

SPEAK NOT TO ME of those who have committed small sins, but suppose the case of one who is filled full of all wickedness, and let him practise everything which excludes him from the kingdom, and let us suppose that this man is not one of those who were unbelievers from the beginning, but formerly belonged to the believers, and such as were well pleasing to God, but afterwards has become a fornicator, adulterer, effeminate, a thief, a drunkard, a sodomite, a reviler, and everything else of this kind; I will not approve even of this man despairing of himself, although he may have gone on to extreme old age in the practice of this great and unspeakable wickedness.

For if the wrath of God were a passion, one might well despair, as being unable to quench the flame which he had kindled by so many evil doings; but since the Divine nature is passionless, even if He punishes, even if He takes vengeance, He does this not with wrath, but with tender care, and much loving-kindness; wherefore it behooves us to be of much good courage, and to trust in the power of repentance. For even those who have sinned against Him He is not wont to visit with punishment for His own sake; for no harm can traverse that divine nature; but He acts with a view to our advantage, and to prevent our perverseness becoming worse by our making a practice of despising and neglecting Him. For even as one who places himself outside the light inflicts no loss on the light, but the greatest loss upon himself being shut up in darkness; even so he who has become accustomed to despise that almighty power, does no injury to the power, but inflicts the greatest possible injury upon himself.

And for this reason God threatens us with punishments, and often inflicts them, not as avenging Himself, but by way of attracting us to Himself. For a physician also is not distressed or vexed at the insults of those who are out of their minds, but yet does and contrives everything for the purpose of stopping those who do such unseemly acts, not looking to his own interests but to their profit; and if they manifest some small degree of self-control and sobriety, he rejoices and is glad, and applies his remedies much more earnestly, not as revenging himself upon them for their former conduct, but as wishing to increase their advantage, and to bring them

back to a purely sound state of health. Even so God when we fall into the very extremity of madness, says and does everything, not by way of avenging Himself on account of our former deeds; but because He wishes to release us from our disorder; and by means of right reason it is quite possible to be convinced of this.

Saint John Chrysostom, *Letters to the Fallen Theodore*,
Letter I.3, NPNE, Vol. IX, pp. 93–4

GO TO PRAYER, and observe thy heart and mind, and determine to send up prayer to God pure, and look well there, whether there be nothing to hinder it, whether the prayer be pure, whether thy mind is wholly occupied with the Lord, as the husbandman's with his husbandry, the married man's with his wife, the merchant's with his merchandise; or whether thou bendest thy knees to prayer, while others pluck thy thoughts asunder.

St Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*,
tr. Mason, Homily xv, p. 112

ALL MY HAPPINESS AND UNHAPPINESS ARE contained in the thoughts and inclinations of my heart. If the thoughts and inclinations of my heart are in accord with God's truth or with the will of my God, then I am at rest, filled with divine light, joy, and blessedness; if not, I am uneasy, filled with spiritual soul-corrupting darkness, heaviness and despondency. If I completely change the false, impious thoughts and inclinations of my heart into true ones, pleasing to God, then I again obtain rest and blessedness.

Saint John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, p. 118

Pearls from the Holy Fathers

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