Lord has almost nothing with which to capture our attention so that we may remember Him.

The next stage is to gradually induce the temptations to take root and from them cultivate addictions. Having acquired these addictions it is not we who possess things, but evil that through them possesses us. This applies to computers, television, alcohol, tobacco, music, clothes and all other addictions of our false “persona”. A person, who has allowed all these addictions to take hold, is actually led by the evil one. He is stripped of all the healthy desires of his soul and inoculated with unhealthy ones.

The next stage is to urge a person on to even greater sin. All types of mass media,

as well as other sources of information, make their contribution: deceit, lies, aggression, idolism, lechery become a person's undisputed "values" in this world and gradually money becomes his new "god".

If a man's soul does not resist the will of evil, by clinging to God, it will inevitably fall into hell — a world without love, even in this life. Only a sincere appeal to God will enable a person to break this circle. Often however, by that time, a person will have already become conditioned to yield to his ego.

How can sin be cast out? It is cast out by our soul moving in the direct opposite direction of sin. Only our disgust with our sins and sinful life can give birth in our soul to sincere repentance before people and before God for what we have done. Only such repentance has any strength. As Elder Paisios of Mount Athos said: ***"That which is dirty and disgusting, a man usually throws away; but you have to first realize that it is really dirty and disgusting"***. This is also true of our passions.

However the ability of a person to see his sins and his sinfulness appears gradually and only as a consequence of his appeal to the Lord and earnest spiritual work towards the purification of his soul.

The Internet and the computer

Today's Internet is really a "world wide web" in which evil has entwined the whole world. New models of screen technology with more and more realistic games and programs are being created continuously.

This is however an artificial virtual world of evil, created in our time to soundly bind to itself and later destroy the Divine soul of a man. Nowadays, with the help of the internet and the computer, evil is able to complete this mission much faster than it ever did before.

People who are permanently drawn into the internet have already changed significantly. They have less love and are more selfish and irritable. All their interests are computer related and real life is always in the background for them.

Only God can break this "web" and extricate person's soul. How very seldom he is asked to do it.

Deceit

The kingdom of evil is the kingdom of deceit. That is why the ego tree can be rightly called the tree of lies. There are lies about ourselves, who we are and why we are here. Lies

about the people around us, lies about all our “values” and attachments in this world. Lies about death, fears and sorrows of this life.

A person in today’s world is an eternal prisoner of deceit and he is unable to break free of its shackles without God’s help. It is for good reason the Lord said: **“...If you continue in my word, you shall be my disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”** (St. John 8:31–8-32)

The rules of the Kingdom of God are different. These rules are eternal, and they are all that exists beyond the limits our small world and they transcend everything. Jesus told us in His Sermon on the Mount: **“Seek ye therefore first the Kingdom of God, and His justice...”** (St Matthew 6:33). These are the very same rules of the present and eternal world of the Lord. Some of these rules He imparted to us in His Sermon on the Mount and in the other parts of the Holy Gospels texts. The rest are directly revealed by Him through the Holy Spirit to each voyager sincerely making his way towards Him. **“But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you”** (St John 14:26).

Heaven and hell

After death, a person receives from the Lord the kind of life which he consciously or unconsciously has been striving for all his life long.

If God and His Kingdom were that person's aspirations in this life, and if he has made an enormous effort to acquire inner purity, love and other true virtues with God's help, then after his death he will be in a world together with similar pure and light souls. A world where everyone is thinking how to please each other, and where there are no other feelings but love and joy. This is Heaven.

If a person followed the voices of his passions in this life and if, in the pursuit of worldly riches, glory and pleasures he has squandered all his spiritual wealth and if the Lord's Commandments were strange and useless information for him, he will deservedly be placed in the world of his aspirations, a world of deceit, selfishness and rage, with people just like him as his neighbors. However here in the absence of a physical world and body, all former human "treasures" which he coveted, cease to make any sense or have a purpose and he did not acquire any other treasures while living in this world. Moreover, the existence of the other world – the world of God, love and joy – ceases being a simple theory to him

and becomes a reality. Comprehending this and his position in it is hell.

In conclusion let us finish with the words of the Lord Himself:

“And a certain man said to him: Lord, are they few that are saved? But he said to them: Strive to enter by the narrow gate; for many, I say to you, shall seek to enter, and shall not be able. But when the master of the house shall be gone in, and shall shut the door, you shall begin to stand without, and knock at the door, saying: Lord, open to us. And he answering shall say to you: I know you not, whence you are. Then you shall begin to say: We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. And he shall say to you: I know you not, whence you are: depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And there shall come from the east and the west, and the north and the south; and shall sit down in the kingdom of God” (St Luke 13:23–13:29).



Epilogue

Nowadays mankind has significantly distanced itself from God. It has almost completely squandered the true meaning of this life, and exchanged it for thousands of shallow, short-lived sensations in which it is cocooned by its ego. This process is accelerating. All this is like a large beautiful train, with loud music and drunken voices emanating from its windows hurtling along at full speed into an abyss. Along the railway track there are numerous signs and warnings about the impending danger, but people in the train turn their heads away from these signs and draw the curtains.

Do you know which is the most published and the least read book in the world? It is the Bible. The Lord has put it on bedside tables in the half of the hotels in the world. Nobody reads it. Most times if you check you will find no trace of it being opened. So, the word of God has become part of the hotel furniture.

Every day the Lord gives us lessons, for us to confront our selfishness, our passions and our sins. Every day He makes us think about the true meaning of life. He is patient and does not lose hope. Nobody will be able

to justify their actions after their death. Not a single person will be able to reproach the Lord in that he was left alone. Do not delude yourself with childish excuses that something was forgotten and not explained to you. In this life the Lord gives thousands of lessons to each of us, for us to return to Him and our stubborn unwillingness to notice these lessons is not a justification of our conduct.

Now is a difficult time. The word “God” is more and more often being pronounced shyly, religious books are being read in secret sometimes and school children if they can recall His name it is so insignificant that such recollection is only after the names of dozens of their favorite cartoon characters. But it has not always been like this.

