

POPE SHENOUDA III

GOD AND NOTHING ELSE

REFORM YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD



Introduction

***In the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit,
one God, Amen.***

Dear reader: This book is the fruit of five lectures given at the great cathedral of Saint Royce monastery, The lectures were as follows:

1 – There is none upon earth that I desire besides you on 10/14/1977

2 – God's position in your lifeon 12 /21/1979

3 – Sufficiency in Godon 03/14/1981

4 - Youand God.....on 03/27/1981

5 - God ... your only Goal.....on 08/ 07/ 1981

These lectures were consolidated together to be offered to you in this book which is a series of a larger book called “God and man”, May God help us in publishing the rest of the book through your prayers.

SHENOUDA III

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**What is your
Relationship with God?**

I would like to discuss a vital subject with you, which is the position of the lord in the life of each one of us ...Is there a relationship between God and us? What is nature of that relationship? What is depth and extent of that relationship? Is it formal relationship? Or is there love and passion in it? What is the importance of this relationship compared to other relationships?

First, we have to illustrate the importance of our relationship with God...

There are millions of people, all over the land, maybe you do not care to have a private relationship with any of them. However, God is the only ONE who you must have a relationship with him. This relationship has unique characteristics...

Your relationship with God is the only permanent and solid relationship.

You do not have a permanent relation with everyone you meet. as it is very easy to get separated from that person at some point and have a different path in life, and you would feel it may be a temporary relationship. Likewise, your relations with people around you are definite most of the time with a specific scope and do not go beyond it, which may end by the end of that scope. However your relationship with God is permanent and not limited with your life on earth.

Your relationship with God, include your eternal life, in the other life.

It is a relationship that starts here and remains in eternity. Besides the fact that God created you and looks after you, he also decides your fate in the eternity and your relationship with him there. No doubts this relationship differs from all your relationships with other creatures. Even people or angels who you will relate with them in the eternity will be at the heart of your relationship with God.

Hence examine your relationship with God, and discover its reality ...practically

Here, we ask some detailed questions:

1- Do you know God? Or you haven't known him yet. If you think you know him, what is the nature of this relationship, and how deep is it? And who is God to you?

2- Does God have a clear existence in your life? What is the kind of this relationship that connects you with Him?

3- Does God have the priority in all your concerns, busy life and love?

4- Is he everything to you, and not only the first? Or, there is something else more important in your life beside God? What is it? Do you struggle to get rid of everything that competes with God inside your heart so God stays alone?

Those are different levels in the relationship with God, where do you stand?

Here, please allow me to take these questions one by one and discuss them together.

1- Do you know God? How deep is this knowledge?

This question may sounds strange as everyone thinks he knows God. But maybe he know the existence of a God. I don't mean this superficial mental knowledge.

For even the devil knows that God exists. St. James the Apostle said "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe and tremble." (James 2:19) he means the dead unfruitful mental believe with no life in God.

Some existentialists know that there is a God in heaven. and they make fun of this knowledge, saying "Let the God be in heaven and leave the earth for us to enjoy".... Like a person who knows that electricity exists, but does not understand its nature? how it works, or how to use it widely...

So is it enough to know God through that superficial mental knowledge?

Does this knowledge come from the books, or by hearing the sermons and the education? Without testing this knowledge in your life and inside your heart

Do you hear about God, as you hear about people far away, whom you did not see, connect with, or associate with them? Do you Know God only inside the church and do you ignore him once you are outside? Is he the God who only found in theology institutes and creed books?

The worst kind of the mental knowledge is the one that without a relationship

That is why it is not enough.....it just points to God but you have to approach him, experience him through living with him. Henceforth, you recognize God who lives inside you not the One you read about in the books.

So do you feel God's existence inside you? or you live the philosophical tragedy

experienced by Saint Augustine before he truly knew God.

He recorded this tragedy in his confessions when he said “You were with me, but because of my misery, I was not with you”.....God was with him but he did not feel His presence.

Here we come to the next question;

2-Does God have a clear practical existence in your life?

Is God a mere idea? Or he is He a true being whom you feel? does he have a practical existence? How do you feel his existence, and his act inside you? Who is God for you? ... The question that Christ asked to his disciples still exists before us:

” Who do you think I am “?

What kind of relationship you have with God? Is it a relation of requests and demanding on your side and giving on God’s side? Is He just the cashier who gives you the money? Or the supplier who gives you supplies? Or he is just the helper who gives you the help that makes you feel comfort? And if you don’t feel this help, there is no relation??.....is he the one who solves your problems? And if didn’t solve it, there is no relation...

