

Three-Hundred Sayings of the Ascetics of the Orthodox Church

Once some thieves came to an old hermit and said, "We are taking everything in your cell." He answered, "Take whatever you need, my children." They took almost everything in the cell and left. But they missed a little bag of money that was hidden. The elder picked it up and went after them, crying, "Children! You forgot something!" The thieves were amazed. Not only did they not take the money, but they returned everything that they had taken. "Truly," they said, "this is a man of God."

This happened in the sixth century A.D. in Palestine. St. John Moschos recorded it, along with many other stories about Orthodox monks, which he heard firsthand. The old monk did not read sermons to his impolite guests. He did not rebuke them or threaten them, nor did he have a conversation with them. What then caused the thieves to change their mind and correct their deed? They had beheld in him a different sort of man: a man of God.

Only a man who is rich in God can be so free from attachment to possessions and to money, which have enslaved humanity. Only a man who is rooted in God can unfailingly preserve peace and magnanimity when confronted with manifest evil.

But most of all, the thieves were touched by the love the elder showed them. Only a man who has become like God can demonstrate such love to outlaws who have come to rob him, such that he can sincerely place their interests above his own. This could not have happened if the monk's faith had been confined to rituals, collections of rules, and pretty words about God, without real experience of life in Christ.

The thieves beheld a man in whom the word of the Gospels had become a reality. In the Orthodox Church, such men are called Holy Fathers. Over the course of two millennia, this ancient Church has striven to preserve precisely that truth received from the apostles, together with experience of living communion with God. Therefore the Orthodox Church has also been able to give birth to a multitude of saints, who have been bearers of this experience of heavenly life while still on earth.

The book that you are holding in your hands has been compiled in order to enable the reader to touch the spiritual experience of the Christian East. Collected here are three-hundred sayings of over fifty Orthodox saints from Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Greece, Russia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Georgia. Since the Western Church was part of the family of Orthodox Churches for the first thousand years after the birth of Christ, you may also find in our compilation the sayings of saints who lived in the territory of contemporary Italy, England, France, and Tunis. All of this is part of the spiritual inheritance of the Orthodox Church.

The earliest of these sayings was written in the second half of the first century. The most recent was written in the second half of the twentieth century. No matter where they lived, when they lived, or who they were, the Orthodox Saints speak of a single spiritual reality, and therefore their sayings harmoniously complement one another. In the nineteenth century, St. Ignatius Brianchaninov made this observation: "When on a clear fall night I gaze upon the clear heavens, illumined by innumerable stars that send out a single light, then I say to myself: thus are the writings of the holy fathers. When on a summer's day I gaze upon the wide sea, covered with a multitude of distinct waves, driven by a single wind to a single end, a single pier, then I say to myself: such are the writings of the fathers. When I hear a well-ordered choir, in which different voices sing a single hymn in shimmering harmony, then I say to myself: such are the writings of the fathers." I believe that this small collection of Patristic aphorisms will be interesting and useful not only for Orthodox Christians, but even for everyone who values what is genuine.

Much of what is assembled here has helped me personally. It has given me answers to tormenting questions, permitted me to think about the events of my life in a new way. And so I have decided, through these books to present unto you that which is dear to me.

[Deacon George Maksimov.](#)

January 8, 2011.

I. God and Us

Happiness

1. How mistaken are those people who seek happiness outside of themselves, in foreign lands and journeys, in riches and glory, in great possessions and pleasures, in diversions and vain things, which have a bitter end! In the same thing to construct the tower of happiness outside of ourselves as it is to build a house in a place that is consistently shaken by earthquakes. Happiness is found within ourselves, and blessed is the man who has understood this. Happiness is a pure heart, for such a heart becomes the throne of God. Thus says Christ of those who have pure hearts: "I will visit them, and will walk in them, and I will be a God to them, and they will be my people." (II Cor. 6:16) What can be lacking to them? Nothing, nothing at all! For they have the greatest good in their hearts: God Himself!
(St. Nektarios of Aegina, Path to Happiness, 1)
2. The soul that loves God has its rest in God and in God alone. In all the paths that men walk in the world, they do not attain peace until they draw nigh to hope in God.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily 56, 89)

Truth

3. Truth is not a thought, not a word, not a relationship between things, not a law. Truth is a Person. It is a Being which exceeds all beings and gives life to all. If you seek truth with love and for the sake of love, she will reveal the light of His face to you inasmuch as you are able to bear it without being burned.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)

How does God relate to us?

4. God loves us more than a father, mother, friend, or any else could love, and even more than we are able to love ourselves.
(St. John Chrysostom)
5. A certain monk told me that when he was very sick, his mother said to his father, "How our little boy is suffering. I would gladly give myself to be cut up into pieces if that would ease his suffering." Such is the love of God for people. He pitied people so much that he wanted to suffer for them, like their own mother, and even more. But no one can understand this great love without the grace of the Holy Spirit.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.10)
6. The Lord loves all people, but He loves those who seek Him even more. To his chosen ones the Lord gives such great grace that for love they forsake the whole earth, the whole world, and their souls burn with desire that all people might be saved and see the glory of the Lord.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.8)

How to Come to Know God

7. If a person wants to get an idea about the pyramids of Egypt, he must either trust those who have been in immediate proximity to the pyramids, or he must get next to them himself. There is no third option. In the same way a person can get an impression of God: He must either trust those who have stood and stand in immediate proximity to God, or he must take pains to come into such proximity himself.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)
8. As it is impossible to verbally describe the sweetness of honey to one who has never tasted honey, so the goodness of God cannot be clearly communicated by way of teaching if we ourselves are not able to penetrate into the goodness of the Lord by our own experience.
(St. Basil the Great, Conversations on the Psalms, 29)

9. -10. Many rich and powerful men would pay dearly to see the Lord or His Most Pure Mother, but God does not appear in riches, but in the humble heart... Every one of the poorest men can be humble and come to know God. It needs neither money nor reputation to come to know God, but only humility.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, I.11,21)
11. No matter how much we may study, it is not possible to come to know God unless we live according to His commandments, for God is not known by science, but by the Holy Spirit. Many philosophers and learned men came to the belief that God exists, but they did not know God. It is one thing to believe that God exists and another to know Him. If someone has come to know God by the Holy Spirit, his soul will burn with love for God day and night, and his soul cannot be bound to any earthly thing.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VIII.3)

How do We Relate to God?

12. Always have the fear of God in your heart, and remember that God is always with you, everywhere, whether you are walking or sitting.
(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, The Golden Chain, 14)
13. Having God, fear nothing, but cast all of your care upon Him, and He will take care of you. Believe undoubtingly, and God will help you according to His mercy.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, Instructions, 166)
14. You must love every man with your whole soul, but put your hope in the one God, and serve Him alone. For as long as He is protecting us and our friends (the angels) are helping us, our enemies (the demons) cannot inflict evil upon us. But when He forsakes us, then also our friends turn away from us, and our enemies receive power over us.
(St. Maximus Confessor, Chapters on Love, 4.95)
15. If a man has no worries about himself at all for the sake of love toward God and the working of good deeds, knowing that God is taking care of him, this is a true and wise hope. But if a man takes care of his own business and turns to God in prayer only when misfortunes come upon him which are beyond his power, and then he begins to hope in God, such a hope is vain and false. A true hope seeks only the Kingdom of God... the heart can have no peace until it obtains such a hope. This hope pacifies the heart and produces joy within it.
(St. Seraphim of Sarov, Works, 4)

God takes care of everyone

16. Do not say, "this happened by chance, while this came to be of itself." In all that exists there is nothing disorderly, nothing indefinite, nothing without purpose, nothing by chance ... How many hairs are on your head? God will not forget one of them. Do you see how nothing, even the smallest thing, escapes the gaze of God?
(St. Basil the Great)
17. It is an indubitable truth that the highest Divine Providence arranges all of creation. God considers all things beforehand and takes care for all things. This is the Divine fatherly care of which the blessed apostle Peter speaks: "Cast all of your cares upon Him, because He is concerned for you." (1 Pet. 5:7)
(St. Elias Minjatos. Sermon on the Great Fast, 1)
18. The purpose of God's Providence is to unite, by means of right faith and spiritual love, people who have been separated by evil. To this end the Savior also suffered for us, "in order to gather together the children of God who were scattered." (John 11:52)
(St. Maximus Confessor, Chapters of Love, 4.17)

Those Who Have Known God

19. A man becomes spiritual insofar as he lives a spiritual life. He begins to see God in all things, to see His power and might in every manifestation. Always and everywhere he sees himself abiding in God and dependent on God for all things. But insofar as a man lives a bodily life, so much he does he does bodily things; he doesn't see God in anything, even in the most wondrous manifestations of His Divine power. In all things he sees body, material, everywhere and always - "God is not before his eyes." (Ps. 35:2)
(St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, I.5)
20. When the soul knows the love of God by the Holy Spirit, then he clearly feels that the Lord is our own Father, the closest, dearest Father, the best. And there is not greater happiness than to love God with all the mind and heart, and our neighbor as ourself. And when this love is in the soul, then all things bring joy to the soul.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, IX.15)
21. Don't be troubled if you don't feel the love of God in yourself, but think about the Lord, that He is merciful, and guard yourself from sins, and the grace of God will teach you.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, IX.16)
22. When you throw a nail into a fire, it gets hot and starts to glow like fire. In the same way you, when you listen to divine teachings and live accordingly, will become like God.
(St. Symeon of Daibabe, *Sayings*, 26)
23. The soul that has come to know God fully no longer desires anything else, nor does it attach itself to anything on the earth; and if you put before it a kingdom, it would not desire it, for the love of God gives such sweetness and joy to the soul that even the life of a king can no longer give it any sweetness.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, IX.13)

Christ and Us

24. It is only necessary to seek one thing: to be with Jesus. The man who remains with Jesus is rich, even if he is poor with regard to material things. Whoever desires the earthly more than the heavenly loses both the earthly and the heavenly. But whoever seeks the heavenly is Lord of the whole world.
(St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Patericon*)
25. The flood of temporal things draws us after itself, but in this flood there is, as it were, a full-grown tree: our Lord Jesus Christ. He took flesh, died, and ascended to heaven. It is as if He agreed to be in the flood of the temporal. Is this stream dragging you headlong? Hold on to Christ. He became temporal for you, so that you might become eternal, for He became temporal in such a way that He remained eternal. What difference is there between two men in a prison when one of them is a convict and the other a visitor! Sometimes a man comes to visit his friend, and it seems that both are in prison, but there is a great difference between them. One of them is held there because of guilt, while the other has come out of love for mankind. Thus it is with our mortality: guilt holds us here, but Christ had come out of mercy. He came freely into bondage, and not as a convict.
(St. Augustin, *Sermons on I John*, II.10).
26. A man in this world must solve a problem: to be with Christ, or to be against Him. And every man decides this, whether he wants to or not. He will either be a lover of Christ or a fighter of Christ. There is no third option.
(St. Justin Popovich, *Explanation of I John*, 4.3)
27. Cleanse your mind from anger, remembrance of evil and shameful thoughts, and then you will find out how Christ dwells in you.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, 4.76)

