

BUT REMOVE FAR from thee all pleasure and lust of the affections, not only in act and operation, but even in the thoughts of thine heart, that thou mayest present thy soul without blemish to God. For not our actions only, but our thoughts also are recorded, and procure us crowns or punishments: and we know that Christ, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, dwelleth in pure hearts. But, just as smoke driveth away bees, so, we learn, do evil imaginations drive out of us the Holy Spirit's grace. Wherefore take good heed hereto, that thou blot out every imagination of sinful passion from thy soul, and plant good thoughts therein, making thyself a temple of the Holy Spirit. For from imaginations we come also to actual deeds, and every work, advancing from thought and reflection, catcheth at small beginnings, and then, by small increases, arriveth at great endings.

'Wherefore on no account suffer any evil habit to master thee; but, while it is yet young, pluck the evil root out of thine heart, lest it fasten on and strike root so deep that time and labour be required to uproot it. And the reason that greater sins assault us and get the mastery of our souls is that those which appear to be less, such as wicked thoughts, unseemly words and evil communications, fail to receive proper correction. For as in the case of the body, they that neglect small wounds often bring mortification and death upon themselves, so too with the soul: thus they that overlook little passions and sins bring on greater ones. And the more those greater sins grow on them, the more doth the soul become accustomed thereto and think light of them. For he saith, "When the wicked cometh to the depth of evil things, he thinketh light of them": and finally, like the hog, that

delighteth to wallow in mire, the soul, that hath been buried in evil habits, doth not even perceive the stink of her sin, but rather delighteth and rejoiceth therein, cleaving to wickedness as it were good. And even if at last she issue from the mire and come to herself again, she is delivered only by much labour and sweat from the bondage of those sins, to which she hath by evil custom enslaved herself.

'Wherefore with all thy might remove thyself far from every evil thought and fancy, and every sinful custom; and school thyself the rather in virtuous deeds, and form the habit of practising them. For if thou labour but a little therein, and have strength to form the habit, at the last, God helping thee, thou shalt advance without labour. For the habit of virtue, taking its quality from the soul, seeing that it hath some natural kinship therewith and claimeth God for an help-mate, becometh hard to alter and exceeding strong; as thou seest, courage and prudence, temperance and righteousness are hard to alter, being deeply seated habits, qualities, and activities of the soul. For if the evil affections, not being natural to us, but attacking us from without, be hard to alter when they become habits, how much harder shall it be to shift virtue, which hath been by nature planted in us by our Maker, and hath Him for an help-mate, if so be, through our brief endeavour, it shall have been rooted in habit in the soul?'

The Anchorite Barlaam
catechizing Prince Joasaph of India, in
SS Barlaam and Joasaph, by St. John of Damascus,
tr. Woodward & Mattingly,
Loeb Classical Library, Vol. 34,
pp. 287–93

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