Is God to you just a means? Or desire for you?

Is he just a means to achieve your desires? And only take things from Him? Do you have a relationship with him outside the means areas? Do you set or talk to him without any intention to ask for something? Or you want to offer him something? You want to give him your heart, your love and your time while saying “From your hand, I have given you”

If you want to demand from God, do you want to take from him, his gifts Or his love and enjoyment? Truly, God goes around doing good but:

Do you love God or Only his blessings? God Himself or his gifts?

Do you rejoice when God gives you something but don’t rejoice when you do not feel his gifts? Do you rejoice with the gift not the giver?

When do you love God? When he gives? Do you love him even when you do not feel he gives? Because God ALWAYS gives whether you felt that or not.

Believe me, if we believed that God always gives, the whole life wouldn't be enough to thank him we only know His apparent gifts, what about his hidden gift?

If God command us to give in secret, he also gives in secret And if we searched for those gifts we would find these secret gifts far beyond our imagination.

But let us put the giving aside for now because our relationship should not be built on receiving gifts from Him.

Is your relationship with God a relationship of fear?

Do you walk with God and try to obey his commandments out of your fear? Do you fear his punishment and judgment? Are you afraid of that day in which you stand up before him to judge you? Are you afraid because God is watching you and examines your thoughts and intentions, and sees what's inside the heart and nothing is hidden from him?

No one fears God's punishment except the sinner, are you still in the stage and have not repented and reconciled with God? The bible says, "The Beginning of Wisdom is the fear of the Lord" Are you still in the beginning of the road and have not reached "Love which casts out fear" (1 john4:18).

Is your relationship with God as that of a guilty to a Judge?

Is he the master and you are a slave? God is the ruler who wants you to obey His rules and you are obliged to obey Him. He is the mighty God from whom no one can escape his hand and you have to follow His commandments weather you like it or not?

If you are that type, then you are still living the bondage of the law. and have not yet reached the life of grace, nor the life of purity whereby you love God's commandments and find them not hard.....Then you may say with David "The commandment of the lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (psalm 19:8)," Oh how I love your Law" (psalm119:97) "How sweet are your words to my taste! Yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (psalm119:103). Have you ever felt God's fatherhood at least when you pray "our father who art in heavens"?

What is your relationship with God? Is still under trial?

Have you not reached the point of being confident in God and his love and his

promises? Are you still testing him? Are you still trying him to see if he will answer what you ask for or not? And define your relationship according to that basis, whether to love him or become angry, to leave his church and his book, and start doubting everything you know about him?

You know God is love, do you trust that? Do you believe that all his plans for you are full of love even if it does not appear to be like that? What is your relationship with this love?

Are you full of that love towards God and his people? Therefore, you can feel that God is working with you?

God also is truth. What is your relationship with the truth? If you are far away from the truth, the you will be far away from God.

Does your relationship with God have love, fellowship and life in him?

Can you tell Him as mentioned in Songs of Solomon “I am for my beloved and my beloved is for me” (Songs 6:3)? I know you believe in God as the creator, the master, the Shepherd and the judge. But do you see him also as the lover of Mankind and specially the lover for your soul? Has your relationship with God reached the love level?

Does your love to God made him number one in your life? and the only one?

When you pray, do you say “When I knew you and tasted your love, all my emotions dwarfed and all kinds of love were light and superficial. But your love is the only deep love”

Does your love to God make you love to sit with him? and talk to him? and your prayers became filled with love and impassioned with your emotions to God . and likewise, are all the other spiritual means filled with that divine love? And became not just spiritual practices but an expression of the love inside your heart.....Blessed are you if you are this type of person. However if you are not, you had better wake up lest you should hear His voice rebuking you “These people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from me” (Isaiah 29:13).

God does not require anything from your relationship with him except love.

God didn't ask for anything except “My son, give me your heart....”

When Jesus Christ saw Peter after resurrection, he did not tell him "Why did you deny me? Or how did you weaken? Or what did you mean by insulting me? or what was it mean the phrase " I don't know the man "?"

However, he asked him only one question " Do you love me?" (John 21:15). Then Peter answered "Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you" then Jesus said "Feed my sheep" He does not want anything except that love.

Many exercises or one exercise?

I remember someone asked this question "Whenever I read the bible I discover a certain virtue, for which I try to train myself. Then I read again and discover another virtue and then another virtue and so on. And I am trying to train myself on all those many virtues.....but I am so confused because there are many. Advise me. Where I should start? Which one to postpone? because the exercises are so many I forget most of them"

THE TRUTH IS THAT GOD'S LOVE INCLUDES ALL THE VIRTUES

If you train yourself in God's love, then you will find yourself trained in all other virtues inside this love.

