



# THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN EAST

by

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# WHAT IS SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT?

**What is the Ultimate Purpose of God for us?**

**We are created "in God's Image" so that we may grow "in His Likeness". God's Ultimate Goal for us is "to become perfected in His Likeness" (theosis (θέωσις)).**



# PHYSICAL & SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

## The Incarnate God: Jesus Christ

His Physical Development as a man:

*"Jesus grew in wisdom and stature."* (Luke 2:52)

His Spiritual Development as a man

*"And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them."* (Luke 2:51)

He develops in obedience to his earthly parents

He withdraws to pray

He surrenders in obedience to God the Father

He is perfected in his humanity as he dies on the Cross and is risen from the dead.



# KNOWLEDGE VS SPIRITUALITY

*Much Confusion on this!!!!*

- Growing in Knowledge vs Growing Spiritually



# WHAT IS TRUE KNOWLEDGE?

- **True Knowledge is the Personal Experience of the love of God which is cultivated and nourished within the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.**
- **True Knowledge is the Knowledge of the presence of God in our lives - This is not attained intellectually but relationally.**
- **The knowledge of God springs forth from faith and worship. We respond to the call of God by engaging in dialogue with Him in our prayer and worship of Him.**



# WHAT IS TRUE KNOWLEDGE?

- **Our Personal Experience of God is the fountain which will satisfy our thirst for knowledge and understanding of Things Divine.**
- **As we come to the knowledge of God we are filled with the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit fills us we have a deeper knowledge of God. We thus ascend from Glory to Glory, to the ultimate state of holiness and perfection. *This is true spiritual growth!***



# PRESUPPOSITIONS TO SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT FOR ATTAINING TRUE KNOWLEDGE

- **Faith (Pistis - πίστις) - Trust in God**
- **Prayer**
  - (i) Personal or private prayer**
  - (ii) Communal worship - Divine Liturgy**

**Our relationship with God is the source of all holiness**



# CULTIVATION OF TRUE KNOWLEDGE - SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Ascesis (ἀσκησις) - The Spiritual Struggle**
- **Synergy with God (Συνεργία)**

**“the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and men of violence take it by force.” (Matt 11:12)**

**“Give blood and receive the Spirit.” Abba Longinus, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 123.**



# THE SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE

## St. John Chrysostom and the Spiritual Struggle

St. John Chrysostom presents the Christian life

(i) as a preparation for a contest, a training exercise, (ἀσκημα or ἀσκησις), resembling that of an athlete.

(ii) as a confrontation and a battle (παράταξιν καὶ μάχην) where the armor and the weapons are spiritual ones; they are weapons of light; they are **the virtues** with which a Christian can arm and protect himself.

In this warfare Christ is the ungraspable commander (ἀχέιρωτος στρατηγός).

In this Spiritual Struggle there is an element of urgency; we need to be alert and watchful. (Eschatological Dimension)



# ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON ASCESIS

Guarding against temptation   [Christ sets the bar higher](#)

*Watchfulness, diligence and alertness* (νήψις, σπουδή, and ἐγρήγορσις)

*Watchfulness* leads to avoidance of sin.

Let me give you an example. Are you a man who constantly swears false oaths? You must not only stop swearing falsely but you must stop swearing any oath. Then you will have no further trouble. It is far more difficult for a man who swears oaths to avoid perjury than for a man who swears no oaths at all.



# ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON ASCESIS

**Are you a man who insults and abuses others? Do you strike them with your fists? Lay down a law for yourself not to lose your temper or ever to raise your voice. Then you will be rid of this evil fruit, roots and all. Are you lustful and dissolute? Again, set a rule for yourself not to look at a woman, not to go to the theater, not to be overly curious by leering at the beautiful aspects of other people in the market-place.**

**For it is far easier from the first not to look at a fair-figured woman than, after you have ogled her and stirred up your lust, to get rid of the tumult of passion she has roused in you. For such struggles are easier in their first stages. Rather, we shall have no need to struggle if we do not open the gates to the enemy or take in the seeds of evil.**



# ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON ASCESIS

*Watchfulness and self-control lead to the avoidance of sin*

For the effort of not looking at women in the prime of their beauty is not as great a struggle as it is to restrain yourself while you ogle them. Not to ogle would be no trouble. But after you have ogled them, much toil and sweat is required to restrain your passion.

The man who leers with lust must put forth greater effort to be freed from his passion. And he does not do this without some stain (κηλῖδος)--if he ever frees himself at all.

To keep us from suffering these experiences, Christ forbids not only murder but anger as well; he forbids not only adultery but even a lustful look; he forbids not only swearing falsely but all swearing whatsoever. Nor does he make the measure of virtue stop here. After he set down these laws, he went on to something which is still greater.

What we see here is St. Chrysostom's concept of an active pursuit of the state of dispassion (ἀπάθεια)



# ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM ON ASCESIS

*Watchfulness* when suffering evil leads to a higher state of existence

"Indeed, what is especially marvelous is that we not only are left unhurt if we live a sober and watchful life (ἐὰν νήφωμεν) but we are even blessed by the very things which others do to hurt us."

"Consider this. Is someone insulting you and fighting with you? Then he is making you ready to be watchful and on your guard (ἐγρηγορέναι). He is affording you an opportunity *to become like God* (ἀφορμὴν σοι παρέχει τοῦ γενέσθαι ὅμοιον τῷ θεῷ)."



# OTHER ELEMENTS OF ASCESIS

- **Taking control over our passions -- the road to ἀπάθεια -dispassion or passionlessness):**

**“We have not been taught to kill our bodies, but to kill our passions.”  
Abba Poemen, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, 193.**

**Yet the fathers teach that we should not try to uproot the passions but only to take control over them.**

- **Cultivation of all the Virtues:**
  - **Patience**
  - **Repentance (Metanoia - Μετάνοια)**
  - **Forgiveness**
  - **Humility & Obedience to a spiritual father**
  - **Remembrance of death**
  - **Love of God and neighbor - Charity - Almsgiving - Philanthropy**



Glory be to God!