Evil has labored very diligently and successfully for the last century. Even this present time was also described and predicted in the Book sitting on the hotel bedside table. Nonetheless, it is not too late yet; the curtains are not yet drawn. Right now, the Lord is also moving quickly, even faster than before, towards those who at least take the first step towards Him. All you need is a sincere desire to change something in you.



Aphorisms of the Saints and Righteous Men regarding the struggle against our passions (ego)

The aphorisms of Saints and Righteous Men do not need any comments, as there is no need to comment upon the Truth. Their souls, purified from passions, perfectly communicate with us through our heart.

All these statements are grouped in accordance with the topics of this book; in approximately the same sequence. Hopefully, this material will help you strengthen your conviction in the rightness of your work on your spiritual life; and you will be able to discover new facets of this uneasy, but the only possible way to God.

Types of passions (ego)

In the spiritual struggle it is necessary to determine the “coordinates” of

the weak points of our character — our imperfections - and later strike blows at these points. It is like being at war: while exploring certain territory, we mark on the map enemy locations or bridge-heads from which the enemy can launch an attack. Later, we monitor these places with special attention. Knowing the enemies exact location, you can move with confidence. Military men can open the map and say: “The enemy’s location is here and here. So, we need to seize this and that high ground. We also need to send reinforcements to this place and such or other weapons as are necessary here”. If we know the location of the enemy, it is possible to set a certain plan of action. However, in order to find it, first it is necessary to make an effort to explore battle ground. You cannot be asleep in these instances (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 3, Chapter 3).

The passion tree (the tree of ego)

Thus, we liken our soul and impregnated sin, to a big tree with a lot of branches and the roots deep in the soil. The same is with sin, which upon entering and dominating our soul and pervad-

ing the deepest hiding-places, becomes a habit and preconception (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Bravely defeat all of your passions one after another, starting with the main ones. It is useful not to think too much in the beginning, but to take and exterminate the most harsh and obvious ones. When the thick roots of the main passions start to wither, the thinner roots will start to wither too. Consequently, while rooting out our main passions, we are eradicating the smaller ones too (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 1).

Purification cannot happen automatically, or without effort, or just by mere keystrokes. Passions are not cut off at once, the same as the trunk of a tree is not sawn through by a single saw movement. You have to work long time with a handsaw until the whole trunk is sawn through (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 1).

As pride is the source of everything unclean, meekness is the beginning of purification (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

Pride, can be said to be the headquarters of all passions. By conquering pride, you conquer all passions (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 1).

Pride, selfishness, vainglory are all one and the same passion, but in various manifestations and shades. The satanic level of pride is called arrogance (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 2).

Selfishness is the disobedient son of pride. A selfish person always holds his ground. A selfish person is stubborn and unrelenting, and a proud person may not be either one or the other (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 2)

The root and source of any evil, which gives rise to it, is the excessive self-love. He who is devoted to this passion does not even watch his own deeds (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

Self-love is the fulfillment of desires of Old Testament man, that is, the love to one’s Old Testament man. Overeating,

and selfishness, and stubbornness, and envy have all originated from conceit (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 1).

Judgment and bad-mouthing others are the most dreadful sins, they are stronger than any other sin as they negate God's Grace (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 3, Chapter 1).

As pride is the source of impiety, in the same way meekness is the beginning of piety (Saint John Chrysostom "Three Saints", Spiritual Alphabet).

If you start loving God, your mind will be permanently occupied with the thought how to please Him but not how to please people. It will help you to get rid of heavy burden of obsequiousness (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 2).

That is why we said that the essence of a virtue is the middle: thus, courage is between fear and impudence; wise meekness is between pride and obsequiousness; venerations the same — it is between shame and shamelessness (Ven. Abba Dorotheus "Inspirational Teachings").

Concern and disinterest are the two wings which carry mankind, away from God (Archbishop John (Shakhovskoy) “Holy Moments of Silence”).

A sinful condition which comes from another person in the form of irritation — if we hold back our irritation — it benefits us, creating for us and the other person a spiritual blessing. By this same action we stop another’s irritation (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

...there is no stronger insulating material for Divine Grace than self-justification. Justifying yourself is like building a wall, separating yourself from God. Thus, you break off any relations with Him (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 1, Chapter 2).

Extinguishing passions (ego)

What makes God be favorably disposed towards us? The effort which we put in laboring to defeat our Old Testament man (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 1).

...for it is impossible to become capable of accepting Divine Grace, not having first cast out of ourselves those vicious passions that had mastered our souls (St. Vassily the Great I, 333).

...a man should make an effort to get rid of his imperfections and to develop the good that he has, in order to become in the image of God (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 1).

The moment of extraction of spiritual weeds from of our heart and its purification gives us a sense of genuine blessing, and gives us joy of life. This blessing is a stair to the tenement of God, the moment of our spiritual growth. A man is created for happiness, and solely through his everyday victories over himself will he be able to achieve happiness and such a state that brings light to one and all (Archbishop Serhjus (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

The indicator of a person, who voluntarily exercises his passion, is his confusion at the time when he is exposed or corrected (Ven. Abba Dorotheus “Inspirational Teachings”, Teaching 19).

It is necessary to daily resist the multitude evil thoughts, and train your mind to always strive for love of and attraction to God, and to get, in return, the feeling of grace (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Conversations”, Great Message IX,3).