It is the only complete exercise which if you master you will not need other exercises.

A Love in which the heart gets deeply attached to God, forgets everything except him, and prefers him to every desire and lust.

Anyone might say "I love God" However we ask him "Does God have a priority in your heart? Is he the first in your heart and the only one?

Does God satisfy your heart in a way that you don't need any other love beside Him? If you have true love to God, certainly you'll feel satisfied.

True love to God, liberates the heart from everything.

Our love to God is very deep, suzette all kinds of love will become superficial. And God's love only will own the whole heart.

And all other kinds of love which do not proceed from God's love will cast away, so God becomes everything to us.

God's love shall free us from every lust, and desire that is against Him.

If the person is enslaved by a desire, then this desire ties and pulls him down and dominates him. Therefore, he loses a part of his true inner freedom.

How can one be freed from all other desires?

One is freed when a stronger and deeper love replaces all other kinds of love and casts them away. There is nothing stronger than God's true love because it liberates man from all of his desires.

And sees that anything outside God is not a pleasure.

God becomes the desire of the soul, and no other desire except him. that's why one of the saints said "Repentance is replacing one kind of love by another, replacing the love of the world, the flesh, and materialism by God's love".

Has God's love reached that level in your heart? Has it liberated you from all other desires?

Even in eternity, the eternal joys God.

There is no eternal Joy besides God. And any other joy besides God is not a true joy. The perfect eternal joy with God is what no eye have seen no ear heard. This is the real heaven to live with God and in God forever without any Obstacles.

God's love liberates man from all desires, and fears:

We mean by ((from all desires)) that no other desire can control him or enslaves him. As Saint Paul the Apostle said, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1Corinthians 6:12).

Very nice is that example of that bird that found a place with many grains, so it picks one grain or more, and flies without getting attached to that place or these grains.

Whoever loves God never feel afraid. Fear is connected to desires. The man fears if he desires something and fears that he may not reach it, or when he has it and fears to lose it.

However, if God's love has liberated you, then whom are you afraid of? But you may say with Saint Augustine "I sat on top of the world when I felt inside me

that I don't desire or fear anything“

Then your heart will be filled with strength, and you may say with Saint Paul the apostle “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?. Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans8:35-37)

God's children are free in their inner life. God's love has liberated them, entered their hearts, and granted them purity, self- deprivation, power and courage. It's removed all other desires and made them free as the light of the sun or the fresh air.

Has anyone asked you: who is God to you?

Hopefully you say “He is the beloved whose left hand is under my head, and whose right hand embraces me” (Songs of Solomon 2:6) he is the cohabitation that I cannot dispense, for by him I live, and I move, and exists...he is not a mere thought. He is existing in my spirit, in my blood and in my mind. He is everything to me.

O Lord you work in me, and I don't, you guide me and lead me, you work with me and inside me ...I may not comprehend you, but I feel you inside me with a spiritual comprehension, in a way that my tongue can't express it. I know you. but language words are too weak to explain this knowledge.

God, you are not outside me but inside me.

When I say your name, I do not only lift up my eyes to heaven, because you are not only up in heaven but you are inside me. I do not seek you outside.

It is through what the poet said “I closed up my eyes so I can see you” because you are above the senses and I'm trying slightly to get rid of my senses so I can find you... however if my mind is occupied with the senses, hearing, touch then they will hinder me from seeing you. “O Lord, I wish I forget all, and you alone will keep my life satisfied”

The problem of our father Adam was the additions that entered his heart and mind beside God.

In the beginning, God was everything in Adam's life.

But when he sinned, many things entered his heart.

Satan offered him the knowledge to love it instead of God.

He offered him the Love to be like God, he tempted him and Eve to become Gods like God (Genesis3:5).

He offered him a tree and a fruit to eat He let Adam see that the fruit is pleasant to eyes, and good to eat. Therefore, he added something new to his life. That is the pleasure of the senses, and body lust for eat.

The conclusion is that the Satan gave Adam new things to invade his heart and to become more important than God, so he would sacrifice God for itGod is no longer everything inside Adam's heart, but there is something competes with him inside the heart

God become one of many to Adam!

God no longer ruled over all of the love inside the heart, because the love of knowledge, love to be a God, love of food, and the lust of senses entered Adam's heart.

