

Cut off the passions before the soul becomes accustomed to them - 1 (Saint Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

Image not found or type unknown



should take care to cut off the passions quickly before to them.

Put your minds, brethren, to the way things are and

see that you don't neglect yourselves, because even a little inattention can lead us

into great dangers. I went to visit a brother one time and found him recovering from an illness. In the course of conversation, I learned that he'd been alone and had had a high fever for the first seven days and then, even after another forty days he still hadn't fully recovered. You see how troublesome it is if you're afflicted by even a minor illness. It almost always happens that people don't pay enough attention to minor irregularities and don't understand that if the body's just a little upset-especially if the person is of a sickly disposition - it's going to take much more time and effort before they get back to normal. That poor man had a high temperature for seven days, and look how much time passed thereafter and he still wasn't fully recovered. The same's true of the soul. You commit one little sin and you then need a lot of time, shedding your blood, to put it back to rights.

There are a variety of causes of bodily sickness, and it might be that the medicine's out-of-date and no longer effective, or that the doctor's inexperienced and doesn't prescribe the right medication, or that the patient is negligent and doesn't follow the doctor's orders. The same's not true of the soul, though; we can't say that the doctor's inexperienced or has given an inappropriate prescription. Because the Physician of our souls is Christ; He knows everything and gives the proper medication for each passion. What I mean is: for vanity, He prescribes humility; for sensuality, self-control; for avarice, charity. In short, every passion has the proper orders from the Physician as regards the medication. So the Physician isn't inexperienced. Nor are the medicines out-of-date and ineffective. Because Christ's commandments are never old, but, in fact, the more they're applied, the newer they become. So there's nothing that afflicts the health of the soul except its own misdemeanours.

Let's look to ourselves, then, brethren. Let's be vigilant while we have the time. Why do we neglect ourselves? Let's do something good, so that we'll find help in time of affliction. Why should we lose our lives? We've heard so much, yet we're not concerned, but are more or less indifferent. We see our brothers plucked from the midst of us and it doesn't bring us to our senses, even though we see that soon we'll be approaching death ourselves. From the time we sat down to talk until now, we've used up two or three hours of our time and have come closer to death. We see that our time's being lost, but we're not afraid. Why don't we recall the words of that Elder who said: 'If you lose gold or silver, you may find more to replace them; but if you waste your time, you can't get it back'. Indeed, there'll come a time when we seek a mere hour of all that time, but we won't find it. How many want to hear the word of God and don't find it? Yet we hear so much, but ignore it and aren't stimulated by it. God knows, I'm astonished at the heedlessness of our souls, at the fact that we can be saved and don't want to be. We can cut off our

passions when they're fresh, but we don't trouble to. Instead, we allow them to become embedded within us, much to our later detriment. I've told you many a time that it's easier to root out a little weed that you can pull up at once than to uproot a great tree.

There was once a great Elder with his disciples in a place where there were lots of cypress trees, large and small. The Elder said to one of his disciples, 'Pull up that young cypress'. It was very little and the man was able to lift it out with one hand. The Elder then pointed to a bigger one and said, 'Pull that up, as well'. He shook it back and forth with both hands and managed to uproot it. Then the Elder showed him another one, bigger again, but when he'd tried his best and had sweated over the job, he was still unable to move it. When the Elder saw that the disciple wasn't up to the task, he told another brother to get up and help him. Both together they were able to pull it up. Then the Elder said to the brothers: 'That's what the passions are like, brethren. When they're new, if we want we can easily pull them out. But if we ignore them when they're new, they take root, and the deeper they go the more effort it takes to get rid of them. And if they really penetrate deeply within us, then we can't remove them by ourselves unless we have the aid of saintly people who, by God's grace, support us'.

Do you see the power that the words of the holy Elders have? The Prophet teaches something similar on this same subject in the psalm where he says. 'Wretched daughter of Babylon. Blessed is he who will treat you as you have treated us. Blessed is he who will seize your children and dash them against the rock'. [139, 8-9].

Let's look carefully at what this says. Babylon means 'confusion', because it's an interpretation of Babel (that is Sykhem). The daughter of Babylon is 'enmity'. The soul is first cast into turmoil and this constitutes sin. He calls her wretched because, as I've told you before, evil has no substance and no hypostasis. It's born out of non-existence through our negligence, and returns to non-existence and is lost when we fight it. This is why the saint [David] says, 'Blessed is he who will treat you as you have treated us'. We should find out what we've given, what we've received and how we're going to pay it back. We gave up our will and received sin in exchange. The psalm praises those who will repay this. We repay by not doing it again.

Then he adds, 'Blessed is he who will seize your children and dash them against the rock'. In other words: 'Blessed is he who takes what you've given birth to, that is wicked thoughts, and gives them no room to grow inside himself and to make mischief for him. On the contrary, while they're still in their infancy, before they're

nourished and grow within him, he seizes them and dashes them against the rock, in other words Christ. He annihilates them by having recourse to Christ.

See how the Elders and Scriptures all agree and praise those who strive to cut off the passions in their early stages, before they're bothered by the pain and acrimony they cause. So let's hasten, brethren, to find mercy. Let's labour a short while and we'll find great refreshment.

The Fathers said that people should cleanse their souls meticulously. In the evening they should examine how the day went, and in the morning how they passed the night. And should repent to God as appropriate for any sins they've committed. In fact, because we ourselves sin so much and are so forgetful, we should actually question ourselves every six hours as to how we've spent our time and in what ways we've sinned. And each of us should say to ourselves: 'Did I wound anybody through my words? Did I see somebody doing something and condemned them, reviled them or spoke badly about them? Did I ask for something from the cellarer and then grumble when he didn't give me it? Was the food not very good, and did I speak badly about the cook and upset him? Or did I mutter away to myself about something that disgusts me?' Because even complaining to yourself is a sin. Or, again, we should say: 'Did the canonarch or one of the other brothers say something to me that I couldn't take and I spoke back to them?' So, every day we have a duty to examine ourselves as to how we spent the night. Did we get up willingly for the vigil? Did we not pay attention to the person who woke us up, or maybe we complained? We should remember that the person who calls us to the vigil is doing us a favour and is a cause of great benefits for us, because they wake us up so that we can speak with God, pray for our sins and be enlightened. Shouldn't we thank them, then? We should almost think that we're saved because of them.