So, a sign of our success will be the gradual extinguishment of our passions in our soul from day to day and so we become closer to God and — without even comprehending it — we are becoming worthy of His innumerable gifts (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

If you say, “I do not commit fornication or adultery; I am not a money-lover; and that is enough, I am a righteous man”, — you are deluding yourself, thinking that you have already done everything. There are not only three parts of sin that man has to protect himself against, but there are thousands. Where do arrogance, fear, disbelief, hatred, envy, craftiness, hypocrisy come from? Don’t you have to contend against them and fight them secretly in your thoughts? (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Fear your habits more than your enemies. A man cultivating a habit in himself

is similar to a man providing fuel to a fire. If one day a habit demands something and its demand will not be fulfilled, next time you will discover it attacking you with much greater power (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian)

The demon attacks the outpost which is weaker, and leaves alone the other ones which are well protected. “If I manage to seize this outpost”, it says, “then I will seize all of them, one after another”. That is why it is necessary to strengthen a weak point (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 2)

Help from our surroundings

The closest battlefield in our struggle with sin is our family and all those who surround us. We look at the environment, at the atmosphere we live in as if it is something come-by-chance; and we do not even consider our family as the way given to us by God for the sake of our salvation. The life in our family seems to us as something accidental, and the core of our family life eludes our attention. The family, according to the Apostles, is a small church. It might especially

help a man in achieving the main aim of his life. Seek happiness in your family (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

When you face difficulties in communicating with people, when the evil one sets up a storm in our heart, and darkness settles in it, it is necessary to appeal to God for help, calling upon His name in your mind. This is a spiritual moment (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

Self-justification

Oh, it is a terrible thing to talk to a person who has a habit of justifying himself. It is the same as talking to one possessed. God will forgive me, but those who justify themselves have the devil itself as their “elder” (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 1, Chapter 2).

It happens that you judge another person after an argument solely because self-justification has not yet died in you: judge yourself and you will stop judging others (Ven. Varsonophy the Great, “Guidance to Spiritual Life”).

The sin living in us darkens us and makes us justify ourselves. Self-justification is set up for us by the evil one. Until our conscience awakens and becomes sensitive to all kinds of sins — we seldom realize our sinfulness. Our justification of our sinful actions is the enemy of our salvation. Only the comprehension of the danger of sin gives rise to the will to struggle against sin (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

Truly, when justification consolidates with the will — it is a true death, a great danger... For who can make such person believe that another knows better than he what is beneficial for him? (Ven. Abba Dorotheus “Inspirational Teachings”)

A man who justifies himself when others admonish him, thereby kills his meekness. But a man, who admits his drawbacks and is humble, begins to glow with God’s Grace (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 4).

The confession alongside self-justification is a nasty thing before God. Where is the contrition about your sins, where is your humility? Instead of them — judgment! To our previous

sins we have added a new one... (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

***The effect of the Holy Spirit
on a man***

The true aim of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Talk about the Goal of Christian Life”).

Inside each of us there is a spiritual eye which we can see a million times more than our ordinary sight. The development of this inward sight is a very slow process, in the same way as the process of transformation of an outward person into an inward one. The most important requirements of obtaining spiritual sight are poverty of spirit and meekness. Work on restraining your thoughts and then the Lord will open the eyes of your heart (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

Ordinarily, the actions of the Holy Spirit do not show themselves in us, as

we are shackled by sin. As a man delivers himself from the sin, the Holy Spirit starts acting in him (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

...a man is the first and the only spiritual creature; and there have been people who have acquired such high levels of spirituality that have practically attained during their lifetime a separation of their soul from their body. These people-angels ascended in the air during their prayers and displayed the greatest power of spirit over the flesh; they were a transitional stage between the spirit connected with the body and soul connected to the ethereal spirit (an angel) (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Spirit, Soul, and Body”).

Extinguishing pride

Your brother helps you to break your pride, if you let him reprove you and allow him to say a few words of admonition (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 4).

He, who lets others know about his illness, is close to being healed and will

easily find healing (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

It is hard for a person to see his personal arrogance that is why he must treat other people as physicians and take their medicine (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 2, Chapter 4).

The sequence of spiritual work

At the end of the day and after finishing our daily routine, either physical or spiritual, before going to bed, the conscience of each of us should be subjected to the trial of our own heart (St. Basil the Great V,69).

Self-reproach is for passion as water is to fire: fire is extinguished with water and passions are with self-reproach. The latter develops a subtlety of moral differentiation: to distinguish the good from the bad and evil one; so the person who does not have self-reproach, the cognizance of the good is dulled in him (Abbot, the elder Sava, "Spiritual Alphabet").

...it is necessary to daily resist the numerous and abundant evil thoughts,

always turning your mind to strive to be lovingly engrossed in God, and to receive, in return, the feeling of grace from God (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”, Great Message IX.3).

Great sins do not require as much labor and endeavor as, to the contrary, do minor and small sins because the characteristic of such sin itself forces us to turn away from great sin. However small sins — since they are small — incline us to laziness and prevent us from resisting with determination their demands. That is why if we do not stay vigilant, very soon they turn into great sins (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

While recalling your actions during the previous day, you will find in them both good and bad. All the good is attached to God, and all the bad to yourself. Again make a firm determination to resist the sin, especially to your favorite one. Remember well that everything that is worthy of praise in you is not yours but God’s, and it is God Who gave you the disposition, ability, strength, the desire and an opportunity to acquire something worthy to be praised, and, consequently, it does not belong to you

but to God (Abbot, the elder Sava, “Spiritual Alphabet”).

...it is necessary to take care of the purity of the heart: one should daily check if there is no filth in it; it is necessary to watch when and with what your heart is being defiled and soiled; All this filth and dirt should be immediately washed out (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

A man, who has not been tested by temptation, is inexperienced. Attacks make a person experienced. The job of a monk is to tolerate the attacks of the enemy and to resist them with the courage of the heart. But since you do not know the cunning of the enemy, it is the enemy that brings thoughts of fear into your heart and weakens it. You must know that God will not permit attacks and temptations on you which are beyond your strength (Ven. Varsonophy the Great, “Guidance to Spiritual Life”).

*Intuition (thoughts
from God, God’s Voice)*

The soul has its own, much deeper intellect — intuition, the inner perception of

truth (Metropolitan Venemian (Fedchenkov), “About Faith, Lack of Faith and Doubt”).