Briefly, "The self" competed with God in importance... as days and generation pass many other kinds of love have penetrated the heart at the expense of God's prime importance in the heart. The more one loves these matters the less is his love to God.

What is the cure then? No doubt, the cure is forsaking all these matters.

Are you ready to forsakeFor God's sake?

The rich ruler could not forsake his money, therefore he left the lord and went sad. our parents Adam And Eve could not forsake the temptation of knowledge and Divinity, so they lost their divine image.....Can we learn a lesson from this story in forsaking ?

If you could not forsake everything for him, can you start to give the tithes and the first-born to the Lord? Can we forsake being busy one day a week to devote it to God?

Can you forsake some of the enjoyment which fills your heart so your heart may be clear for God? It is easy to forsake many kinds of food to give your soul a chance to rise above material and body to connect with God.

It is important to be ready to forsake something for God's sake

If God has the priority in your heart, then you can forsake anything for Him.

You can forsake everything, because everything will be trifle and lose value besides God.

You know that one day you will leave everything; you will leave the whole world, so it is better for you to leave anything willingly than leave it unwillingly ...This is the lesson that saint Antony had learned when he looked to his dad's corpse Anything you forsake something for God. you prove that your love to God has exceeded that thing. You also prove that your love to God is greater than anything.

The most important thing you forsake for God's sake is [yourself]

Many people focus on themselves. Self is the most important thing, it is the center of their thoughts. Man's concern focuses completely on himself: how am I doing now? What I want to be? And When...? What are the disabilities? How can I win? And how to be superior? How to build myself, how to raise it.....my position, my knowledge, my reputation, my money, my pleasures, my freedom and my dignitywith details that has no end.

The Self takes the first place and not God ...

While you are thinking of yourself, you may forget God, or may not give him any time or attention, because all your attention focused on the self, it becomes easy to break God's commandments to build yourself up and please it by the way you like it.

What was the problem of the (existentialists) except “the self”?

The existentialist wants to feel his existence, and enjoy it according to his own means, by indulging in the pleasures of this world, and by having complete freedom with no obstacles, law, tradition or divine commandments!

He may see God limiting that freedom, therefore he may reject God for the self and enjoyment of himself, this pleasure resembles what is written in the bible “He that finds his life, shall lose it” (Matthew 10:39).

The motto of the existentialist is: it is better that God doesn't exist, So I can

exist, and enjoy my existence ...!

That's how we see that the self, lost its relationship with God.

This example is one of the worst example. They may look like Epicureans whose goal is enjoyment that they would say: "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we shall die". Likewise do all those who walk according to the desires of the flesh and body lusts.

There are many other examples for the dominion of the self:

King Herod, who lived during Jesus birth, he did not rejoice when Jesus was born nor the upcoming salvation, but he thought about himself, how would be another king for Jews beside him. "The self" led him to order the killing of all the Children of Bethlehem! Therefore, he did not rejoice the birth like the wise men or the shepherds did. Whose "Self" did not hinder them from God.

King Herod who killed Saint James the apostle and imprisoned Peter, when he sat on his throne arrayed in royal apparel and made an oration unto the people. while they kept shouting "The voice of a God and not a of a man" he was concerned with the glory of the "self" and didn't give glory to Godhe lost his life "Then immediately the angel of the lord smote him because he did not give God the glory and he was eaten by worms and died" (acts12:21-23).

Pilate also cared about himself and not for the Lord Jesus. Although he said "I find no fault in him", he sent Jesus to death, because he cared more about his position, and was afraid from Caesar because of the Jews accusations, while he judged to set him free...! Moreover, he washed his hand saying," I am innocent of the blood of this righteous man"

Thus, the self was able to overthrow kings and governors. And perish them!

Self also perished chief priests and the teachers of the people:

Those who delivered Christ to death were envy. Because they feared of losing their positions because of his popularity, the Pharisees therefore said among themselves "You see that you are accomplishing nothing. Look, the world has gone after him" (John12:19).

For the "Self" sake that was drifted from envy, they left God completely. They paid money to Judah to betray his master, and they brought false witnesses whom their words did not match. They fabricated false accusations they know it

is not true. They paid bribes to the soldiers to say that His disciples came at night to steal the body while they were asleep.

They did all that because they loved themselves, their positions, presidency and fame, but they lost the Lord.

They never thought of the kingdom of God, also the prophecies of salvation and redemption, they never cared about. They completely ignored teaching the people and leading them to the faith. All that concerned them was themselves, and how to exalt their self-image in front of people and how to destroy that rival even if he was the Messiah.

