

The Basics of Orthodoxy Class 101

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Topic 7: The Passions: How the Fall affects each of us

(See the Special Study: “The Passions”, *The Faith*, p.87)

One of the ways we humans are fallen is that the natural order inside of us was turned upside down. Instead of the body serving man, since the Fall, the bodily desires now dominate man.

God designed man so that His Holy Spirit should help our spirit.

Our spirit was to inform our mind, telling it what God’s will for us was.

Our mind, in turn, was to control and order our body to do God’s will.

God gave human nature three powers (three natural energies):

- a) The intelligent power--refers to man's ability to reason (the rational)
- b) The appetitive power--refers to man's desires
(for food, for happiness, for sexual fulfilment, etc.).
- c) The irascible power--refers to man's ability to get angry or to feel very strongly and vehemently about something that is evil and must be repulsed

God had a design for these powers of the soul:

"It is according to nature that the rational element in us be *subjected to the divine Word*, and that it govern our irrational element."

--St. Maximus the Confessor, circa 662 A.D.

God’s **design** is that we obey God, and that the rational in us rule the irrational in us.

It is a hierarchy: **God, His Word, and His Spirit** inform and assist

our intelligent (rational) power, which controls

our natural desires, and appropriately uses

our irascible power against evil, as needed.

It is only when these ordinary, God-given powers and desires, implanted in mankind at creation were perverted and instead were “turned against God and against our brothers...[that] we have the development of the passions. So a passion is a movement of the soul contrary to nature.” (*The Illness and Cure of the Soul in the Orthodox Tradition*, p. 137)

When we DO NOT obey the Creator's plan (the Manufacturer' design), and do not obey His commandments and His Word (Christ), and ignore the assistance and promptings of His Holy Spirit, it is easy for the rational to stop ruling.

Then, the desires and raw anger start to take control, and go **wild**, going beyond what is reasonable and healthy, and becoming irrational and harmful.

The inner hierarchy is corrupted and over-turned:

The desires of the body now dictate,

And the irascible power angrily enforces its demands.

The intellect has abdicated its authority, having turned away from the knowledge of God and His Truth, being instead filled with ignorance, fantasies, illusions, and wild imaginations.

“In such a state, it is unable to govern the rest of man’s faculties.” (*The Faith*, p.88)

God's Word and Spirit are ignored.

(a) example: the passion of evil self-love

Under normal circumstances, we have a God-given desire to stay alive, by eating right, bathing regularly, and by visiting the doctor. We love ourselves enough to get clean and stay healthy.

When the rational in us stops listening to God and stops ruling our actions, then normal self--love can become excessive and evil: becoming completely unreasonable and uncontrollable. We eat until we are sick and over-weight. We drink until we are drunk and die early of liver disease.

(b) example: the passion of hatred

Under normal circumstances, hatred is a natural feeling that can be used to steer us away from danger. We hate falling off of cliffs, so we are careful when standing on the edge of one. We are to hate sin. We use anger against sin.

When the rational in us stops obeying God's Word, and stops ruling the irascible power, then the natural use of hatred gets misdirected to where God never intended us to use it: against God, against our friends, against ourselves.

As our ability to get angry (the irascible) is riled up, we stomp our feet, yell, and go into irrational behaviours and fury, doing things as enraged animals.

A classic example of the hierarchy in the soul being over-turned.

Addiction to smoking: Even though science has informed a heart patient that smoking is highly injurious to one's health, the addict ignores this rational information and lights up. The desire for the pleasure overrules the intelligence. When the desire becomes a habit, the appetitive (desire) aspect is ruling. One has become a slave to one's desires.

If one cannot find a cigarette quick enough, in order to pacify the passionate desire, the person could get very angry. His irascible faculty now dominates his life, as he tries to fulfil his appetites and desires, which have grown excessive. His smoking might even kill him with cancer one day.

So--What are the "Passions"?

Passions are huge sinful behaviours that dominate and control one's life. Our passions can grow **SO large** that we become their habitual slaves.

Passions are *spiritual sicknesses* in the soul that God can heal.

"Passion is an excessive feeling or appetite, going beyond what is reasonable. Passions are a disturbance of our soul contrary to nature, in disobedience to reason. Passion is not natural, and it ruins our nature instead of fulfilling it. "

-- Clement of Alexandria (a famous priest and theologian, circa 223A.D.)

- a) Passions are *ordinary, natural desires and feelings* of the soul that get out of control. (like a camp fire burning down a forest).
- b) Passions are normal energies that have become excessive— beyond normal and beyond what is reasonable.
- c) It is when the natural power of the souls, its energies, desires, and feelings are misdirected, and turned against (God and man).
- d) Passions are “a movement of the soul contrary to nature”--contrary to the way God designed us.
- e) Passions corrupt and ruin our nature.

“When we speak of all the passions together, we call them ‘the world.’ So when Christians speak of renouncing the world, they mean renouncing the passions.” -- St. Isaac of Syria

St. Paul calls the passions “the works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-25) --

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: **adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like**; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”

The seven most serious **passions** are :

- 1) Pride (opposite of humility)
- 2) Greed (opposite of liberality)
- 3) Lust (opposite of chastity)
- 4) Anger (opposite of mildness)
- 5) Gluttony (opposite of temperance)
- 6) Envy (opposite of contentment)
- 7) Sloth (opposite of diligence)

Let us by the Grace of Christ, crucify the passions, driving them out through prayer and the Grace of the Holy Spirit.