The Holy Spirit can be acquired by listening to the voice of God. The voice of God, speaking clearly, distinctly and intelligibly, can be heard everywhere and in everything, but to hear you have to have ears to listen. God, is like your philoprogenitive Father, Who from your birth and thereafter keeps talking to you every day calling you to Himself, warning you, edifying, teaching, and making you listen to reason (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

A man starts seeing and feeling God by his faith and using his supreme intuitive comprehension. A man is capable of hearing — by his inner ear — Divine truth and love (Archbishop John (Shakhovskoy) “Holy Moments of Silence”).

The Spirit of God reminds us of the words of our Lord Jesus Christ and always acts triumphantly with Him, gladdening our hearts and guiding our steps into the way of peace, while the false diabolical spirit reasons in the opposite way to Christ, and its actions in us are

rebellious, stubborn, and full of lust for flesh, being lust of the eyes and pride of life (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Talk about the Goal of Christian Life”).

And as for you, let the anointment which you received from Him abide in you. And you have no need that any man teach you; But this anointment teacheth you of all things and is the truth and is no lie. And as it has taught you abide in Him (1 St. John 2:27) (Holy Apostle Evangelist John).

The Writings say that not only does the heart have the ability to receive the effect of God’s spirit but it is the organ that is evolved and repaired by God it is the centre of our spiritual life our key to knowing God.

Almost all people, even the less sensitive ones, have the ability of cognition another than cognizance by the five senses. The higher the spirituality of a man, the brighter is this ability of spiritual cognition (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Spirit, Soul, and Body”).

The spirit speaks out and when speaking during prayer the Holy Spirit settles on us and we are enveloped in silence

comprehending all such knowledge of life eternal that He gives us (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Talk about the Goal of Christian Life”).

For when our conscience tells us to do something and we ignore it, and when it tells us about it again and we do not do it but keep flouting it, then it is not able to tell us clearly of the burden resting on it, instead, it is like a lamp behind a veil, showing us things less clearly than before (Ven. Abba Dorotheus “Inspirational Teachings”).

Each and every one of us should know that there are eyes which are more inward than your physical eyes, and there is hearing which is more inward than your physical ears. As our physical eyes see and distinguish the face of a friend or of a loved one, in the same way the eyes of our soul, enlightened by the God’s light, spiritually see and distinguish the true friend — the Lord. This happens when our soul is lit up by the Holy Spirit (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

When a thought comes and tells you to do something for God and you rejoice

in it, then be aware that such thought was from God... so to each time you hear something, think about something or see something and your heart becomes even a little uncomfortable then this matter is demonic (Ven. Varssanophy the Great, “The Guidance to Spiritual Life”).

The more a man succeeds in his spiritual life, the wider the eyes of his soul open. The mind is being purified, and the person starts recognizing his own imperfections much better, seeing, at the same time, numerous good deeds of God; he becomes meek and inwardly grieves — and thus God’s Grace, God’s Enlightenment comes to him in a natural way... (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 4, Chapter 5).

The Lord has put a particular ability into a man: to hear our own voice through the voice of our conscience. We need this voice, but the ability to hear it is easily lost (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

For if our heart condemns us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things (1 John 3:19) (Saint John Apostle Evangelist).

Attentiveness to thoughts

Always pay careful attention: take a stand against thoughts so as not to succumb to carelessness or vanity, do not do anything by your own will and do not accept thoughts of self justification — in the worst case you will expose yourself to a great downfall. Know with certainty that no matter where you go even if to the four corners of the earth that you will not find a place of greater benefit to you than where you are now (Ven. Varsonophy the Great, “Guidance to Spiritual Life”).

Many thoughts appearing in us, sometimes quite unexpectedly, can be from God, from Angels of saints or from our invisible enemies — the servants of satan. That is why holy Fathers offer to gain an understanding where the thoughts are coming from: from Angels or from the evil one. The thoughts from demons can be filled with confusion and sorrow.

The thoughts from God come with quietness and joy. A kind angel is quiet, modest, meek, and peaceful. It inspires purity, justice, chastity, tenderness, indulgence, love, and piety. The evil angel is malicious, wrathful, and reckless (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

Like the opponent, which at first bombs fortifications from the air to destroy them, and only then, under the artillery support, moves into the offensive, similarly the demon first bombs the thoughts of a man and after that attacks him. The demon never attacks a man, unless it first ruins his thoughts. You see a good thought protects a person because a good thought is his “dugout” (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 1, Chapter 4).

Wandering thoughts

One should know that we cannot succeed in either observing any of the commandments or in loving our neighbor if we have wandering thoughts (St. Basil the Great, “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet)

Do not let your mind spin around. Even if your mind is permanently within the sphere of not directly sinful things, but rotates among the neutral, ordinary things, these neutral things, entertaining your mind, also “neutralize” it and it languishes in vain. Besides, the thoughts which appear because of distraction are craftier than frankly evil thoughts, because the former we do not notice, consequently we do not cast them out. (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 1, Chapter 4).

Meekness

Meekness even without action makes a lot of sins forgivable. But without meekness all our deeds are useless and actually prepare many dire things for us... if we acquire meekness, it will make us the sons of God (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

When Saint Antony saw all the nets of the evil one spread out, having sighed, he asked God: “Who can avoid them?” The answer was: “Meekness avoids them”, and what is more astonishing, God added: “These nets do not even touch meekness”. Do you understand

now the grace of this virtue? Truly there is nothing stronger than wise meekness, nothing can conquer it (Ven. Abba Dorotheus “Inspirational Teachings”).

A meek person exudes all the scents of spiritual fragrance: simplicity, meekness, love without limits, kindness, gentleness, sacrifice, obedience, etc. He is poor in spirit, which is why he possesses all the spiritual wealth (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Section 2, Part 1, Chapter 1).

A meek person cannot be caught by any passion, neither anger, nor the love of glory, nor envy or jealousy can make him indignant. And there is nothing higher than the soul alien to these passions (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

About faith in God

To believe in God means in everything and always to acknowledge the strength, power and wisdom of the Supreme Master of life leading us in this world — through hospital and school — for healing, learning, acquiring wisdom

and for the salvation of our immortal soul (Archbishop John (Shakhovskoy) “Holy Moments of Silence”).