The Fear of God
(Fear of Offending God With One's Sins)

28. The fear of God illumines the soul, annihilates evil, weakens the passions, drives darkness from the soul and makes it pure. The fear of God is the summit of wisdom. Where it is not you will find nothing good. Whoever does not have the fear of God is open to diabolical falls.
(St. Ephraim Syrian)
29. A man obtains the fear of God if he has the remembrance of his unavoidable death and of the eternal torments that await sinners; if he tests himself every evening as to how he has spent the day, and every morning as to how he has spent the night, and if is not sharp in his relations with others.
(St. Abba Dorotheos, Soul-profiting Teachings, 4)
30. Sin makes man a coward; but a life in the Truth of Christ makes Him bold.
(St. John Chrysostom, On the Statues, VIII.2)
31. Whoever has become a servant of the Lord fears only his Master. But whoever is without the fear of God is often afraid of his own shadow. Fearfulness is the daughter of unbelief. A proud soul is the slave of fear; hoping in itself, it comes to such a state that it is startled by a small noise, and is afraid of the dark.
(St. John of the Ladder, The Ladder, 21.11,1,4)
32. Whoever fears God stands above all manner of fear. He has become a stranger to all the fear of this world and placed it far from himself, and no manner of trembling comes near him.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian, On the Fear of God and the Last Judgment)

Unbelief

33. Falsehood - and only falsehood - separates us from God ... false thoughts, false words, false feelings, false desires - Behold the aggregate of lies that leads us to non-being, illusion, and rejection of God.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)
34. The Lord does not show Himself to a proud soul. The proud soul, no matter how many books it reads, will never know God, since by its pride it does not give place for the grace of the Holy Spirit, while God is known only by the humble soul.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, III.11)
35. Each of us can discuss God inasmuch as he has known the grace of the Holy Spirit; for how can we think of or discuss what we haven't seen, or haven't heard of, or don't know? The saints say that they have seen God, but there are people who say that there is no God. Clearly, they say this because they haven't known God, but this does not at all mean that He is not. The saints speak of that which they have truly seen and know.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VIII.9)
36. Pride does not allow the soul to set out on the path of faith. Here is my advice to the unbeliever: let him say, "Lord, if you exist, then illumine me, and I will serve you with all my heart and soul." And for this humble thought and readiness to serve God, the Lord will immediately illumine him... and then your soul will sense the Lord; she will sense that the Lord has forgiven her, and loves her, and you will know this from experience, and the grace of the Holy Spirit will be a witness in your soul of your salvation, and you will want to cry out to the whole world: "The Lord loves us so much!"
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, III.6)
37. Only one who guards himself from all sin can have sincere and fervent faith. Faith is only preserved in the presence of good morals.
(St. Nikon of Optina)

II. The Realities of the Spiritual World

Sin and Evil

38. A lie is a delusion of the mind, while evil is a delusion of the will. The sign by which one is distinguished from the other is the judgment of God Himself ... that which he teaches a man: Truth is that which leads a man to will the good. But whatever contradicts this is entirely false, entirely evil.
(St. Nicholas Cabasilas, *Seven Sermons on the Life in Christ*, 7)
39. Our world is guided by two principles and sources: God and the devil. All that is better in the world of men has its source in God, and all that is bad has the devil as its principle and source. In the final account, all good comes from God, and all evil from the devil.
(St. Justin Popovich, *Explanation of I John 3:11*)
40. Food is not evil, but gluttony is. Childbearing is not evil, but fornication is. Money is not evil, but avarice is. Glory is not evil, but vainglory is. Indeed, there is no evil in existing things, but only in their misuse.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, 3.4)
41. God and the devil are found at opposite poles. No one can turn his face to God who has not first turned his back on sin. When a man turns his face to God, all of his paths lead to God. When a man turns his face away from God, all of his paths lead to perdition. When a man finally rejects God by word and in his heart, he is no longer fit to do anything that does not serve for his complete destruction, both of his soul and of his body.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, *Thoughts on Good and Evil*)

Freedom

42. In truth there is only one freedom - the holy freedom of Christ, whereby He freed us from sin, from evil, from the devil. It binds us to God. All other freedoms are illusory, false, that is to say, they are all, in fact, slavery.
(St. Justin Popovich, *Ascetical and Theological Chapters*, II.36)
43. Only faith that all does not end with this earthly existence gives us power not to chain ourselves to this earthly life by all means, and for its sake to come into all manner of baseness, degradation and humiliation. Only man of deep and sincere faith can be truly free. Dependence on the Lord God is the only dependence that does not degrade a man, nor turn him into a pitiful servant. But, on the contrary, it exalts him.
(Martyr Alexander Medem, *Letter to his son*, 1922)
44. Some people by the word freedom understand the ability to do whatever one wants ... People who have the more allowed themselves to come into slavery to sins, passions, and defilements more often than others appear as zealots of external freedom, wanting to broaden the laws as much as possible. But such a man uses external freedom only to more severely burden himself with inner slavery. True freedom is the active ability of a man who is not enslaved to sin, who is not pricked by a condemning conscience, to choose the better in the light of God's truth, and to bring it into actuality with the help of the gracious power of God. This is the freedom of which neither heaven nor earth is restricted.
(St. Philaret of Moscow, *Sermon on the Birthday of Emperor Nicholas I*, 1851)
45. The Lord wants us to love one another. Here is freedom: in love for God and neighbor. In this freedom, there is equality. In earthly orders, there may not be equality, but this is not important for the soul. Not everyone can be a king, not everyone a patriarch or a boss. But in any position it is possible to love God and to please Him, and only this is important. And whoever loves God more on earth will be in greater glory in His Kingdom.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, VI.23)

The Purpose of Life

46. Every Christian should find for himself the imperative and incentive to become holy. If you live without struggle and without hope of becoming holy, then you are Christians only in name and not in essence. But without holiness, no one shall see the Lord, that is to say they will not attain eternal blessedness. It is a trustworthy saying that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners (I Tim. 1:15). But we deceive ourselves if we think that we are saved while remaining sinners. Christ saves those sinners by giving them the means to become saints.
(St. Philaret of Moscow, Sermon of September 23, 1847)
47. The acquisition of holiness is not the exclusive business of monks, as certain people think. People with families are also called to holiness, as are those in all kinds of professions, who live in the world, since the commandment about perfection and holiness is given not only to monks, but to all people.
(Hieromartyr Onuphry Gaguluk)
48. The chief end of our life is to live in communion with God. To this end the Son of God became incarnate, in order to return us to this divine communion, which was lost by the fall into sin. Through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we enter into communion with the Father and thus attain our purpose.
(St. Theophan the Recluse, Letters to various people, 24)
49. Just as people do not enter a war in order to enjoy war, but in order to be saved from war, so we do not enter this world in order to enjoy this world, but in order to be saved from it. People go to war for the sake of something greater than war. So we also enter this temporal life for the sake of something greater: for eternal life. And as soldiers think with joy about returning home, so also Christians constantly remember the end of their lives and their return to their heavenly fatherland.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)

The Saints

50. The humble soul is blessed. The Lord loves her. The Mother of God is higher than all in humility, and therefore all races bless her on earth, while the heavenly powers serve her. And the Lord has given us this blessed Mother of His as a defender and helper.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings III.14)
51. "I love them that love me, and glorify them that glorify me." (Proverbs 8:17, I Kings 2:30,) says the Lord of His saints. The Lord gave the Holy Spirit to the saints, and they love us in the Holy Spirit. The saints hear our prayers and have the power from God to help us. The entire Christian race knows this.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XII.1,8)
52. Many think that the saints are far from us. But they are far from those who distance themselves from them, and very close to those who keep the commandments of Christ and have the grace of the Holy Spirit. In the heavens, all things are moved by the Holy Spirit. But the Holy Spirit is on earth too. He lives in our Church. He lives in the Mysteries. He is in the Holy Scriptures. He is in the souls of the faithful. The Holy Spirit unites all things, and therefore the saints are close to us. And when we pray to them, then the Holy Spirit hears our prayers, and our souls feel that they are praying for us.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XII.3)
53. The saints are like the Lord, but so are all people who keep the commandments of Christ; but those who live according to their own passions and do not repent are like the devil. I think that if this mystery were revealed to the world, then they would stop serving the devil, and every one would strive to serve the Lord with all his strength, and to be like Him.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XII.9)

54. When the soul by the Holy Spirit comes to know the Mother of God; when in the Holy Spirit the soul becomes kin to the Apostles, the Prophets, and all the Saints and Righteous Ones, then she is irresistibly drawn to that world, and cannot remain, but is bothered, and thirsts, and cannot cease from prayer, and although the body becomes exhausted and wants to lie down on a bed, even while lying in bed the soul longs for the Lord and the Kingdom of the Saints.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, I.28)

The Holy Scriptures

55. The Holy Scriptures lead us to God and open the path to the knowledge of God.

(St. John Chrysostom, Conversations on the Gospel of John, 59:2)

56. Of all the afflictions that burden the human race, there is not one, whether spiritual or bodily, that cannot be healed by the Holy Scriptures.

(St. John Chrysostom, Conversations on the Book of Genesis, 29.1)

57. Just as those who are deprived of light cannot walk straight, so also those who do not behold the ray of the Holy Scriptures must necessarily sin, since they walk in the deepest darkness.

(St. John Chrysostom, Conversations on the Epistle to the Romans, 0.1)

58. A humble man who lives a spiritual life, when he reads the Holy Scriptures, will relate all things to himself and not to others.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Sermon, 1.6)

59. In all things that you find in the Holy Scriptures, seek out the purpose of the words, that you may enter into the depth of the thoughts of the saints and understand them with greater exactness. Do not approach the reading of the Divine Scriptures without prayer and asking the help of God. Consider prayer to be the key to the true understanding of that which is said in the Holy Scriptures.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Sermon 1.85)

60. When you begin to read or listen to the Holy Scriptures, pray to God thus: "Lord Jesus Christ, open the ears and eyes of my heart so that I may hear Thy words and understand them, and may fulfill Thy will." Always pray to God like this, that He might illumine your mind and open to you the power of His words. Many, having trusted in their own reason, have turned away into deception.

(St. Ephraim the Syrian)

61. The proud sin greatly who, after studying secular literature and having turned to the Holy Scriptures, consider all that they say to be the Law of God, and do not endeavor to come to know the thoughts of the prophets and apostles, but seek out from the scriptures inappropriate texts for their own thoughts, as if this were a good work, and not the most defiled kind of study: to distort the thoughts of Scripture and submit them to their own intentions, in spite of obvious contradictions... It is proper to children and charlatans to try to teach that which they do not know.