John the Baptist rebuked all those Pharisees because he didn't care about his Ego "Self"

He got rid of every attention given to him and directed it to Jesus saying "He who is coming after me is mightier than I , whose sandal strap I am not worthy to carry" (Matthew 3:11), He also said "He who has the bride is the bridegroom , but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease". (John3:29-30)

All the glories surrounded John the Baptist, but he never allowed it to enter his heart. His "self" never occupied his heart, but God was. Whom He came to prepare the way for the Lord. That is why he denied himself, and said about the Lord "He who comes from above is above all" (John 3:31).

Self-love leads to envy. And envy destroys love.

Love does not envy. When one envies, he concentrates on himself, and loses the love toward the one he envies. If he loses love, he loses God, for "God is love".

By envy, Josef's brothers sold him as a slave and betrayed their father. They did not put God before them. All that because they loved themselves and refused that Josef would be better than them.

Beware that envy or anger would destroy love from your heart, lest you lose God, who does not dwell in a heart free from love.

"If you cannot love your brother whom you see, how can you love God whom you do not see? (1 John 4:20).

Self wants to exalt same way it wants to enjoy...

When the “Self” proud, it rejects God from the heart.

The clearest example for that is the fall of Satan who said in his heart ”I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most high” (Isaiah 14:13-14). The result was that he fell into Hades. His self-pride made him compete even with God in his divine Glory!

The builders of Babel tower also were lost because of the “Self”.

Their selves wanted exalt over all those living on earth. They said “Come , let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heaven; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth” (Genesis 11:4). The result was God made them speak different languages and scattered them. However, he who puts himself in front of God’s unlimited greatness, sees that he is only dust and ashes and therefore he feels humble and broken hearted, but meanwhile God will raise him.

No wonder that the “Self” had a war against the saints also.

The twelve apostles were also tempted and they were thinking who would sit on the right of the lord and who sits on His left, and who will be the first!

Lord Jesus who knows that “Self” ego will deviate man from God, told them “Let not this thought be in you. Whoever wants to be first, let him be last and a servant to all”. He gave them an example when he bent and washed their feet. They also rejoiced that the devils submitted to them saying “Even the devils obeys us by your name” the lord told them “Do not rejoice for that” real joy shall not be the ego “Self”, but in cleaving to God and His love, hence our names shall be written in the Kingdom of God.

The “Self” also fought a great prophet like Jonah

He was concerned about himself, his ego and his word.

Therefore, when God ordered him instruct the people of Nineveh that God would destroy their city, Jonah knew that God is merciful and would forgive them, so he fled from the face of the lord and disobeyed him. Therefore, he bumped with God for the sake of himself.

And when the whale spat him out, he preached in Ninevah and the people repented, he was not happy by this great salvation, he was focusing on his dignity, on himself, on his word that wouldn't happen, so he sat sad. Then God told him "Is it right for you to be angry?" (Jonah 4:4) Jonah said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death" (Jonah 4:9).

Thus, Jonah's will was against God's will, and his sentiments against God's sentiments. All that was because of his concentration on himself "His Ego"!

If it weren't for God who looked for him, he would have lost.

Also Job the righteous perfect man, was fought by his ego.

He was perfect, righteous and straight, but his problem was that he knew that he was is righteous. He said "I am blameless, yet I do not know myself. Though I were righteous, my own mouth would condemn me; though I were blameless, it would prove me perverse" (Job 9:20-21). Therefore, it was mentioned "He was righteous in his own eyes" (Job 32:1). He blamed God a lot when he said" Do not condemn me; show me why you contend with me. Does it seem good to you that you should oppress the work of your hands, and shine on the counsel of the wicked?" (Job 10:2-3), also he blamed his friends harshly.

Job was tempted till he was freed from his "self", till Job got humbled and finally said "Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand over my mouth" (Job40:4) "Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I didn't know... You said, "I will questions you and you shall answer me' Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:3-6).

When Job reached the dust and ashes "The Lord then raised his face and restored his captivity" (Job 32:9-10).

Man has to be free from his self, or God has to liberate him from it.

God freed Job from his pride, money, health, children and the respect of men. He freed him from his ego and from his dependence on his understanding and wisdom. Finally Job put his hand on his mouth and repented in dust and ashes saying "I am vile, what shall I answer you?" then God removed the temptation.

Did you see how dangerous is the self?

When one gets over-confident in himself, his intelligent, thinking, and his

abilities. He will brag about himself and his acts and won't demand the advice of others as Job did (Job 29). The bible says "There is a way seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (proverbs14:12).