Faith should be loving, sincere, non-hypocritical, unquestionable, active and lively. If your faith is like this, if you have brought up such faith in yourself, you will undoubtedly try to probe it by your deeds: you will try to fulfill God’s will and strive to be good and kind both in your thoughts, words and deeds (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

You should have a meek and easy heart, and your faith should be firm. You should undoubtedly believe that there is nothing that can be impossible for God. ...only a genuine believer lives a true life and really is a man of God (Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, “Spiritual Alphabet of Paisios of Mount Athos the Elder”).

Miracles of God in our life

For those whose hearts are ready, there is nothing strange in a miracle: a miracle is God acting with the power

of His might. For the heart which is not ready, miracles are not accepted, and in order to understand them people try to find different explanations (Archbishop Serhjus (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

If a man lives his life with faith, without any hesitations, and is looking for help from God, gradually wonderful things start happening to him — first minor, unimportant things and later more important ones — and his faith strengthens (Paisios of Mount Athos, “Spiritual Alphabet of Paisios of Mount Athos the Elder”).

Besides this visible material world, there is a far more important spiritual world that lives according to great laws unknown to us which completely differ from the laws of the material world. It is these laws rule over the laws of the material nature (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

A miracle is not a disturbance but, on the contrary, an exercise of the supreme and eternal laws of existence in our transient world (Archbishop John (Shakhovskoy) “Holy Moments of Silence”).

About prayer and petitions to God

A prayer is a talk with the Lord.

Where prayer and reverence are — the grace of the Holy Spirit comes and that is where demons are driven away from, and all enemy forces retreat and turn into flight (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

...keep your heart clean and pure and ask God to give prudence to you, so that He will let you know all the tricks and traps of the evil, so that the evil one will not acquire us for itself (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Some people, without making any efforts towards perfection themselves say, “Oh, my Christ, there are such and such passions in me. You can cast them out. Deliver me from them!” . How can God help here? In order for God to help, it is necessary for a man himself to endeavor. There are certain things which a man has to do for himself, for God to later send His help. There is no way for a man to get help, if he himself has no desire to help himself (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume, Part 1, Chapter 1).

...it will be better to let a man always call upon God, for God Himself to become his Guide, and his Way, and his Mind, and his Determination, and his Interpreter (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”)

About judgment

As water extinguishes a fire, so to judgment extinguishes the grace of God (Ven. John the Ladder).

When we contradict our thoughts, why do we not receive any power to reject them? It is because, first and foremost, we begin to judge our neighbor, and through that, our spiritual force becomes weaker, and we blame our brother, being guilty ourselves (Ven. Varsanophy the Great, “The Guidance to Spiritual Life”).

If somebody judges another person for something but does not realize his own downfall and does not repent, he usually falls into the same sin himself. It happens so that man can comprehend his downfall. Because of His love, God allows replication of the state of that person who he has judged (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 3, Chapter 1).

Judge the evil deed, but do not judge the one committing it (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Spiritual Teachings”).

The main thing is to purify our spiritual eyes... having reached a good spiritual state, a man sees everything spotless, justifies imperfections of others — in a good way — because he sees them through his spiritual vision and not with his human one (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 3, Chapter 1).

When we are disgusted by a person or insult them, it is as if a stone is being put onto our heart (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Spiritual Teachings”).

...spiritual life starts with understanding yourself and your own weaknesses but not with the trial of those surrounding you. The most destructive sins are temptation and judgment. So, start to diligently casting out these two sins from your soul and heart (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Letters”).

Offence and the accompanying humiliation are not from the malevolence of the offender but the weakness of the offended (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

Accusation said in a rude manner is judgment. In this case a sinner will not be saved and you will ruin yourself (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and homilies).

Repentance

If we say that we have no sin — we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:8) (Saint Apostle, Evangelist John).

Repentance is the door of mercy: through this door we enter into God's mercy; and we will not acquire mercy through any other door (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

Before you start repenting, you must forgive everyone! Forgive without delay, immediately! You must genuinely forgive and not for example: “I have forgiven you but I can't see you any longer and I don't want to talk to you!” You must

immediately forgive everyone everything, as if there was never any offence, distresses or hostility (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies” 1993).

Any offence, whatever it may be, should not only, not affect you, but on the contrary, you have to forgive from the heart, even if the heart is resisting (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Spiritual Teachings”).

God, wishing for us to get rid of our numerous and great sins, offered us a short, easy and convenient way. Is it really a labor to forgive the one who insulted us? (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

The repentance is being valued not in accordance with the time so devoted, but according to the state of the soul. He who really hates sin, turns away from it and promptly extinguishes all his passions (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and homilies).

There are no unforgivable sins except for the unrepented ones (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

God, is merciful man-loving, long-suffering and is waiting for repentance from each sinner and the repentance of the latter is a heavenly celebration (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Our judgments in the past

While studying yourself, it will be very useful from time to time to have a deeper insight into your life: step by step, starting from your childhood. It is necessary to realize where you were before, where you are now, and where you have to be (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 3, Chapter 3).

When you recall your previous sins, or addictions, or weaknesses, although you are not delighted by them, the mere touch of filth ruins the soul and infects it with its stench. That is why when our memory brings back our former sins, you must immediately turn away from it. We should try to cultivate in ourselves thoughts of virtue and the Heavenly Kingdom than the harmful recollection of our sins (Venerable John the Cassian of Rome, “Two Kingdoms”).

The more years pass, the more spiritually mature a person should become. Using the benefit of our past experience for good, we go forward more confidently and more meekly (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 3, Part 3, Chapter 3).

Love

He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in darkness even until now. He who loves his brother, abides in the light and there is no occasion of stumbling in him (St. John 2:9) (Holy Apostle Evangelist John).

Love is considered to be love only in the case when it is to everybody without any exceptions. Until such time love only towards those whom "I" love, it is not love but selfishness (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and jomilies).

