

On the need to cut off the passions quickly before the soul becomes used to them (Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Set your minds, brethren, to the examination of your affairs and don't neglect yourselves, because even a little neglect can lead us into great danger. I lately paid a visit to a monk and found him recovering from an illness. As we were talking I learned that he'd been alone and had contracted a fever that lasted seven days. It was then forty days since the fever had left him and he still hadn't regained his former strength. You see, brethren, what a trial it is if something goes wrong with you. People usually dismiss a small disorder and don't realize that if a little thing happens to injure their body, especially if it's weak to start with, they're going to need a great deal of time and effort to put it right again. In this case, the poor man had a temperature for only seven days, and look how many days he suffered without recovering. It's the same with the soul: you commit a small sin and you spend a lot of time, shedding blood, before it's put right.



We find a variety of reasons for illnesses of the body: it may be that the medicines were old and therefore didn't work; the doctor wasn't experienced and tried the wrong remedy; or patients lacked the discipline to comply with what the doctor told them. Now we can't say this about the soul- that the Doctor lacks experience or doesn't prescribe the right medicine- since Christ is the Doctor Who knows everything and applies the proper remedy for every sickness: for empty ambition, humility; for love of pleasure, temperance; for avarice, almsgiving. In other words, each disease of the soul has a commandment which is the appropriate remedy. The Doctor's not incompetent and the remedies are never out-of-date or ineffective, because the more Christ's commandments are applied, the fresher they become. So, the only impediment to the soul's healing is our own recalcitrance.

We should attend to ourselves and be vigilant while there's still time. Why do we neglect ourselves? We should be doing good, so that we'll find help in time of trial. Why do we fritter away our lives? We're always hearing this, but we don't care much about it and are indifferent to it. We see our brothers [in the monastery] snatched away from the midst of us and it doesn't put us on our mettle, even though we know that, in a little while, we too will be facing death. Since the moment we sat down to talk, we've used up two or three hours of our time and are that much closer to death. We see that our time's running out, but that doesn't frighten us. Why don't we remember the saying of that Elder that, if you lose gold or silver you can always find more to replace it, but time, once lost to idleness and

negligence, can never be found again? No matter how hard we try to regain one hour of this time, we'll never do so. How many people long to hear the word of God and don't find it, yet we who hear it are indifferent to it and aren't roused by it. God knows, I'm astonished at the callousness of our souls, by the fact that we can be saved, yet don't want to be. Because we could cut off our passions at birth but we don't bother to. We allow them to grow and harden, so that we make the last evil greater than the first. As I've told you often enough, it's one thing to pull up a blade of grass and another to uproot a great tree...

I've told you the different ways that people fall into bad habits. If someone loses their temper once, this doesn't make them irascible; if they fornicate once, this doesn't make them fornicators, nor, if they give alms once, are they charitable. Virtue and vice are formed in the soul by repeated actions, and ingrained habits bring with them peace or punishment. We speak of virtue bringing rest to the soul and vice bringing punishment. Why is there this difference? Because virtue is natural and inherent in us; the seeds of virtue within us are ineradicable... The case of vice is entirely different. By doing repeatedly something which is wicked, we'll acquire a habit which is foreign to us, which isn't natural....

There's one more thing you ought to know about this, though, which is that it sometimes happens that a soul has an ingrained tendency towards one particular passion. If it indulges that passion even only once there's an immediate danger that it'll turn into a fixed habit...

So there's a need for great vigilance and zeal, plus fear, if we're to avoid falling into bad habits. Believe me, brothers, anyone with a single passion that's become a habit is destined for punishment. Even if you do ten good works for every one resulting from a bad habit, the latter will prevail over the good actions. If an eagle almost escapes a snare but is held fast by a single claw, it's lost the power to get away. It's outside the net, but is still half-held by it. The hunter can strike it down at will. So it is with the soul: if it has one passion set into a bad habit, the enemy can strike it whenever he pleases, because he has the upper hand over the soul through that passion. This is why I'm always telling you not to allow a passion to take root in your soul. We have to struggle, and pray to God night and day, lest we fall into temptation. As people, we'll be defeated and slip into sin, but if so, let's get up again quickly, do penance and weep when we're faced with God's goodness. Let us be vigilant and continue to strive. Then, seeing our good intentions, our humility and our contrition, God will give us a helping hand and extend His mercy to us. Amen.