(St. Jerome, Letter to St. Paulinus)

Holy Tradition

62. If someone wants to be protected from tricks and remain healthy in the faith, he must confine his faith first to the authority of the Holy Scriptures, and secondly to the Tradition of the Church. But someone may ask, is not the canon of Scripture sufficient for everything, and why should we add thereto the authority of Tradition? This is because not everyone understands the Scriptures in the same way, but one explains them this way and another that way, so that it is possible to get therefrom as many thoughts as there are heads. Therefore it is necessary to be guided by the understanding of the Church ... What is tradition? It is that which has been understood by everyone, everywhere and at all times ... that which you have received, and not that which you have thought up ... So then, our job is not to lead religion where we wish it to go, but to follow it where it leads, and not to give that which is our own to our heirs, but to guard that which has been given to us.

(St. Vincent of Lerina, *Notes of a Pilgrim*)

63. Do not undertake to explain the Gospels or the other books of Holy Scripture yourself. The Scriptures were not expressed arbitrarily by the prophets and apostles, but by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How mindless then is it to explain them arbitrarily? The Holy Spirit, having expressed the Word of God through the prophets and apostles, explained it through the Holy Fathers. Both the Word of God and its explanation are a gift of the Holy Spirit. The holy Orthodox Church and its true children accept only this patristic interpretation!

(St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *On Reading the Gospel*)

64. Sometimes Japanese Protestants come to me and ask me to clarify some place in the Holy Scriptures. "You have your own missionary teachers;" I tell them, "Go ask them. What do they say?" "We have asked them. They say: understand as you know how. But I need to know the real thought of God, not my own personal opinion." ... It's not like that with us. Everything is clear, trustworthy and simple, since we accept Holy Tradition in addition to the Holy Scriptures. And Holy Tradition is a living, unbroken voice of our Church from the time of Christ and His Apostles until now, and which will exist until the end of the world. In it all the meaning of the Holy Scriptures are preserved.

(St. Nicholas of Japan, *Diary*, January 15, 1897)

The Church of Christ

65. Brothers and Sisters! The all-merciful God desires happiness for us both in this life and in the life to come. To this end He established His Holy Church, so that she might cleanse us from sin, sanctify us, reconcile us with Him and give us a heavenly blessing. The embrace of the Church is always open to us. Let us all hasten there more quickly, we whose consciences are burdened. Let us hasten, and the Church will lift the weight of our burdens, give us boldness before God, and fill our hearts with happiness and blessedness.

(St. Nectarius of Aegina, *The Path to Happiness*, 1).

66. The Church of Christ is One, Holy, Universal and Apostolic. She is herself a single spiritual body, whose head is Christ, and who has the one Holy Spirit abiding in her. The local parts of the Church are members of a single body of the Universal Church, and they, like branches of a single tree, are nourished by one and same sap from a single root. She is called holy because she is sanctified by the holy word, deeds, sacrifice and suffering of her founder, Jesus Christ, to which end He came in order to save human beings and lead them to holiness. The Church is called universal because she is not confined by place, not by time, nor by nation nor language. The Church communicates with all humanity. The Orthodox Church is called apostolic because the spirit, teaching and labors of the Apostles of Christ are entirely preserved in her.

(St. Nicholas of Serbia, *Catechesis*)

67. We know and are convinced that falling away from the Church, whether into schism, heresy, or sectarianism, is complete perdition and spiritual death. For us there is no Christianity outside of the Church. If Christ established the Church, and the Church is His Body, then to be cut off from His Body is to die.
(St. Hilarion Troitsky, *On Life in the Church*)
68. One should not seek among others the truth that can be easily gotten from the Church. For in her, as in a rich treasury, the apostles have placed all that pertains to truth, so that everyone can drink this beverage of life. She is the door of life.
(St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, III.4)
69. The Church is holy, although there are sinners within her. Those who sin, but who cleanse themselves with true repentance, do not keep the Church from being holy. But unrepentant sinners are cut off, whether visibly by Church authority or invisible by the judgment of God, from the body of the Church. And so in this regard the Church remains holy.
(St. Philaret of Moscow, *Catechesis*)
70. -72. When are we living in Christ? When we live according to His Gospel and His Church. For He Himself, and not only His Gospel, is in the Church with all of His perfections and virtues. The Church is the eternally living Body of the God-man Christ. In her we find the medium of the holy mysteries. In her we find the means of holy good deeds. Our Lord Jesus Christ abides inseparable from the Church in this world. He abides with each member of the Church throughout all ages. He has His entire self for us in the Church, and continually gives Himself to us entirely, so that we might be enabled to live in this world as He lived.
(St. Justin Popovich, *Explanation of I John*, 4:9, 17)

The Spiritual Father

71. Consider that the Holy Spirit lives in the spiritual father, and He will tell you what to do. But if you think that the spiritual father lives negligently, and that the Holy Spirit can't live in him, you will suffer mightily for such a thought, and the Lord will humble you, and you will straightway fall into delusion.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, II.1)
72. If a man does not tell everything to his spiritual father, then his path is crooked and does not lead to the Kingdom of Heaven. But the path of one who tells everything leads directly to the Kingdom of Heaven.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XIII.9)
73. Tell everything to your spiritual father and the Lord will have mercy on you and you will escape delusion. But if you think that you know more about the spiritual life than your spiritual father, and you stop telling him everything about yourself in confession, then you will immediately be allowed to fall into some sort of delusion, in order that you may be corrected.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XVII.13)
74. The Holy Spirit acts mystically through the spiritual father, and then when you go out from your spiritual father, the soul feels her renewal. But if you leave your spiritual father in a state of confusion, this means that you did not confess purely and did not forgive your brother all of his sins from your heart.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XIII.11)
75. The Lord loves us so much that He suffered for us on the Cross; and His suffering was so great that we can't comprehend it. In the same way our spiritual pastors suffer for us, although we often don't see their suffering. The greater the love of the pastor, the greater his suffering; and we, the sheep, should understand this, and love and honor our pastors.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XIII.2)
76. The spiritual father only shows the way, like a signpost, but we have to traverse it ourselves. If the spiritual father shows the way and the disciple doesn't move himself, then he won't get anywhere, and will rot near the signpost.
(St. Nikon of Optina)

Retribution

77. Don't be deceived regarding the knowledge of what will be after your death: what you sow here, you will reap there. After leaving here, no one can make progress. Here is the work, there the reward; here the struggle, there the crowns.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, Instructions, 606)
78. God gives His communion to all who love Him. Communion with God is life and light and sweetness with all the good things that He has. But those who of their own will forsake Him he rewards with separation from Him, which they themselves have chosen. As separation from light is darkness, so also alienation from God is deprivation of all good things which He has. But the good things of God are eternal and without end, so that the loss of them is eternal and without end. Thus sinners shall be the cause of their own torments, just as the blind do not see the light, although it is shining on them.
(St. Irenaeus of Lyons, Against Heresies, V.27)
79. The Savior of our race, employing all means to free man from deception, has shared with us who obey Him heavenly and divine good things. But to the disobedient he has shown that there awaits them not temporal torments that abide for a time, but eternal and everlasting torments.
(St. Photius the Great, Amphilocius, 6)
80. Not only men, but also women, the weaker sex, in going by the narrow path of Christ have received for themselves the Kingdom of Heaven. For there is neither male nor female, but everyone receives his own reward according to his own labor.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian, Sermon on the Second Coming of the Lord)
81. The Eternal Joy of Christians. Christians, always rejoice, for evil, death, sin, the devil and hell have been conquered by Christ. But when all of this is conquered, is there anyone in the world who can bring our joy to naught? You are the lord of this eternal rejoicing as long as you do not give in to sin. Joy burns in our hearts from His truth, love, resurrection, and from the Church and His saints. Joy burns in our hearts all because of sufferings for Him, mockings for Him, and death for Him, insofar as these sufferings write our names in heaven. There is no true joy on earth without the victory over death, but the victory over death does not exist without the Resurrection, and the Resurrection does not exist without Christ. The risen God-Man Christ, the founder of the Church, constantly pours out this joy into the hearts of His followers through the Holy Mysteries and good deeds. Our faith is fulfilled in this eternal joy, insofar as the joy of faith in Christ is the only true joy for human nature.
(St. Justin Popovich, Explanation of I Thessalonians, 5)

III. Us and Our Neighbors

Relationships With Other People

82. A Christian must be courteous to all. His words and deeds should breathe with the grace of the Holy Spirit, which abides in his soul, so that in this way he might glorify the name of God. He who regulates all of his speech also regulates all of his actions. He who keeps watch over the words he is about say also keeps watch over the deeds he intends to do, and he never goes out of the bounds good and benevolent conduct. The graceful speech of a Christian is characterized by delicateness and politeness. This fact, born of love, produces peace and joy. On the other hand, boorishness gives birth to hatred, enmity, affliction, competitiveness, disorder and wars.
(St. Nektarius of Aegina, The Path to Happiness, 7)

83. It is joyful to feel that we do not and cannot have any enemies among men, but only unhappy brethren, who are deserving of pity and help, even when, through misunderstanding, they become our enemies and fight against us. Woe! They do not understand that the enemy is found within ourselves, and that first of all one must cast him out of oneself, and then also help others to do the same. We have only one enemy: the devil and his evil spirits. But man, no matter how far he has fallen, never loses certain sparks of light and goodness which may be blown into a bright flame. But for us there is no reason to fight against people, even when they consistently send against us all kind of blows and rebukes ... To fight against people is to take a false position of our enemies. Even if we succeed, we gain nothing from this fight, but rather become estranged from our own success.
(Martyr Roman Medved, *Letter to His Daughter from the Gulag*, 1932).
84. With all your power, ask the Lord for humility and brotherly love, because God freely gives His grace for love towards one's brother. Do an experiment on yourself: one day ask God for love towards your brother, and another day - live without love. You will see the difference.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XVI.8)
85. -88. Adorn yourself with truth, try to speak truth in all things; and do not support a lie, no matter who asks you. If you speak the truth and someone gets mad at you, don't be upset, but take comfort in the words of the Lord: Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of truth, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven (Matt. 5:10).
(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 26, 29).
89. The holy Isaiah said: If one should speak to his brother with guile, he will not escape spiritual harm.
(Ancient Patericon, 10.28)
90. If someone puts his trust in God in a matter, let him not argue with his brother about it.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Sermon 2.103*)
91. Draw nigh to the righteous, and through them you will draw nigh to God. Communicate with those who possess humility, and you will learn morals from them. A man who follows one who loves God becomes rich in the mysteries of God; but he who follows an unrighteous and proud man gets far away from God, and will be hated by his friends.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Sermon 57,8*)
92. St. Pimen the Great said: Depart from every man who loves to quarrel.
(Ancient Patericon, 11.59)
93. If you cannot close the mouth of one who reviles his brother, at least avoid conversation with him.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily 89*)