How much troubles did our father Jacob suffer because of his attention to his "Self"!

To receive his father's first-born blessings, he used human bad ways like lying and deceiving. Then he was exposed to the anger of his brother, and became frightened and had to escape.

When the "Self" wants to fulfill its desires, it will deceive and loses its spiritual nature, and go away from God. Moreover, many times it becomes a goal and target.

God becomes a means to fulfill the self and its goals

God is no longer the Goal that a man would sacrifices himself for him, but on the other hand, the self becomes the goal, and God is the means who builds that self.

Even all the prayers become concentrated on requests and demands of that "Self", even if it contradicts with God's will! Then, prayers and glorification of God disappear, and the love element inside it disappears...

Jesus gave us an example of self-abandonment.

In his incarnation, we see that wonderful phrase "He emptied Himself" To what extent? To the extent that He became a slave. He obeyed till death, death on the cross" (Philippians 2:7-9)

On the cross, he sacrificed himself a burnt sacrifice to please the father and to keep his divine justice. He also gave himself as a sinful sacrifice to save the humanity and carried their sins and for their sake "He was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12).

During his life on earth, He said to the father "Not my will, but your will" presenting himself on the altar of the obeying.

Saint Paul the apostle learned to empty himself when he said "Not I live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20).

Who can Say with Saint Paul "Not I"

I wish if we can examine our relationship with God and let God become everything to us. God who has all our emotions, all the love, all the heart and our hopes focus on him. Prefer Him to everything else. And to find our enjoyment and pleasure in him, so we may sing with prophet Jeremiah saying “The lord is my portion, says my soul, therefore, I hope in him!” (Lamentations 3:24).

[2]
The lord is my portion

“The lord is my portion, says my soul” (Lamentations 3:24)

We all love this beautiful phrase, we memorize it and always say it, but who can live it? Who takes it as a spiritual principle that spares him many commandments?

Do you accept that God be your portion in this life?

Many may consider home, Family, wife, children, money, authority and fame as their portion, and they do not mind adding God to all these!

However, to have God as our sole portion (Psalms 16:5) and to be satisfied with God and to feel that we do not need anything beside Him (Psalms 23:1) and sing saying “You are my portion” (Psalms 119:57). It is not easy for everyone to say or to live it.

God gave us good examples for that in His Holy Bible.

God gave us an example in the priests of the Old Testament

Not only the priests, but all the Levite Tribe who devoted their lives to serve the Lord.

Portions were distributed between all tribes but “Therefore, Levi has no portion nor inheritance with his brethren; the Lord is his inheritance, just as the lord your God promised him” (Deuteronomy 10:9).

Therefore, they were named (Ekleros) which mean the portion, for God was their portion, and they also were a Portion to the Lord. God was enough for them, they did not need anything. Their lives became a portion to God. Nothing occupies their minds except serving God.

Are you the same? Is God your portion? If you are not one of those devoted people, at least examine your relationship with God in the light of the next examples:

If your life is not a portion for God, is Sunday his portion?

If your life is not a portion to the Lord, do you give Him that only day of every week? Do you devote Lord’s Day? Only one day every week “That is, do you not do any of your daily routine work according to God’s commandment?” (Deuteronomy 5:14). Do you devote to prayer, spiritual reading and serving the

Lord and enjoying him? Or you have other concerns that keeps you busy.

If you cannot give one day to the Lord, then this is an inclusive confession that God is not completely your portion. And if He were your portion, you could have find him a time, and control your concerns, and the Lord's day would have been set for Him.

Another test for God's portion in you, is prayer.

If you do not keep your prayers regularly, then God is not your portion. And He does not fill your heart nor satisfies you.

Therefore, when you pray, you find many thoughts come to your mind and you think when your prayer will end? So you may have time for these thoughts, which you consider them more important than the prayer.

If these thoughts were mere temptations from the devil, then you would have been annoyed and you would have continued praying and found enjoyment in doing so.

But if those matters roughly pulls you out from your prayers, so you hurry up to finish. This is another evidence that God is not your Portion yet.

Whoever choose the Lord to be his portion, if he stands to pray, he does not like to stop praying. and forgets about all other concerns, If he remembers them, they seems to be trifles which don't deserve to occupy his heart or his mind.

Here we move to another point in the test of God's portion.

Whoever choose the Lord to be his portion, finds pleasure and enjoyment in God.

He rejoices in the lord, he enjoys sitting with Him, talking to him and say with Prophet David "I will lift up my hands in your name. My soul, shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness" (Psalms 63).