Love is the summit of all perfections, and in order to ascend to it, you have to walk all the steps... Only those who became passionless, i.e. free from all passions, can acquire love... Only they,

having become purified, can acquire love (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Evangelistic Gold).

Those with earthly love argue with each other as to who will grab more love for himself. But those with the spiritual, precious love argue with each other who will give more love to the other. They love without thinking whether they are being loved by the others or not (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Section 2, Part 2, Chapter 2).

But love to God on the earth, according to the Commandment of God, appears only with the love towards people. The heart of a Christian can get warm and burn solely by a simultaneous love of God and people. If our heart is callous and cruel to our brother — to mankind, — then marred by hostility, coldness, and cruelty it becomes indifferent and insincere to God as well and Paradise, which could be so close — in our heart — is moving away, becoming vague, and the sin of not loving gives birth to disobedience, selfishness and vanity (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies” 1993).

It is not difficult, not at all difficult to love the people who love us; it is not

difficult, not the least difficult to love our father or mother, or our wife, or our children. But what is the true value of such a love? Oh no, such love has little value, if any at all, since we love our nearest and dearest and our children instinctively, and this instinct is naturally inside us (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

The summit of holiness and perfection is not in doing miracles but in the purity of love (Venerable John the Cassian of Rome “Two Kingdoms”).

He who has reached perfect love, becomes the captive and prisoner of grace. He who is gradually coming closer to the full measure of love but has not risen to the level of becoming a prisoner of love yet, is still under the influence of fear, he is being threatened by the battle and by the possibility of falling down; and if he does not guard himself, then satan will depose him (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

*Love of the Lord to us,
the Divine Light*

*Herein is love, not that we loved God,
but that he loved us, and sent his Son*

to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:10) (Holy Apostle Evangelist John).

Love cannot exist all by itself since the attribute of love is the necessity to find expression in somebody or something, and this necessity entailed the creation of the world by God (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Spirit, Soul, and Body”).

God shows us His love of man not only in the instances when we do good to others, but also when we insult Him through our sins and anger Him. How patiently He endures our outrage when he mercifully punishes us (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Spiritual Teachings”).

Do you know that besides ordinary sun light, there is another light, the Great Light, non-material light, Spiritual Light? Are you all striving to this Spiritual Light? This light is shining and will shine forever, no matter for how long we have been turning away from it and irrespective of how unnecessary this Light would seem to this world (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

That which we consider to be the reality of this world is not the true reality, the one

which is the Devine Light. However this light can start shining in us only as a result of our struggle against sin, through overcoming darkness by the endeavors of our will and by God's grace (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) "Walking in the Light").

*The way to the Lord because
of love and because of fear*

There is no fear in love, but a perfect love casts out fear, because fear has torment. He that fears is not made perfect in love (St. John 4:18) (Holy Apostle Evangelist John).

If a man sets all his hopes upon on his affairs and addresses God with the prayer only in cases when unexpected misfortunes befall him, and — not seeing any other possibilities to avert them — he starts hoping on the help from God, such hope is superstitious and untruthful (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, "Spiritual Teachings").

Fear for the body can be so intense in people that quite often people are unable to commit something glorious or honourable. When fear for the soul joins with fear for the body — then the

corporal fear wilts before the fear for soul as wax melts from the omnivorous force of fire (The Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian).

God's fear — is such a fear where the son is afraid of his most loving father, or a brother is afraid of his brother, or a friend of his friend, or the spouse of the other spouse; in this case we are not afraid of punishment or reproach, but we are afraid of even the slightest insult of love (Venerable John the Cassian of Rome, "Two Kingdoms").

He who fulfills the will of God because of the fear of torment is still a beginner, since he does not do good for the sake of good but because of fear of being punished. Another fulfills the will of God because of his love of God, loving Him and solely to please Him. So, the latter one knows the essence of what real good is, he has comprehended what it means to be with God. This man has a true love which saints call perfected (Ven. Abba Dorotheus "Inspirational Teachings").

God does not draw anybody to Himself forcefully, does not make anybody obey Him by fear and trembling.

Do remember that only pure free love of God is pleasing to Him (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Evangelic Gold”).

*Spiritual pride, vainglory
(spiritual ego)*

Suppose you are earnestly moving forward, and your thought tells you that you are doing something great, that you are a virtuous man. If so, it means there is pride in you, and you conceal it. Hidden pride is very cunning and that is why it is so hard to heal. It hides very deeply, surrounding people do not notice it and only an experienced person is able to distinguish it. People of spiritual life mainly suffer from the hidden pride. Outwardly they may seem meek and pious but inwardly they can conceal such a pride that you would be astonished! (Paisios of Mount Athos, Volume 5, Part 1, Chapter 2).

...vanity sticks to the virtuous and does not leave them until it takes away from them all their essence, a vain monk is an unpaid worker: he does the work, but will not be rewarded (St. Nilus of Sinai “Philokalia”).

...it happens so that when we managed to resist the attack of the enemy and remain unconquerable, we can be conquered by the highness of our triumph over him (Venerable John the Cassian of Rome, “Philokalia”).

Vainglory is a fierce and many-headed passion. Being carried away by this passion, some people search for wealth, others — for power, and all this happens at still the lowest level of its reign. Spreading its power further, this passion turns into its food even virtues themselves, such as charity, fasting, praying, and the gift of learning. This beast has so many more heads (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

It is terrible when a man is being attracted by himself, is proud of his abilities, gifts and natural capabilities... The symptoms of vainglory are the thirst for being praised; inability to take criticism, instructions and reproaches; suspiciousness, mistrust, rancor; judgment of others, experiencing difficulties while asking for forgiveness, looking for easy ways; being in a state of permanent acting as if on the stage in the presence of other people, carefully concealing

one's passions and vices (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and homilies).

Reading the Holy Gospel

And we hear the words of the Holy Gospel: “For if you will forgive men their offences, your Heavenly Father will forgive you also your offences. But if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences” (St. Matthew 6:14–15). Forgive everything to everybody, and you will be forgiven. Forgive and you will be saved, and you will inherit the Heavenly Kingdom.