How to Relate to the Sins of Others

94. -95. Love sinners, but hate their deeds, and do not disdain sinners for their failings, so that you yourself do not fall into the temptation in which they abide... Do not be angry at anyone and do not hate anyone, neither for their faith, nor for their shameful deeds... Do not foster hatred for the sinner, for we are all guilty... Hate his sins, and pray for him, so that you may be made like unto Christ, who had no dislike for sinners, but prayed for them.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homily 57,90*)
96. Find evil in yourself and not in other people or things, who are with you have not learned how to relate properly. This is how a child relates with fire or a knife: he burns himself, he cuts himself.
(St. Sebastian of Karaganda)
97. A brother asked an elder: If I see my brother fall into sin, is it good to hide him? The Elder answered: When, out of love, we hide the sin of our brother, then God also hides our sins; but when we show our brother's sin before others, then God also makes our sins known to people.
(Ancient Patericon, 9.9)

98. Do not lose your temper with those who sin. Do not have a passion for noticing every sin in your neighbor and judging it, as we usually do. Everyone will give an answer for himself before God. Especially, do not look with evil intention on the sins of those older than you, with whom you have no business. But correct your own sins, your own heart.
(St. John of Kronstadt, *My Life in Christ*, I.6)
99. If you see your neighbor in sin, don't look only at this, but also think about what he has done or does that is good; and infrequently trying this in general, while not partially judging, you will find that he is better than you.
(St. Basil the Great, *Conversations*, 20).
100. If you see a man who has sinned and you do not pity him, the grace of God will leave you. Whoever curses bad people, and does not pray for them, will never come to know the grace of God.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, VII.4, VIII.6)
101. One who strictly prosecutes the misdemeanors of others will find not condescension towards his own.
(St. John Chrysostom, *On the Statutes*, 3.6)

Should We Denounce Them that have Sinned?

102. It is better to pray with good will for our neighbor, rather than to denounce him for every sin.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 1.132)
103. Do not attempt to benefit by the rebukes of one who boasts of his virtues, for he loves to display himself and cannot be a lover of truth.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 2.222)
104. Whoever with fear of God corrects and directs a sinner gains virtue for himself, that of opposition to sin. But whoever insults a sinner with rancor and without good will falls, according to a spiritual law, into the same passion with the sinner.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 2.183)
105. When you want to direct someone toward the good, first put him at peace bodily and honor him with words of love. For nothing inclines such a man to shame and induces him to cast off his vice and be changed for the better as do bodily goods and honor, which he sees in you. Then, with love tell him a word or two, and do not be inflamed with anger toward him. Do not let him see any cause of enmity toward you. For love does not know how to lose its temper.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homilies*, 85, 57).

Judging

106. He who seeks the forgiveness of his sins loves humility. But he who judges another strengthens his own evil deeds against himself.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 1.126)
107. -108. To judge sins is the business of one who is sinless, but who is sinless except God? Whoever thinks about the multitude of his own sins in his heart never wants to make the sins of others a topic of conversation. To judge a man who has gone astray is a sign of pride, and God resists the proud. On the other hand, one who every hour prepares himself to give answer for his own sins will not quickly lift up his head to examine the mistakes of others.
(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 53-55)
109. -110. A discerning man, when he eats grapes, takes only the ripe ones and leaves the sour. Thus also the discerning mind carefully marks the virtues which he sees in any person. A mindless man seeks out the vices and failings ... Even if you see someone sin with your own eyes, do not judge; for often even your eyes are deceived.
(St. John of the Ladder, *Ladder*, 10.16-17)

111. If you have the sinful habit of judging your neighbor, then whenever you judge someone make three prostrations that day with this prayer: "Save, O Lord, and have mercy on him (whom I have judged) and by his prayers, have mercy on me, a sinner." Do this every time you judge someone. If you do this, God will see your sincerity and will deliver you from this sinful habit forever. And if you never judge anyone, then God will never judge you. In this way you will even receive salvation.

(Priest-confessor Sergei Pravdolubov)

How to Deal with Those Who Hurt Us

112. Whoever prays for those who hurt him lays the demons low; but he who opposes his affronter is bound to the demons.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1.45)

113. Whoever does not fight the one who despises him, neither in word nor in thought, has received true knowledge and demonstrates a firm trust in God.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.119)

On Forgiveness of Insults

114. We have such a law: If you forgive, it means that God has forgiven you; but if you do not forgive your brother, it means that your sin remains with you.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VII.9)

115. We all have to die, beloved brethren, and it will be hard for us if, while we are in this world, we do not love each other, if we are not reconciled to our enemies, whom we have offended, and if one has grieved another, if we do not forgive him. Then we will not have eternal blessedness in that world, and the heavenly Father will not forgive our sins.

(St. Peter of Cetinje, Letter to Radulovichs, 1805)

116. The forgiveness of insults is a sign of true love, free from hypocrisy. For thus the Lord also loved this world.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.48)

When People Curse Us

117. We must receive the one who curses us as a messenger from God, rebuking our hidden evil thoughts, so that we, seeing our thoughts with exactness, might correct ourselves. For we do not know how many hidden evils we have; only a perfect man can understand all of his own shortcomings.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 6)

118. Inasmuch as you pray with all your soul for the one who has slandered you, so much will God reveal the truth to them who have believed the slander.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 4.89)

When People Praise Us

119. When people begin to praise us, let us hurry to remember the multitude of our transgressions, and we will see that we are truly unworthy of that which they say and do in our honor.

(St. John of the Ladder, Ladder, 22.42)

Rancor

120. If you are remembering evil against someone, then pray for him; and as you remove through prayer the pain of the remembrance of the evil he has done, you will stop the advance of the passion. And when you have attained brotherly love and love for mankind, you will completely cast this passion out of your soul. Then when someone else does evil to you, be affectionate and humble toward him, and treat him kindly, and you will deliver him from this passion.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 3.90)

121. A soul that is nurtured by hatred toward man cannot be at peace with God, Who has said: If you forgive not men their sins, neither shall your Father forgive your sins (Matt. 6:15). If a man does not want to be reconciled, you must at least guard yourself from hating, praying with a pure heart for him, and speaking no evil of him.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 4.35)

Love Toward Enemies

122. Whoever will not love his enemies cannot know the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies in such way that we pity their souls as if they were our own children.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, I.11)

123. When you have been insulted, cursed, or persecuted by someone, do not think of what has happened to you, but of what will come from it, and you will see that your insulter has become the cause of many benefits to you, not only in this age, but in that which is to come.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1.114)

124. Do not desire to hear about the misfortunes of those who oppose you. For those who listen to such speech later reap the fruits of their evil intention.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.173)

125. I ask you to try something. If someone grieves you, or dishonors you, or takes something of yours, then pray like this: "Lord, we are all your creatures. Pity your servants, and turn them to repentance," and then you will perceptibly bear grace in your soul. Induce your heart to love your enemies, and the Lord, seeing your good will, shall help you in all things, and will Himself show you experience. But whoever thinks evil of his enemies does not have love for God and has not known God.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.21)

IV. Concerning that which Brings us Close to God

Prayer

126. Do not forsake prayer, for just as the body becomes weak when it is deprived of food, so also the soul when it is deprived of prayer draws nigh to weakness and noetic death.

(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, The Golden Chain, 44)

127. -128. Consistently pray in all things, so that you might not do anything without the help of God ... Whoever does or busies himself with anything without prayer does not succeed in the end. Concerning this, the Lord said: "Without Me you can't do anything". (John 15:5)

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.94,166)

129. Whatever we do or say without prayer always ends up either sinful or harmful and convicts us through the deeds in some mysterious way.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.108)

130. The prayer of one who does not consider himself a sinner is not accepted by the Lord.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 55)

131. God hears and fulfills the prayer of a man who fulfills His commandments. "Hear God in His commandments" says St. John Chrysostom, "So that He might hear you in your prayers." A man who keeps the commandments of God is always wise, patient, and sincere in his prayers. Mystery of prayer consists in the keeping of God's commandments.
(St. Justin Popovich, *Explanation of I John*, 3:22)
132. Give your intentions in prayer to God, Who knows everyone, even before our birth. And do not ask that everything will be according to your will, because a man does not know what is profitable for him. But say to God: Let Thy will be done! For He does everything for our benefit.
(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 47)
133. Everyone who asks something of God and does not receive it doubtless does not receive it for one of these reasons: either because they ask before the time, or they ask unworthily, or out of vainglory, or because if they received what they asked they would become proud or fall into negligence.
(St. John of the Ladder, *Ladder*, 26.60)
134. Whoever wants to approach prayer without a guide, and proudly thinks that he can learn from books, and won't go to an elder, is already halfway into delusion. But the Lord helps the humble, and if there is no experienced guide, and he goes to a confessor, whoever he may be, then the Lord will cover him because of his humility.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, II.1)
135. If, at the time when the mind is praying it is distracted by any extraneous thought or worry about anything, then this prayer is not called pure.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homilies*, 16)
136. If you become proud when you receive what you ask in prayer, then it is obvious that your prayer was not to God, and you did not receive help from Him, but the demons were working with you in order to exalt your heart; For when help is given from God, the soul is not exalted, but is all the more humbled, and she is amazed at the great mercy of God, how merciful He is to sinners.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, *Instructions*, 418)
137. When God wants to have mercy on someone, He inspires someone else to pray for him, and He helps in this prayer.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XX.9)
138. In times of affliction, unceasingly call out to the merciful God in prayer. The unceasing invocation of the name of God in prayer is a treatment for the soul which kills not only the passions, but even their very operation. As a doctor finds the necessary medicine, and it works in such a way that the sick person does not understand, in just the same way the name of God, when you call upon it, kills all the passions, although we don't know how this happens.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, *Instructions*, 421)

Repentance

139. Every sin that is left without repentance is a sin unto death, for which if even a saint shall pray, he shall not be heard.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 2.41)
140. One who has sinned cannot escape retribution in any other way than by repentance corresponding to his sin.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 2.58)
141. God will cleanse your sins if you yourself are dissatisfied with yourself and will keep on changing until you are perfect.
(St. Augustine, *Sermons on I John*, I.7)
142. The saints were people like all of us. Many of them came out of great sins, but by repentance they attained the Kingdom of Heaven. And everyone who comes there comes through repentance, which the merciful Lord has given us through His sufferings.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XII.10)