Man's joy with God, pushes him to devote more time to God, and makes God enter deep to his heart, his love, his thinking and concerns.

However, some people find joy and delights in carnal matters. This proves that

they have not taken God to be their portion. If this is the case, let me ask:

What is your relationship with God?

Do you have any relationship with him at all?

Where is God in your life?

Is He on the margin of your life?

How much do you exist in him?

Is God on the side of your life? Or in the deep inside of your life?

Is he all your life? How do you see him?

Is He one of the hopes? Or He is all what you hope?

Is He a part of your concern? Or He is all the concerns?

Is God a theory you read in books? Or Is He just a mere teaching you learned in the church? Or is He a practical existence in your life?

Be honest with yourself and do not deceive yourself

I say that because many people pray, fast or take communion, but God is still at the corner of their lives, not in the depth. This man may fast and breaks the bread, and practices all the spiritual means but God still on the side of his life ...!

When will God be the whole life? When will we say with Paul the apostle?

“For me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21)?

Some people's concerns might be family, position, money, marriage, children and luxurious pleasures, IF they don't have it all, people might say “Those people are not enjoying life”.

But who says “For me to live is Christ” can continue to say “And to die is gain”.

He can also say, “I am hard pressed between two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.” (Philippians1:23).

Moreover, he can say “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or

sword? As it is written “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the laughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”. (Romans 8:35-37)

Another test of your relationship with God, is the commandment that says:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart” (Deuteronomy 6:5)

Probably, you may love God from your heart. But do you love him from all your heart? Do you give him the whole heart and the whole love? Who could do this commandment?

Who is the man that all his feelings and emotions are focused on God? God is his portion here on earth and there in the eternity. God fills his life, his mind and his heart.

When God rules all your heart, then the whole world become like a (garbage can) with no value at all. And all the pleasures of the world would look as Solomon the wise saw it before “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and grasping for the wind” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14)Money, prospect, fame, all are vanity.... beauty, greatness, pleasure, home, children,...all are vanity.

God become the all, and nothing beside him.

Sit quietly by yourself and examine your relationship with God well.

What is your position on the God’s map?

What is God’s position in your life and your feelings? Ask yourself: Does God satisfy me entirely? Am I happy with that satisfaction? Do I feel that I lack nothing? Is my heart happy with God? Am I happy because I found him? Do I sing everyday a new song ...Is the name of the Lord beloved and on my lips?

Is God my dreams at night, and my hopes at daylight?

Is he my flammable passion? Is that Him who makes my heart peep? Is He my life? What is exactly His position inside me?

You need to see where are you going, do you have a goal, and is God your goal? Is He really your portion that you are satisfied with? Is he always so? Or from time to time you may desire other goals that replace God in your heart and become your portion in life?

Look to David, so you can see what was God's place in his life:

David says, “The lord is my strength and song” (Psalms 118:14) and “The lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” (Psalms 23:1). Therefore, the Lord is David's strength, song and his shepherd. And what else he says, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1)

And continue that God is his shelter, shield and buckler, his lord and God, Moreover, he tastes the Lord, and sees how sweet is He ... God is everything to him.

All those who take God as their portion find him everything to them.

They do not fight for themselves, for the bible tells them, “The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace” (Exodus14:14).

They do not talk for themselves “For it is not you who speak, but the spirit of your Father who speaks in you. (Matthew 10:20). Also “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries will not be able to contradict or resist” (Luke 21:15)

“Always leads them in triumph” (2 Corinthians2:14) He covers them with his wings. He is the Father, the beloved, the friend and the companion on the road.

He is the only heart guaranteed in his love and sincerity.

We can guarantee neither emotions nor sincerity of people in all circumstances, nor guarantee their steadiness in love, as they may leave their first love.

However, God is the only One guaranteed, “If we are faithless, he remains faithful” (2 Timothy2:13) If a mother forgets her baby, God never forgets us, For He has inscribed us on the palm of His hands, even all hairs of our heads are all counted and none falls without His permission.... How couldn't we love such God? no God like him among Gods ...

Is God the source of blessings, or he is the blessing?

A beginner in the spiritual life and in his relationship with God may look to God as a source of the blessings, and God really is. But whoever takes God as his portion, sees that God is the blessing himself and the only blessing, He does not look for pleasure outside Him or waits for a reward from him, but sees God as

the real pleasure that he enjoys.

He is everything in eternity. And it is not a heaven without him.