But these words of the Lord about the forgiveness are followed by other words: “Do not judge and you won’t be judged” (St. Matthew 7:1).

With these words the Lord shows us the shortest and the most certain way to our salvation which opens the gates of the Heavenly Kingdom in front of us. The Lord points out at that, without that all our deeds and life endeavors will be all in vain. It is the only way — the way of love of people — starting with non-judgment (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

The Holy Gospel brings everyone, reading it with childish purity of the heart, to Christ. Those left out without any answers, are those whose hearts are not clean and are full of weakness for earthly cares, that is why they do not want to know anything about the Christ's Holy Gospel. This is a spiritual death (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

As the disparagement of one's neighbor turns, first and foremost, against those who disparage, in the same way goodness done to a neighbor brings joy to those doing it. He who does good and he who does evil will definitely be the first to experience both themselves. That is why God permitted evil people to be among good people for the good ones to enlighten themselves even more. Do you now see how useful this is? But this usefulness is, by the way, not from the evil ones but from the courage of the kind (Saint John Chrysostom "Three Saints", Spiritual Alphabet).

God has entrusted much to man, and everyone was given their own talent. God has no unfortunate people. But all these benefits, riches and treasures

themselves, my dear ones, are not valuable to us, as these are not ours — it is God's gift. Solely the fruits of spirit, which were cultivated in our life's fields entrusted to us by God, are our genuine riches, if they include goodness, righteousness and truth (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) "Homilies").

Talents are given to everyone. The Lord will ask everybody: "Why haven't you done that what you should have done?" The task of each of us in this life is to discover and increase the talent given to each of us by God (Archbishop Serhius (Korolyov) "Walking in the Light").

If we do not find the abundant fruits of love, peace, joyfulness, meekness, simplicity, sincerity, faith and long-suffering, all our deeds were futile and vain because all such deeds and actions should be performed for the sake of fruits (Ven. Macarius of Egypt "Spiritual Homilies").

The Holy Gospel makes us free from the spirit of ignorance and evil, it brings out the kindness, concealed in a person, to the forefront of his life. The word of Christ purifies and cultivates

the inner deepness of our human essence: our heart and conscience (Archbishop John (Shakhovskoy) “Holy Moments of Silence”).

About the soul

The soul is asking for food far more sublime than the pleasures and enjoyments, than those who are far from a spiritual life are trying to comfort it with. You absolutely must not live without food for the soul; you must not let the soul starve as many countless people do (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

Each of us should know that there are eyes which are more internal than ordinary eyes, and there is hearing which is more internal than the ordinary one. As ordinary eyes sensitively see and distinguish the face of a friend or of a loved one, in the same way the eyes of the worthy and loyal soul, being enlightened by the Divine light, spiritually see and distinguish a true friend – the Lord. This happens when the soul is illuminated by the Holy Spirit (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

The rules of the Lord

...a potter who made pots knows that if he does not put them into the fire, they will not be useful; as well, he knows how long they should be kept in the fire for them to be useful. How much better does God know — true Knowledge, unlimited Intellect, incomprehensible Wisdom — how many ordeals, sorrows and temptations do those who want to please Him need. Having experienced sorrows they are honored to receive the fullness of grace and entirely acquire purity and blessing through participation of the Spirit; and they are completely delivered from passions (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”)

While you are still in the process of learning, even through the sorrows themselves, God’s Mercy is about you. When you acquire peace in your soul, the Lord will let you know Him and will show you that the struggle was permitted for your sake and benefit (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Everything depends both upon us and upon God: we have to choose good beforehand, and after choosing it God will provide

us with His assistance. He does not curb our desire in order not to break our freedom; but when we choose good, He provides His great help to us (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

The Lord does not force a lifestyle upon a person, but considers and observes a person’s lifestyle and his love towards Him and what the person is striving for. If God sees that the souls love is fastened to Him, He takes residence in such soul...: but if God does not have any reason to settle in a certain soul, — that is no love of and no faith in Him — He will not become a part of the life of this person (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Good thoughts and wishes cannot without Gods grace, be cultivated flower and strengthened; but God’s grace can but not without the free will of a person wake them up, develop and strengthen them depending on how much the person himself wants it and what effort he makes to act in accordance with or abide by the effect of grace (Ven. John the Cassian of Rome, “Two Kingdoms”).

While calling people to Himself, God does not impose need on them and does not

force the will of those who do not want to choose virtue; instead He admonishes, gives advice, does everything and tries to do His best to encourage them to be virtuous. But if some of them do not want to be virtuous — He never forces them (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

The Lord takes a look in each soul in hope of finding fruits, so He can enter and settle there: He died for all of us and redeemed the whole mankind by His death (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “New Spiritual Homilies”, XVI.5).

The best thing that the Lord has given to a man as the crown of His creation — is free will, which He Himself safeguards without putting any demands on us — we do not treasure this and quite often carelessly give it to sin (Archbishop Serhjus (Korolyov) “Walking in the Light”).

You should know that at all times and in every place people who are genuinely looking for salvation, can find it. The only thing we need is to seek salvation with all our strength, with all heart and soul, to follow Christ, and to fulfill His Commandments (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Spirit, Soul, and Body”).

*Medicine from the Lord,
our diseases*

Diseases – permitted by God - contribute to a man's benefit. They slow down our mad pace of life and make us become thoughtful and look for help. As a rule, human help is powerless and quickly exhausted' so a man turns to God (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) "Homilies").

Where are the diseases from? Where is bodily harm from? The Lord created the body but not the disease; He created the soul but not sin. So what is most useful and most needed? It is connection with God and communication with Him through love. Losing this love we fall away from God, and falling away from Him we are being subjected to different and numerous diseases (St. Basil the Great, "God is Not the Cause of Sorrows").

Punishment from God is the same as the medicine from a doctor: cutting off and searing. Everything that seems to be a scourge is sent to the soul to stop – as can happen to the body – the development of its diseases and to make it better (Saint John Chrysostom "Three Saints", Spiritual Alphabet).