143. If someone falls into any sin and is not sincerely grieved about it, it is easy for him to fall into the same thing again.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.215)
144. If someone has repented once of a sin, and again does the same sin, this is a sign that he has not been cleansed of the causes of the sin, wherefrom, as from a root, the shoots spring forth again.
(St. Basil the Great)
145. -147. Do not say: "I have sinned much, and therefore I am not bold enough to fall down before God." Do not despair. Simply do not increase your sins in despair and, with the help of the All-merciful One, you will not be put to shame. For He said, "he who comes to Me I will not cast out." (John. 6:37) And so, be bold and believe that He is pure and cleanses those who draw near to Him. If you want to accomplish true repentance, show it with your deeds. If you have fallen into pride, show humility; if into drunkenness, show sobriety; if into defilement, show purity of life. For it is said, "Turn away from evil and do good." (1 Pet. 3:11)
(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, The Golden Chain, 87-89)
148. Whoever hates his sins will stop sinning; and whoever confesses them will receive remission. A man can not abandon the habit of sin if he does not first gain enmity toward sin, nor can he receive remission of sin without confession of sin. For the confession of sin is the cause of true humility.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 71)
149. -150. It is harmful to remember previous sins in detail. For if they bring you sorrow, they will estrange you from hope, but if they are remembered without sorrow, they will introduce the previous defilement. If you want to bring to God an uncondemned confession, then don't remember your sins in detail, but manfully endure the suffering that is coming because of them.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.151,153)
151. The Lord greatly loves the repenting sinner and mercifully presses him to His bosom: "Where were you, My child? I was waiting a long time for you." The Lord calls all to Himself with the voice of the Gospel, and his voice is heard in all the world: "Come to me, my sheep. I created you, and I love you. My love for you brought Me to earth, and I suffered all things for the sake of your salvation, and I want you all to know my love, and to say, like the apostles on Tabor: Lord, it is good for us to be with You."
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IX.27)

Our Will and God's Will

152. -153. Here is the luminous teaching of our Savior: Thy will be done. (Matt. 6:10). Whoever sincerely pronounces this prayer leaves his own will and puts all things in the will of God. But the will inspired by the demons consists in self-justification and trust in ourselves, and then they easily subject a man who receives this sort of thought.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, Instructions, 40, 124)
154. It is a great good to be given over to the will of God. Then the Lord alone is in the soul, and no other thought, and she prays to God with a pure mind. When the soul is entirely given over to the will of God, then the Lord Himself begins to guide her, and the soul learns directly from God ... A proud man does not wish to live according to the will of God. He likes to direct himself, and does not understand that man does not have enough understanding to direct himself without God.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VI.1).
155. In the measure to which a man cuts off and humbles his own will, he proceeds toward success. But insofar as he stubbornly guards his own will, so much does he bring harm to himself.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian, Counsels to a Novice Monk)

156. How can you find out if you are living within the will of God? Here is the sign: If you are troubled about anything, this means that you have not completely given yourself over to the will of God. A person who lives in the will of God is not concerned over anything. And if he needs anything, he gives both it and himself over to God. And if he does not receive the necessary thing, he remains calm nevertheless, as if he had it. The soul which has been given over to the will of God is afraid of nothing, not of thunder nor of thieves - nothing. But whatever happens, she says, "Thus it pleases God." If she is sick, she thinks: this means that I need to be sick, or else God would not have given it to me. Thus peace is preserved in both soul and body.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VI.4)

157. The Lord has given the Holy Spirit upon the earth, and in whomsoever He dwells, that one feels paradise within himself. You might say: why hasn't this happened to me? Because you have not given yourself over to the will of God, but you live according to yourself. Look at the one who loves his own will. He never has peace in himself and is always displeased with something. But whoever has given himself over to God's will perfectly has pure prayer. His soul loves the Lord, and everything is acceptable and good to him.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, VI.14)

The Commandments

158. As it is not possible to walk without feet or fly without wings, so it is impossible to attain the Kingdom of Heaven without the fulfillment of the commandments.

(St. Theophan the Recluse, Five Teaching on the Way to Salvation, 3)

159. The Commandments of God are higher than all the treasures of the earth. Whoever has acquired them has received God within himself.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 57)

160. The Holy Apostle John the Theologian says that the commandments of God are not difficult, but easy (I John, 5:3). But they are only easy because of love, while they are all difficult if there is no love.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XVI.10)

161. God requires not the doing of the commandments for their own sake, but the correction of the soul, for whose sake He established the commandments.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 34)

162. God abides in each commandment by His gracious power. "God is hidden in His commandments", says St. Mark the Ascetic. God helps everyone who strives to keep His commandments. That God abides in us we know by the Spirit, which He has given us. This means that a Christian is never alone, but that he lives and works together with the Thrice-Holy God.

(St. Justin Popovich, Explanation of I John, 3:24)

How God Sees our Deeds

163. In all of our deeds God looks at the intention, whether we do it for His sake, or for the sake of some other intention.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2:36)

164. -165. God values deeds according to their intentions. For it is said, "The Lord grant unto you according to your heart" (Ps. 19:5) ... Therefore, whoever wants to do something but can't is considered as having done it by God, who sees the intentions of our hearts. This applies to both good and evil deeds alike.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1.184, 2.16)

166. If the intention is unclean, the deed that follows from it will also be evil, even if it seems good.

(St. Gregory the Dialogist, Conversations, 1.10)

How We Should Relate to our Deeds

167. Do not think about or do anything without a spiritual purpose, whereby it is done for God. For if you travel without purpose, you shall labor in vain.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1.54)
168. Fasting, prayer, alms, and every other good Christian deed is good in itself, but the purpose of the Christian life consists not only in the fulfillment of one or another of them. The true purpose of our Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit of God. But fasting, prayer, alms and every good deed done for the sake of Christ is a means to the attainment of the Holy Spirit. Note that only good deeds done for the sake of Christ bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Everything else that is not done for the sake of Christ, even if it is good, does not bring us a reward in the life to come, nor does it bring the grace of God in this life. This is why our Lord Jesus Christ said, "Whoever gathereth not with me scattereth" (Matt. 12:30).
(St. Seraphim of Sarov, Conversation on the Goal of the Christian Life)
169. When the mind forgets the purpose of Christian life, then even the clear fulfillment of virtue becomes profitless.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2:51)
170. All that you lose in the name of God, you keep. All that you keep for your own sake, you lose. All that you give in the name of God, you will receive with interest. All that you give for the sake of your own glory and pride, you throw into the water. All that you receive from people as from God will bring you joy. All that you receive from people as from people will bring you worries.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)
171. It is needful to do everything with discernment, and to take your own measure, so that you will not be confused later. To perform alms, fasting, or anything else at the highest degree (beyond one's limits or personal measure) lacks discernment, since later it will lead the one who performs them into confusion, despondency, and grumbling. Even God requires that which is according to the strength of man.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, Instructions, 627)
172. No matter who you are, what kind of work you do, give an account of yourself as to how you have performed your work: as a Christian, or as a heathen (that is, motivated by self-love and worldly pleasure). A Christian must remember that every deed, even the smallest, has a moral principle. A Christian, who remembers the teaching of Jesus Christ, should perform every deed so that it will be of use toward the spreading of the grace of God and the Kingdom of Heaven among men.
(St. Gabriel of Imereti, Yearly Account)

Our Good Deeds

173. One evil receives strength from another. In the same way, good deeds also sprout one from another and the one in whom they are found grows larger.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.93)
174. Every time that we sin, we are born of the devil. But every time that we do good, we are born of God.
(St. John Chrysostom)
175. We abide in God insofar as we do not sin.
(St. Bede the Venerable, Commentary on I John, 3:6)
176. Forget your good deeds as soon as possible ... Do not record your good deeds, for if you record them, they will soon fade. But if you forget them, they will be written in eternity.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thought on Good and Evil)
177. If you want the Lord to hide your sins, then don't talk to people about what kind of virtues you have. For as we relate to our virtues, so God relates to our sins.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.135)

178. Whoever has a spiritual gift and is compassionate toward one who does not have it guards his gift through his compassion. But whoever is proud of his gift loses it through self-opinion.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1.8)

Even a Small Good Deed has Worth

179. If at some time you show mercy to someone, mercy will be shown to you.
If you show compassion to one who is suffering (and of course, this is not a great deed) you will be numbered among the martyrs.
If you forgive one who has insulted you, then not only will all your sins be forgiven, but you will be a child of the Heavenly Father.
If you pray from all your heart for salvation - even a little - you will be saved.
If you rebuke yourself, accuse yourself, and judge yourself before God for your sins, with a sensitive conscience, even for this you will be justified.
If you are sorrowful for your sins, or you weep, or sigh, your sigh will not be hidden from Him and, as St. John Chrysostom says, "If you only lament for your sins, then He will receive this for your salvation."
(St. Moses of Optina)

Love

180. God gave people the word "love" so that they could call their relationship to Him by this name. When people misuse this word to refer to their relationship with earthly things, it loses its meaning.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, Thoughts on Good and Evil)
181. Do not disdain the commandment to love, for through it you become a son of God, and when you break it, you become a son of Gehenna.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 4:20)
182. Love toward God should be higher for us than love toward any human.
(St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite)
183. Do not say that faith in Christ alone can save you, for this is not possible if you do not attain love for Him, which is demonstrated by deeds. As for mere faith: "The demons also believe and tremble" (James, 2:19). The action of love consists in heartfelt good deeds toward one's neighbor, magnanimity, patience, and sober use of things.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 1.39-40)
184. As God illumines all people equally with the light of the sun, so do those who desire to imitate God let shine an equal ray of love on all people. For wherever love disappears, hatred immediately appears in its place. And if God is love, then hatred is the devil. Therefore as one who has love has God within himself, so he who has hatred within himself nurtures the devil within himself.
(St. Basil the Great, Homily on Asceticism, 3)
185. "Love covers a multitude of sins," (1 Pet. 4:8). That is, for love towards one's neighbor, God forgives the sins of the one who loves.
(St. Theophan the Recluse, Letters, VI.949)
186. -187. Love for Christ overflows into love for one's neighbor, love for truth, love for holiness, for the world, for purity, for everything divine, for everything deathless and eternal ... All these forms of love are natural manifestations of love for Christ. Christ is the God-man, and love for Him always means love for God and for man. When we love Christ God, we also love all that is divine, immortal and Christ-like in people. We can't truly love people if we do not love them for the sake of these causes. Any other love is pseudo-love, which is easily changed into lovelessness and hatred toward people. True love for man comes from love for God, and love for God grows in accordance with the keeping of His commandments.
(St. Justin Popovich, Explanation of the I John, 4:20, 5:2)

188. Love is the fruit of prayer ... Patiently abiding in prayer signifies a man's renunciation of himself. Therefore the self-denial of the soul turns into love for God.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily, 43)
189. If you find that there is no love in you, but you want to have it, then do deeds of love, even though you do them without love in the beginning. The Lord will see your desire and striving and will put love in your heart.
(St. Ambrose of Optina)

