

## ***Excerpt from Chapter 18: The Nature of Sin***

### ***The Passions and the Virtues***

When the Orthodox speak or write about sin, they often use the term the “passions.” Father David Smith points out that the word “passion” as used by the Holy Fathers in their writings is not a word that translates well into English. It does not mean an intense desire for something. Rather, it means a sickness of the soul, turning our backs on God, and a habit for sin.<sup>i</sup>

Another way to phrase it is that the passions are simply the incorrect orientation of our desires due to the infection of sin within us. These are things such as pride, self-love, obsession with material items, greed, sloth, sexual lust and spiritual ignorance to name a few. These are the types of words the Orthodox use when describing why we “fall short.”

The word “passions” in Greek has the same root word as the Greek word for “passive.” The late M. Scott Peck, the famous psychiatrist and author of *The Road Less Traveled* and other books, likened sin to laziness.<sup>ii</sup> Indeed, much of our sin comes from our inherent laziness not to make the effort to do the right thing in our thought and actions but rather simply give in to the passions.

The passions are not sins but the actions we take or do not take because of them are what lead to sinful behavior. For example, Christ warned us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:27-29) about sexually lustful thoughts in saying that to look at a woman lustfully who is not your wife is committing adultery in your heart. He’s not talking about an acknowledgement of someone’s beauty here, but rather a step beyond that when you are thinking sexually about a woman who is not your wife. He’s saying our thoughts are important. He’s acknowledging that bad thoughts that come from the passions often lead to bad actions so he is essentially advocating a “nip it in the bud” mentality.

Submitting to the passions is to align ourselves with evil because we are not aligning our will to God’s will. Giving into the passions enslaves us to the world and actually keeps us from knowing our true selves, which is God’s desire for us. Knowing ourselves and growing into what we were meant to be as created persons of God with purpose are only possible when God illumines our thoughts and hearts. This can’t happen when we enslave ourselves to thoughts and behaviors that are not of God.

Therefore the penultimate goal of Christianity in Orthodoxy is the cure of passions. The first goal is a union with God and it follows that through this union we would begin to overcome our passions or sins. We need to replace the passions with what are known as the “virtues.” These are humility, obedience, repentance and love.

Humility is seeing ourselves as we are and loving ourselves. *It’s not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less.* Don’t confuse it with modesty, though modesty is a good thing. Humility is more simply putting others and their needs above your own. Humility leads to sincere repentance, which is a continual heart for God, and self-forgiveness. Obedience is simply living according to God’s will as expressed through the Holy Tradition of His Church, in some cases whether it initially makes logical sense to us or not. All of this will lead to the purging of

sin that is gradually replaced by greater and greater love. The virtues will come to us naturally as we sincerely seek to have union with God by actively participating in the life of His Church and living accordingly.

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<sup>i</sup> Father David Smith, Mary, Worthy of All Praise, Conciliar Press, 2004, p. 60.

<sup>ii</sup> M. Scott Peck, The Road Less Traveled, Simon and Schuster, 1978, pp. 271-277.