The outcome for us all is the same — and it is well known — Eternity lies through the gates of death. Diseases are just notification messages reminding us about what the main thing is in our life (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

In the same way the Lord treats us too. Those whom He loves and who He considers His children, He punishes with love for them to become better. He sends heavy ordeals to those who are proud, subjecting them to disgrace and humiliation in people’s eyes. For those who lust after money He takes away their property, destroying it by the fire or permitting it to be stolen by the thieves. He punishes those subjected to lechery by sending shameful diseases (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

About evil (ego)

Nowadays we are more scared of the stamp of the antichrist that will come in time, at a time we are unlikely to live to. However concern about the stamp of our personal sin very few give it any consideration. It is this very stamp that

delivers a man into the power of the elements of the antichrist (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”)

To sin is evil, but even greater evil is to deny the sin after having committed it. This in itself is the weapon of the demon (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

Battling our soul with different methods, our opponent uses innumerable tricks, desiring to weaken a man’s intention, to deprive him of hope and his love of God (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

Our enemy gets its freedom to influence us solely through our own sins and downfall, and not because one of our adversaries wanted it (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

We have only one enemy blocking the way to our salvation — the devil; let us defeat it with reasonableness. He convinces us towards sluggishness — let us take action. He deceives our heart by vain promises — let us not remain ignorant regarding his intentions. Isn’t it he, who although not advising us to sin today, at the same

time persuades us to postpone the truth until tomorrow? (St. Basil the Great, “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

The evil spirits are continuously fighting for possession of the heart, the will and the whole of the spiritual life of those who nobody considers to be possessed; to a certain extent they take power over them. This struggle composes the main content of the spiritual life of all people, with the exception of those who are already completely consigned to evil and untruthfulness (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, Homilies).

The are numerous and various ways the devil enters our soul, and separates us from God. Each movement of passion is a pathway for the devil and he never misses a single opportunity to enter us (Abbot Sava, the elder of the Pskov-Caves Monastery (1898–1980) — Complete collection of sermons and homilies).

About sin

The worst sin of all is GODLESSNESS, that is the condition in which a great number of our compatriots, our

relatives, close friends and acquaintances find themselves in (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

In our soul there is a certain shame of sin which does not allow us to immediately become shameless; on the contrary, the soul descends to extreme perdition unwittingly, little by little, when it starts living negligently (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

The cultivation of sin and the distortion of our life happens gradually: it starts by embracing the mind (for the mind to be clear you have to daily read the Holy Gospel and to look at life and assess it in the light of the Evangelistic truth), followed by the weakening of the soul, making the snow ball of sin bigger and bigger until you are crushed by it. The weakening of the soul is followed by the distortion of the conscience, when everything is being seen in a distorted light, that results in the defilement of the body (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

Great sins do not require as much labor and endeavors as, to the contrary, do minor and small sins. Because the characteristic of the sin itself forces us

to turn away from great sins, but small sins — since they are small — incline us to laziness and prevent us from resisting with determination their demands. That is why if we do not stay vigilant, very soon they turn into great sins (Saint John Chrysostom “Three Saints”, Spiritual Alphabet).

Heaven and hell

Finally, the soul belongs to him with whom it communicates and unifies by its desires. That is why having inside ourselves the Divine light living in it and being enriched by virtues we obtain light and peacefulness, or — having inside ourselves the darkness of sin we are condemned (Ven. Macarius of Egypt “Spiritual Homilies”).

A man, in whatever time he lives, whether he wants to or not, makes a choice which determines his future in eternity (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) “Homilies”).

If the Kingdom of God is inside of us, and if this Kingdom is righteousness, peace and joy, then he who has acquired

them is, without any doubt, in the Kingdom of God. He who lives in untruthfulness, discord and sorrow, producing death, is in the kingdom of the evil one, in hell; since the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of evil are distinguished by these two features (Venerable John the Cassian of Rome, "Two Kingdoms").

Eternal blessedness of righteous men and eternal torment of sinners should be understood as follows; the immortal spirit of the former enlightened is powerfully strengthened after being freed from the body, receives an opportunity of unlimited development of good and Divine love, is in permanent communication with God and all spiritual powers. The gloomy spirit of villains and atheists, are in permanent communication with the devil and his demons, and will forever be in agony because of their estrangement from God the holiness of Whom will finally be comprehended.

God, certainly, cannot be blamed for the eternal torment of shameless sinners and we should not see Him as infinitely vengeful, punishing by eternal torment the sins of a short-term life. Each person receives and has in him the breath of the Holy Spirit. No one is born from the spirit

of satan. But as dark clouds darken and absorb the light of the sun, in the same way evil deeds of the mind, will and senses, in their repetition and predominance, continuously darken the light of Christ in the soul of an evil man and his consciousness is more and more shaped by the influence of the spirit of the devil

He who loved evil but not good, has for himself prepared eternal torment in the eternal life hereafter (St. Luke, Archbishop of the Crimea, “Spirit, Soul, and Body”).

About modern Christianity

“In our days”, the Elder answered, “because of our almost general coldness to the holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and because of our inattentiveness to the actions of His Divine Providence in relation to us and lack of mans communication with God, we have reached the point when almost all of us have distanced ourselves from a true Christian life” (Ven. Seraphim of Sarov, “Talk about the Goal of Christian Life”).

Forgotten is God! Yet again I will not hear objections to my words — is God really forgotten?! All round there is talk

of opening monasteries and churches and about the grace of God. That's right, my dear friends, there is a lot of talk, but the combination of human and Divine is just a monster. Unthinkable internal "harmony" is now associated with verbal piety and walking into a church is done with the perverse cynicism. Terrible babble, slander, slyness, deceit, falsity, self-love, and lawless cohabitation co-exists with — in the conscience of the many — groaning, weeping and taking Holy Communion.

A man thinks that he is with God but no, he is not. It is not Christianity, it is his cynical extermination (Archbishop John (Krestiankin) "Homilies").



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