Who Has no Love

190. Whoever sees in himself the traces of hatred toward any man on account of any kind of sin is completely foreign to the love of God. For love toward God does not at all tolerate hatred for man.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 1.15)
191. -192. Who is far from love is a bad state, and to be pitied. He passes his days in a delirious dream, far from God, deprived of light, and he lives in darkness ... Whoever does not have the love of Christ is an enemy of Christ. He walks in darkness and is easily lead into any sin.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian, Homily on Virtues and Vices)

How to Manifest Love

193. Whoever has known the love of God loves the whole world and never murmurs against his fate, for the burden of sorrow for the sake of God gains eternal joy.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Letters, 1.27)
194. Love is manifested not only through the distribution of one's possessions, but even moreso through the spreading of the word of God and helpful deeds.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 1.26)
195. What is perfection in love? Love your enemies in such a way that you would desire to make them your brothers ... For so did He love, Who hanging on the Cross, said "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)
(St. Augustine, Sermons on I John, 1.9)
196. Happy is the man in whom there is love for God, for he bears God within himself. The one in whom there is love is with God, above all things. Whoever has love in himself does not fear. He is never mad at anyone, nor does he exalt himself above anyone. He does not calumniate anyone, nor does he listen to the calumniator. He does not compete with anyone, is not jealous, does not rejoice in the fall of another, does not slander the fallen, but sympathizes with him and helps him. He does not disdain his brother who is fallen into need, but helps him and is ready to die for him. Whoever has love fulfills the will of God.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian, Spiritual-Moral Letters)

Mercy

197. Let there always be a preponderance of mercy with you, even though you don't feel such mercy in yourself, as God has for the world ... A cruel and merciless heart is never purified. A merciful man is the doctor of his own soul, because as it were a by a strong wind from his heart he drives out the darkness of the passions.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 41)
198. If you begin to guard wealth it will not be yours. But if you begin to distribute it, you will not lose it.
(St. Basil the Great, Conversations, 7)
199. Do you think that the man-loving God has given you much so that you could use it only for your own benefit? No, but so that your abundance might supply the lack of others.
(St. John Chrysostom, Conversations on the Book of Genesis, 20)

200. If you are truly merciful, then when what is yours is unjustly taken, don't be sad inside, and do not tell of your loss to your neighbor. Let a bitter loss, inflicted by those who insult you, be absorbed by your mercy.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 58)

Humility

201. Nothing is more opposed to God than pride, for self-deification is concealed in it, its own nothingness or sin. Thus more than anything humility is acceptable to God, which considers itself nothing, and attributes all goodness, honor, and glory to God alone. Pride does not accept grace, because it is full of itself, while humility easily accepts grace, because it is free from itself, and from all that is created. God creates out of nothing. As long as we think that we can offer something of ourselves, He does not begin His work in us. Humility is the salt of virtue. As salt gives flavor to food, so humility gives perfection to virtue. Without salt, food goes bad easily, and without humility, virtue is easily spoiled by pride, vainglory, impatience - and it perishes. There is a humility which a man gains by his own struggles: knowing his own insufficiency, accusing himself for his failings, not allowing himself to judge others. And there is a humility into which God leads a man through the things that happen to him: allowing him to experience afflictions, humiliations, and deprivations.

(St. Philaret of Moscow, The Glory of the Mother of God, 9)

202. They asked an elder, "What is humility?" The elder said, "When your brother sins against you, and you forgive him, before he repents before you."

(Ancient Patericon, 15.74)

203. He does not show humility who accuses himself (for who will not accept rebukes from himself?), but he who, being rebuked by another, does not decrease his love toward him.

(St. John of the Ladder, Ladder, 22.17)

204. As water and fire oppose one another when combined, so are self-justification and humility opposed to one another.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homily 2.125)

205. Some suffer much from poverty and sickness, but are not humbled, and so they suffer without profit. But one who is humbled will be happy in all circumstances, because the Lord is his riches and joy, and all people will wonder at the beauty of his soul.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writing, III.9)

206. Humility consists in considering oneself to be nothing in all circumstances, cutting off one's will in all things, accusing oneself of everything, and bearing without confusion that which befalls him from without. Such is true humility, in which vainglory finds no place. A humble man doesn't need to try to show his humility in words, nor does he need to make himself do humble deeds, for both of these lead to vainglory, hinder progress, and cause more harm than good. But when they command anything, it is necessary not to contradict, but to fulfill it with obedience. This is what leads to success.

(St. John the Prophet, Instructions, 275)

Meekness

207. Meekness is an unchanging state of mind, which both in honor and dishonor remains the same. Meekness consists in praying sincerely and undisturbedly in the face of afflictions from one's neighbor. Meekness is a cliff rising from the sea of irritability, against which all the waves that strive against it break, but which is itself never broken.

(St. John of the Ladder, Ladder, 24.4)

208. Let them push you, but do not push; Let them crucify you, but do not crucify. Let them insult, but do not insult. Let them slander, but do not slander. Be meek, and do not be zealous in evil.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homily, 89)

209. As fire is not extinguished by fire, so anger is not conquered by anger, but is made even more inflamed. But meekness often subdues even the most beastly enemies, softens them and pacifies them.

(St. Tikhon of Zadonsk)

Temperance

210. Love hunger and thirst for the sake of Christ. Insofar as you pacify your body, so much will you do make your soul virtuous. God, who rewards thoughts, words, and deeds, will give good in return for even a small thing which you gladly suffer for His sake.

(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 41)

211. -212. Seek the simplest in all things, in food, clothing, without being ashamed of poverty. For a great part of the world lives in poverty. Do not say, "I am the son of a rich man. It is shameful for me to be in poverty." Christ, your Heavenly Father, Who gave birth to you in the baptistery, is not in worldly riches. Rather he walked in poverty and had nowhere to lay His head.

(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, *The Golden Chain*, 24-25)

213. You must teach yourself how to eat less, but with discernment, insofar as your work allows. The measure of temperance should be such that after lunch you want to pray.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, V.8)

Obedience

214. By obedience a man is guarded against pride. Prayer is given for the sake of obedience. The grace of the Holy Spirit is also given for obedience. This is why obedience is higher than prayer and fasting.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XV.4)

215. Obedience is necessary not only for monks, but for all people. Even the Lord was obedient. The proud and self-regarding do not allow grace to live in them, and therefore they never have spiritual peace, while in the obedient soul the grace of the Holy Spirit enters easily and gives joy and peace. Whoever bears even a little grace in himself joyfully submits himself to all direction. He knows that God directs even the heavens and the netherworld, and himself, and his business, and everything in the world, and therefore he is always at peace.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XV.2)

V. Concerning that which Hinders us on the Path to God.

Sinful Passions

216. A passion is a contranatural movement of the soul or an irrational love, or a blindfold hatred toward any material thing, or because of it: for example, for food, or for women, or for riches, or for worldly glory, or any other sensible thing; or for the sake of such things, as in a senseless hatred for someone on account of the things mentioned above.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, 2.16)

217. Some passions are bodily, other spiritual. Bodily passions have their sources in the body, while spiritual ones come from external things. But love and temperance cut out both the one and the other: Love cuts out spiritual passions, and temperance bodily ones.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, 1.64)

218. We must consider all evil things, even the passions which war against us, to be not our own, but of our enemy the devil. This is very important. You can only conquer a passion when you do not consider it as part of you.

(St. Nikon of Optina)

219. -220. At first a simple thought about evil makes it into the mind, and if it is kept in the mind, then a passionate motion arises from it, and if you do not extirpate the passion, then it inclines the mind to agreement, and when this happens, it leads the mind to the commission of a sinful deed. [Guard your thoughts], for if you do not sin in thought, you will never sin in deed.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 1:84, 2:78)

221. Unclean spirits increase the passions in us, making use of our negligence, and inciting them. But the angels decrease our passions, inciting us to the perfection of virtue.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2:69)

222. A sinful soul, full of passions, cannot have peace and rejoice in the Lord, even if it had charge over all earthly riches, even if it ruled over the whole world. If it was suddenly said to such a king, happily feasting and sitting on his throne, "King, now you will die," his soul would be troubled and he would tremble with fear, and he would see his powerlessness. But how many beggars there are, whose only wealth is love for God, and who, if you said to them, "You will die now," would answer peacefully, "Let God's will be done. Glory to the Lord, that He has remembered me and wants to take me to Himself."

(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, IV.3)

The Struggle with the Passions

223. When a man is given over to the passions, he does not see them in himself and does not fight against them, because he lives in them and by them. But when the grace of God becomes active in him, he begins to discern the passionate and sinful in himself, acknowledge them, and to repent and decide to guard against them. A struggle begins. At first, the struggle begins with deeds, but when released from shameful deeds, then the struggle begins with shameful thoughts and feelings. And here the struggle encounters many steps ... The struggle continues. The passions increasingly are torn out of the heart. It even happens that they are entirely torn out ... The sign that the passions are torn out of the heart is that the soul begins to feel repulsion and hatred for the passions.

(St. Theophan the Recluse, How the Spiritual Life Proceeds)

224. -226. A man who hates the passions cuts off their causes. But a man who remains among their causes experiences even against his will the conflict from the passions. It is not possible to be mentally inclined toward a passion if one does not love its cause. For who, disdainful of shame, is given to vainglory? Or who, loving lowliness, is bothered by dishonor? Who, having a broken and humble heart, accepts fleshly sweetness? Or who, believing in Christ, is concerned about temporal things, or argues about them?

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homily 2.119,122-123)

227. It is one thing to be delivered from bad thoughts, and another to be freed from the passions. Often people are delivered from thoughts, when they do not have before their eyes those things which produce passion. But the passions for them remain hidden in the soul, and when the things appear again the passions are revealed. Therefore it is necessary to guard the mind when these things appear, and to know toward which things you have a passion.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 3:78)

228. The mind of a man that loves God does not fight against things or thoughts about them, but against the passions that are connected with these thoughts. That is, he does not struggle against a woman, or against one who has insulted him, and not against the images of them, but against the passions that are aroused by these images.

