



LIFE APPLICATIONS "1 CORINTHIANS"

Chapter 6

DO YOU STRUGGLE WITH PASSIONS?

St. Paul states that, when people rejected God, God "gave them up to vile passions" (Romans 1:26). He then describes some of these passions that people indulge instead of worshipping God:

All unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; they are whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. (1:29-31)

In 1 Corinthians 6 he presents a similar list of sins that, if a person is enslaved by them, will prevent him or her from inheriting the kingdom of God: fornication, idolatry, adultery, homosexuality, sodomy, theft, covetousness, drunkenness, reviling, and extortion (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

Do you struggle with one or more of these passions? If so, do not give up on yourself as a "lost cause" who lives in total rejection of God. In reality, overcoming the passions is central to the Orthodox life. St. Maximos the Confessor, a saint of the sixth-seventh centuries, defines passion as "an impulse of the soul contrary to nature, as in the case of mindless love or mindless hatred for someone or for some sensible thing."

The passions are, for lack of a better term, our corrupt impulses; they are the lusts and emotions that turn our attention away from God and onto ourselves. Christ lists some of the passions: "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man." (Mark 7:20-23). St. Peter of Damascus - using the Bible as his basis - created a list of 298 passions, summarizing them as "a falling away from God in all things, utter destruction."

In his epistle to the Romans, St. Paul vividly describes the war with passions, as well as the fact that they can only be overcome through the grace of God:

For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who

will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin. (Romans 7:18–25)

Archbishop Paul of Finland notes that passions arise from three sources:

First of all they are aroused by the outer world with its human relationships. A second source of passions is man's own corrupted nature, that 'other law in my members at war with the law of my mind' (Romans 7:23). It creates the lusts of the flesh, gluttony, drinking, laziness, etc. The third producer of passions is the soul's enemy, the tempter, the 'spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places' (Ephesians 6:12). That is where unbelief, despondency, pride, and especially blasphemy, come from.

How does God, through His Church, enable you to overcome these passions? St. Theophan the Recluse, a nineteenth century Russian saint, explains how:

Work at finding your primary passion and direct active as well as spiritual warfare against it. I cannot tell just what your primary passion is. Maybe it is as yet undefined; nevertheless, if you begin looking after the heart's impulses more rigorously, it will make itself known to you...Kill the passions both inwardly and externally, and cultivate your good aspects, giving them full range and exercise. The main thing is prayer...After this follows the labor of good deeds...Along with this, spiritually beneficial reading and conversation must take place; prayers and daily Scripture readings must be carried out as well as deeds of self-mortification – renounce yourself when it is necessary.