(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 3:40)

229. The passions are uprooted and turned to flight by constant occupation of the mind with God. This is a sword that puts them to death... Whoever always thinks about God drives the demons away from himself and pulls up the seeds of their malice.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 8)

Spiritual Mistakes

231. The worst kind of sin is not to acknowledge that you are sinful.
(St. Caesarius of Arles, Commentary on I John, 1:8)
232. -232. Flee from self-love, the mother of malice, which is an irrational love for the body. For from it are born the three chief sinful passions: gluttony, avarice, and vainglory, which take their causes from bodily needs, and from them all the tribe of the passions is born. This why we must always oppose self-love and fight against it. Whoever rejects self-love will easily conquer all the other passions with the help of God: anger, despondency, rancor, and the others. But whoever is retained by self-love will even unwillingly be conquered by the above-named passions.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2.59,8)
233. Whoever does not want to know the will of God is mentally walking a path next to a cliff, and easily falls with any wind. If he is praised, he is proud. If he is rebuked he is angry. If he eats pleasant food, he is drawn into bodily passions. When he suffers he weeps. When he knows something, he wants to show that he knows. When he doesn't understand, he pretends to understand. When he is rich he puts on airs. When he is poor, he is a hypocrite. When he is full, he is bold. When he fasts he is vainglorious. When he is denounced he loves to argue, while he looks on those who forgive him as fools.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.193)
234. Understand two thoughts, and fear them. One says, "You are a saint," the other, "You won't be saved." Both of these thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. But think this way: I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful. He loves people very much, and He will forgive my sins.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XVII.1)
235. Sincere faith is the renunciation of your own mind. It is necessary to make your mind naked and present it like a clean chalkboard to faith, so that she can draw herself on it like she is, without any admixture of foreign sayings and attitudes. When the mind's own attitudes remain within it, then, after the attitudes of faith are written on it, there appears a mixture of attitudes. The mind will be confused, encountering contradictions between the actions of faith and the sophistries of the mind. Thus are all who approach the region of faith with their own sophistries... They are confused in the faith, and nothing comes of it but harm.
(St. Theophan the Recluse, Thought for Every Day of the Year, 11.04)
236. There are lots of those who speak but few who do. However, no one should distort the word of God by his own negligence, but it is better to confess your own weakness, not hiding the truth of God, so that together with the breaking of the commandments you do not also appear guilty of an untrustworthy explanation of the word of God.
(St. Maximos the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 4:85)
237. Whoever prematurely begins a work that is above his strength receives nothing, but only brings harm upon himself.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 11)
238. There are people who, when they encounter inability to understand, do not ask the Lord. But one must immediately say, "Lord, I am a sinful man and I don't understand as I should. But give me understanding, merciful One, as to how I must proceed." And the merciful Lord then inspires them as to what to do and what not to do.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XX.4)
239. No one ever accomplishes good by means of evil, because they are themselves conquered by the evil. On the contrary, evil is corrected by good.
(St. Barsanuphius the Great, Instructions, 15)
240. Do not try to decide a difficult matter by means of disputing, but that which is enjoined by the spiritual law, namely patience, prayer, and thoughtful hope.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 1:12)

241. If we weave by day and undo at night, nothing gets woven. If we build by day and destroy by night, nothing is ever built. If we pray to God and do evil before Him, nothing is woven, and a house for our soul is not built.

(St. Nicholas of Serbia, *Thoughts on Good and Evil*)

Remain in Place and do not Flee from Temptation

242. Amma Theodora said: A certain monk, afflicted by many sorrows, said to himself, "Leave this place." With these words he began to put his sandals on his feet, and suddenly he saw the devil in the form of a man sitting in the corner of his cell. The devil was also putting on his sandals. He said to the monk, "Are you leaving here because of me? Well then, wherever you go, I will be there before you.

(St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *Patericon*)

Sinful Thoughts

243. -244. A certain monk asked one of the elders, "Why are my thoughts always inclined to defilement, so that they give me no rest even for an hour, and my soul is troubled?" The elder said to him, "If the demons inspire thoughts in you, do not give in to them." It is their nature to tempt constantly. And even though they never leave off this temptation, they cannot force you to sin. It depends on your will to listen to them or not to listen." The brother said to the elder, "What should I do? I am weak and the passion is conquering me." The elder answered, "Guard against them, and when they begin to speak to you, do not answer them, but pray to God: Son of God, have mercy on me!"

(*Ancient Patericon*, 5.35)

245. If a man does not argue with the thoughts that the enemy secretly sows in us, but by prayer to God uproots conversation with them, this is a sign that his mind has attained wisdom, and that he has found a short path.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homilies*, 30)

246. A man who is enticed by sinful thoughts is blinded by them, and he sees the action of sin in himself, but he cannot see the cause of this action.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 1.168)

247. It is impossible to keep spiritual peace if we do not take care of the mind, that is if we do not drive out thoughts that are displeasing to God and, on the contrary, keep thoughts which are pleasing to God. It is necessary to look into the heart with mind and see what is done there. Is it peaceful or not? If not, then find out in what you have sinned.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XIV.8)

248. When bad thoughts are planted in you, then cry to God: "Lord, my Maker and Creator. You see that my soul is in agony from bad thoughts. Have mercy on me." Teach yourself to root out thoughts immediately. But when you forget and don't root them out immediately, then offer repentance. Work on this, so that you get a habit.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, XVII.4,6)

The Snares of the Devil

249. Love for that which is earthly makes the soul empty, and then she is sad, and grows wild, and does not want to pray to God. The enemy then, seeing that the soul is not in God, shakes her and freely places in the mind whatever he wants, and he drives the soul from one thought to another, and thus the whole day the soul remains in such disorder and cannot purely gaze at the Lord.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, IV.5)

250. Our inhuman enemy [the devil, in drawing a Christian to defilement] inspires the thought that God loves mankind, and that He quickly forgives this sin. But when we observe the guile of demons, then we see that after the commission of the sin, they suggest to us that God is a righteous and implacable Judge. The first they say in order to lead us to sin, the second, in order to weigh us down in despair.

(St. John of the Ladder, Ladder, 15:33)

251. The devil makes small sins seem smaller in our eyes, for otherwise he can't lead us to greater evil.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2:94)

252. When anyone goes into sin, his thoughts are as it were enchained and his vision is changed for the worse through that by means of which the evil one, instigating and flattering, weakens and darkens us. But after the sin has been committed he sets before our eyes what we have done and cruelly reveals that to which he has drawn us with much guile and, condemning the severity of the deed, endeavors by the same to draw the sinner into despair.

(St. Photius the Great, Amphilochius, 14)

Spiritual Warfare

253. We have within us deeply rooted weaknesses, passions, and defects. This cannot all be cut out with one sharp motion, but patience, persistence, care and attention. The path leading to perfection is long. Pray to God so that he will strengthen you. Patiently accept your falls and, having stood up, immediately run to God, not remaining in that place where you have fallen. Do not despair if you keep falling into your old sins. Many of them are strong because they have received the force of habit. Only with the passage of time and with fervor will they be conquered. Don't let anything deprive you of hope.

(St. Nectarios of Aegina, Path to Happiness, 3)

Vainglory

254. Do not seek earthly glory in any matter, for it is extinguished for him who loves it. In its time it blows on a man like a strong wind, and then quickly, taking from him the fruits of his good works, it goes away from him, laughing at his foolishness.

(St. Gennadius of Constantinople, The Golden Chain, 35)

255. Abba Pimen said, he who fervently desires the love of men is deprived of the love of God. It is not good to be liked by everyone, for it is said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you." (Luke 6:26)

(Ancient Patericon, 8:16)

256. Often the Lord heals vainglory by dishonor.

(St. John of the Ladder, Ladder, 22:38)

257. [It is possible to struggle against love of honor and vainglory in this way:] When you hear that your neighbor or friend has reproached you in your absence or presence, then show love and praise him.

(St. John of the Ladder, 22:15)

Falsehood

258. In the Scriptures it is written that falsehood is from the evil one, and that He is the "Father of Lies" (John 8:44), while God is truth; for He Himself says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (John 14:6). Thus you see from whom we estranged ourselves and to whom we are united by a lie. So then, if we really want to be saved, we must love truth with our whole hearts and guard ourselves from all falsehood. There are three different types of lies: in thought, in word, and in life itself. A man lies in thought when he accepts as true his own vain imaginations, despite his neighbor. Such a one, when he sees that someone is conversing with his neighbor, makes his own estimation and says, "They are talking about me." If someone says a word, he considers that it was said to grieve him. Never believe your own guesses and interpretations, for a crooked measurement makes even the straight to be crooked. Human opinion is false and harms those who are given to it. The one who sins in word is one who, for example, when out of despondency he has not gotten up for the service, does not say, "Forgive me, I was too lazy to get up," but says, "I had a fever, I had too much work, I hadn't the strength to get up, I was sick," and says ten false statements, rather than make a single prostration and be humbled. And if he should be rebuked in such a situation, he changes his words and argues, in order not to be rebuked. One who lies by his life is one who, if he is defiled, pretends to be chaste, or if he is avaricious, praises almsgiving, or if he is proud praises humility. Thus, in order to escape falsehood and be delivered from the part of the evil one, let us strive to appropriate truth, in order to have union with God.

(St. Abba Dorotheos, *Soul-profiting Teachings*, 9)

Pride

259. Guard your mind from self-praise and flee a high opinion of yourself, so that God does not allow you to fall into the opposite [passion to the virtue for which you boast], for man does not accomplish virtue alone, but with the help of God Who sees all.

(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 85)

Murmuring

260. The Lord bears all the weaknesses of men, but He does not bear a man who is always murmuring, and does not leave Him without chastisement.

(St. Isaac the Syrian, *Homilies*, 85)

261. If you suffer some misfortune, then think: "The Lord sees my heart, and if it pleases Him, it will be well both for me and others." And thus your soul will always be at peace. But if someone murmurs, "This is bad, and that is bad," then he will never have peace in his soul, even though he fasts and prays a lot.

(St. Silouan the Athonite, *Writings*, IV.1)

Anger

262. A certain monk lived in a monastery, and he was always angry. He decided, "I will leave this place and dwell by myself as a hermit, and then I will have no relations with anyone, and the passion of anger will leave me." Leaving the monastery, he settled in a cave. One day, having taken up a pitcher of water, the monk set it on the ground, and it tipped over. Again he drew the water, and the pitcher tipped a second time. Then he drew it again, and it fell a third time. The brother got angry, picked it up and broke it. When he had come to himself, he understood that the devil had triumphed over him and said, "Behold, I have gone away into seclusion, and I am conquered! I will go back to the monastery, for patience and the help of God are necessary everywhere!" And he returned to his previous place.

(Ancient Patericon, 7.38)

263. Abba Agathon said: An angry man, even if he raises the dead, is not pleasing to God."
(Ancient Patericon, 10.15)
264. Are you angry? Be angry at your sins, beat your soul, afflict your conscience, but be strict in judgment and a terrible punisher of your own sins. This is the benefit of anger, wherefore God placed it in us.
(St. John Chrysostom, Conversation of Ephesians, 2)

Defiled Lust

265. Gluttony and satiety in food produce defiled lust, while free association with women enflames the fire of lusts ... At the time of struggle with defilement, punish your thoughts with lack of nourishment, so that you will think not of defilements, but of hunger, and reject the invitation to go visiting.
(St. Nilus of Sinai)
266. Don't let your eyes look here and there, and don't look on someone else's beauty, so that the devil will not conquer you with the help of your eyes.
(St. Ephraim the Syrian)
267. A certain monk had a struggle against defiled lusts. He got up at night and went to the elder and confessed to him the thoughts that were drawing him to defilement. The elder calmed him and the brother, have benefited, returned to his cell. But the struggle rose up against him again, and again he went to the elder. He did this a few times. The elder did not grieve him, but said, "Don't give up, but it is better that you come to me whenever the demon disturbs you, and repel him by exposing your thoughts. By such a repulsion he will pass you by. For nothing so burns the demon of defilement as the revelation of his deeds [in confession before a spiritual father]. And nothing makes him as happy as the hiding of thoughts." Thus the brother came to the elder eleven times, repelling his thoughts, and the brother's temptation ceased.
(Ancient Patericon, 5.16)
268. Lust is as it were desire and desire, will which extends beyond the natural will, passionate, not governed by the law and moderation. There are thus many forms of lust, like the many forms of sin ... Lust does not approach the soul in the form of a warlike enemy, but in the form of a friend or a pleasant servant. It suggests some sort of pleasure or illusory good. But this is only a trick by which the malicious angler strives to lead astray and catch the poor soul. Remember this when you are tempted by lust.
(St. Philaret of Moscow, Sermon on the 5th of July, 1845)

VI. Concerning What Must be Endured of the Spiritual Path

Temptation

269. When you want to make a beginning of a good deed, first prepare for temptations, which will come to you, and don't doubt the truth [of that which you do for God].
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 57)
270. No one can sense his own weakness if at least a small temptation is not allowed to afflict either his body or his soul. Then, comparing his weakness to the help of God, a man comes to know its magnitude. But whoever does not know that he needs God's help, let him make many prayers. Insofar as he multiplies them, in that measure will he be humbled.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 61)
271. There is no man who will not be grieved at the time of his chastisement; and there is not man who will not endure a bitter time, when he must drink the poison of temptations. Without them, it is not possible to obtain a strong will. When he has often experienced the help of God in temptations, a man also obtains strong faith.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 37)

272. Without temptations, it is not possible to learn the wisdom of the Spirit. It is not possible that Divine love be strengthened in your soul. Before temptations, a man prays to God as a stranger. When temptations are allowed to come by the love of God, and he does not give in to them, then he stands before God as a sincere friend. For in fulfilling the will of God, he has made war on the enemy of God and conquered him.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 5)
273. Conquer temptations by patience and prayer. If you oppose them without these, you will fall all the more severely.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.106)
274. If an unexpected temptation comes, don't blame the one through whom it came, but seek out the reason. Thus you will find correction for your soul.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2.42)
275. Temptations come on some people for the cleansing of previous sins, on others for the beautification of their current perfection, and on yet others, as preparation for things to come, except temptations which are for the increase of a man's faith and virtue, as it was with Job.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2.45)
276. Temptations come so that hidden passions may be revealed and so that it will be possible to fight them, and so that the soul may be rid of them. They are also a sign of God's mercy. So give yourself with trust into God's hands and ask His help, so that He will strengthen you in your struggle. God knows how much each one can bear and allows temptations according to the measure of our strength. Remember that after temptation comes spiritual joy, and that the Lord protects them that endure temptations and suffering for the sake of His love.
(St. Nektarius of Aegina, The Path to Happiness, 4)

Sorrows

277. A child cries when his mother washes him, and those of little faith murmur at God when they are in trouble, which cleanses the soul like water cleanses the face.
(St. Symeon of Daibabe, Sayings, 89)
278. If you want to serve God, prepare your heart not for food, not for drink, not for rest, not for ease, but for suffering, so that you may endure all temptations, trouble and sorrow. Prepare for severities, fasts, spiritual struggles and many afflictions, for "by many afflictions is it appointed to us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Acts 14, 22); "The Heavenly Kingdom is taken by force, and those who use force seize it". (Matt 11:12)
(St. Sergius of Radonezh, Life, 10)
279. It is impossible to draw near to God without sorrows, without which human righteousness cannot remain unchanged... If you desire virtue, then give yourself to every affliction, for afflictions produce humility. If someone abides in virtue without afflictions, the door of pride is opened to him.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 34)
280. Sin is a sickness which has been introduced into human nature. A sinful impression and perverse pleasure leaves a trace in the soul and body, which becomes deeper with the repetition of sinful actions and which forms a propensity for sinful action and a certain thirst for sin. Therefore, as a bodily doctor sometimes painfully burns out the ulcers that have infected the body, or separates them with iron, in the same way the Doctor of souls and bodies uses instruments of affliction in order to wrest out the roots and erase the traces of sins, and with the fire of suffering burns out the contagion of propensity to sinful pleasures.
(St. Philaret of Moscow, Homily on July 5th, 1848)
281. Abba Dorotheos said: No matter what kind of sorrow comes to you, don't blame anyone but yourself, and say, "This has happened because of my sins."
(St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, Patericon)

282. A man of discernment, meditating on the healing Divine Providence, bears with thanksgiving the misfortunes that come to him. He sees their causes in his own sins, and not in anyone else. But a mindless man, when he sins and receives the punishment for it, considers the cause of his misfortune to be God, or people, not understanding God's care for him.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 2.46)
283. If we were not passionately inclined to money or to vainglory, then we would not fear death or poverty. We would not know enmity or hatred, and we would not suffer from the sorrows of ourselves or others.
(St. John Chrysostom, To those at Enmity, 3.19)
284. Afflictions for God's sake are dearer to Him than any prayer or sacrifice.
(St. Isaac the Syrian, Homilies, 58)
285. God tested Abraham. That is, he sent him afflictions for his benefit, not so that He could find out what sort of man he was, for God knows everything, but so that He could give him the means to perfect his faith.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, Homilies, 2.203)
286. When we bravely and quietly endure the afflictions sent to us, we participate a little, albeit not fully, in the sufferings of Christ.
(St. Macarius of Optina, Letters, 473)
287. The righteous have no sorrows that are not turned into joy, as sinners have no joy that is not turned into sorrow.
(St. Dmitri of Rostov)
288. Humility and suffering free a man from all sin; for the first cuts out spiritual passions, and the latter bodily.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, Chapters on Love, 1.76)
289. We suffer because we have no humility and we do not love our brother. From love of our brother comes the love of God. People do not learn humility, and because of their pride cannot receive the grace of the Holy Spirit, and therefore the whole world suffers.
(St. Silouan the Athonite, Writings, XVI.4,6)
290. Everyone who loves God shows himself patient and steadfast in times of suffering. Whoever bears them bravely becomes strong and obedient to God, and whoever enters the path of following the will of God conquers his natural weakness. On the other hand, whoever does not recognize his own powerlessness is proud and not inclined to submit himself to the will of the Lord. Whoever does not submit to it and hopes only in his own power does not receive the power and help of God and, not having been strengthened in spirit, cannot become patient. But whoever does not endure misfortune and afflictions has not faith, and whoever does not have faith, does not love God.
(St. Alexis of Senaki, Concerning Afflictions)
291. No matter what bitterness has befallen you, no matter what unpleasantness has happened to you, say, "I shall endure this for Jesus Christ!" and it will be easier for you. For the name of Jesus Christ is powerful. Through it all unpleasantness is calmed, and demons disappear. Your disappointments will also be calmed and your pusillanimity will be quieted.
(St. Anthony of Optina)

How Can we be Saved?

292. Orthodox Christians must steadfastly remain in Orthodoxy, preserve oneness of mind with one another and un hypocritically love, guard purity of soul and body, reject evil and unclean intentions, temperately partake of food and drink, and above all adorn themselves with humility, not neglect hospitality, refrain from conflicts and not give honor and glory in anything to earthly life, but instead await a reward from God: the enjoyment of heavenly goods.
(St. Sergius of Radonezh, Life, 32)

293. If you want to attain salvation, learn and keep in your heart all that the holy Church teaches and, receiving heavenly power from the mysteries of the Church, walk the path of Christ's commandments, under the direction of lawful pastors, and you will undoubtedly attain the Heavenly Kingdom and be saved. All of this is naturally necessary in the matter of salvation, necessary in its entirety and for all. Whoever rejects or neglects any part of it has no salvation.
(St. Theophan the Recluse, *Five Teachings on the Path to Salvation*, 3)
294. A certain monk asked St. Anthony the Great, "What must I do to be saved?" The elder answered him, "Don't trust in your own righteousness, don't worry about what's past, and constrain your tongue and your stomach."
(Ancient Patericon, 1.2)
295. Another brother asked Abba Macarius, "How can I be saved?" The elder answered him, "Be like one dead: do not think about insults from people, nor of glory, and you will be saved."
(Ancient Patericon, 10.45)
296. In the spiritual life we can do nothing worthy without repentance, but the Lord has much mercy on us because of our intentions. He who compels himself and holds on to repentance until the end, even if he sins is saved because he compelled himself, for the Lord promised this in the Gospel.
(St. Mark the Ascetic, *Homilies*, 3)
297. A Christian receives divine wisdom in three ways: by the commandments, teachings, and faith. The commandments free the mind from passions. Teachings lead it to true knowledge of nature. Faith leads to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity.
(St. Maximus the Confessor, *Chapters on Love*, 4.47)
298. If you become rich, consider whether or not you could worthily bear poverty. If you are happy, imagine how you could worthily meet unhappiness. When people praise you, think how you might worthily bear insult. And, all your life, think how you might worthily meet death.
(St. Nicholas of Serbia, *Thoughts on Good and Evil*)
299. So, being the portion of the Holy God, begin to do all that pertains to holiness, running away from evil words, unclean and shameful relations, drunkenness, passions and innovations, base lusts, defiled adulteries and overweening pride. For it is said: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5). So, let us unite ourselves to them to whom grace has been given by God. Let us put on oneness of mind, let us be humble, temperate, far from any cursing or evil speech, making ourselves righteous by deeds and not by words... Let our praise be from God, and not from ourselves. God hates those who praise themselves. Let the witness of our good deeds be given by others.
(St. Clement of Rome, *Corinthians*, 30)
300. Christians, have we understood the great responsibility that we have taken on before God through baptism? Have we come to know that we must conduct ourselves as children of God, that we must align our will with the will of God, that we must remain free from sin, that we must love God with all our hearts and always patiently await union with Him? Have we thought about the fact that our heart should be so filled with love that it should overflow to our neighbor? Do we have the feeling that we must become holy and perfect, children of God and heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven? We must struggle for this, so that we may not be shown unworthy and rejected. Let none of us lose our boldness, nor neglect our duties, nor be afraid of the difficulties of spiritual struggle. For we have God as a helper, who strengthens us in the difficult path of virtue.
(St. Nektarius of Aegina, *The Path to Happiness*, 2)