He is the tree of life upon whom we nourish, He is the hidden Manna, and the bread of life, the water of life that all whom who drinks from it never thirsts forever. He is the life itself, whoever abides in Him abides in life. He is the truth, whoever knows Him knows the truth and the truth will liberate him. He is the True Light who enlightens everyone. He is the Wisdom and the true pleasure.

God will not grant us certain thing to please us in the eternity, but He himself is our pleasure. Whoever approaches him, will approach happiness. And whoever tastes Him will taste happiness and love.

Are we going to be busy in eternity or have pleasure in anything besides God? Definitely no. God, who is our portion here, will be our portion there.

How can we always enjoy him, this is the secret of the kingdom of heaven?

This is what never “comes in a human’s heart”. For all what we enjoy here on earth in our relationship with God, is not comparable with the Glory that will be revealed to us, when we know him the real knowledge and grow in His knowledge, as the Son said to the Father "And this is the eternal life, that they may know you" (John 17:3)

If God is your portion, you could not mistake...

If God filled all your heart and thoughts, and if He is all your love, all your Goal, then how can you sin? it doesn't make sense, because sin is deviation from God's love to another love against him.

However, if God is your portion, goal and hopes, and the desire of your heart, then you cannot sin, and the evil cannot touch you “Whoever has been born of God does not sin. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest” (1 John 3:9-10)

Your love to God never leaves a space for any sin, then you do not need many practices for many commandments, but His love is enough, and it is your only practice.

The difference between Law and Grace appears...

Whoever is still under the law, struggles hardly to obey the commandment, but if he who entered the scope of the divine love, and God became his portion, so love will liberate him from the dominion of the law, so he will do all the good through his love for God. And through this love, he will love the virtue, and the commandments will not be heavy anymore, and don't need an effort....

The grace did not override the commandment, but all commandments becomes an expression of God's love. And became implementation of love. It is no longer orders to do this and do not do that. God says, "Who loves me, keep my commandments". It is a natural result of love.

Thus, if God become your portion, you will not falter between two opinions.

Do not be with God in a day, and far away from Him in another day, the heart which is steadfast in God's love, will note shake or deviate from his divine goal. That's why God says, "Abide in my love" (John 15:9) "Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine" (John 15:4).

Are you like that branch abiding in the vine?

The Juice of the vine goes in its veins and grants it life. Through this abiding, the branch resembles the vine in everything and gives fruits of the vine itself.

The vine becomes the portion of the branch, if it is separated from the vine, it will be separated from life, and become dry and will be thrown in fire.

But due to its abiding in the vine, it will be refreshed, live, and keep growing. That is why God said, "I am the vine, and you are the branches" (John 15:5).

If God is your portion, he will be inside you...

Like vine juice inside the branch, like what saint Paul said, "Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16).

If God inside you, you will not search for him outside "If anyone says to you look, here is the Christ or there don't believe it" (Matthew 24:23). He is inside you "I in them" (John 17: 23).

If God is your portion, do you feel his existence inside you?

Are you a “Thephorus”, which means the carrier for God?

Saint Agnatus from Antioch was thus called. And so, every true believer whose heart the Lord dwells and feels his residency, and feel that wherever he goes or stays ...He is a carrier for God.

I hope you pray saying, “Lord, be my only portion, and I do not want any other portion beside you. Take everything I have, and give me yourself, give me the privilege of your knowledge. I do not want to request many things, I need only You. I want everything to be worthless, and you become the only worthwhile whom I care for. So I may love you my Lord who dwells in my heart, and not only that God who I read about in books.

Examples of saints who have taken God as their portion:

A - Saint peter the apostle, He said, “We have left all and followed you” (Matthew 19:27) expressing the condition of all apostles, who left their families, their homes, and their work, and followed God, who became their portion.

B - Saint Paul, who became one of those Apostles. In his beautiful phrase he said, “For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ, and be found in him” (Philippians 3:8). In St.Paul eye’s everything become worthless beside God, Therefore he said “But What things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my lord” (Philippians 3:7).

C - The psalms says to every soul who became a bride to the Lord ”Listen O daughter, consider and incline your ear, forget your own people also, and your father’s house; so the king will greatly desire your beauty, he is your Lord, worship him. (Psalms 45:10-11).

D - Our Mother Rebecca, who left her country and family and travelled with Eliezer the Damascene, to live with Isaac, is a symbol for human soul who leaves everything to live with Christ, as her portion.

Here we remember a beautiful phrase that Prophet David said, “And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you” (Psalms 73:25).

[3]

**“And there is none upon earth that I desire besides
you” (Psalms73:25).**

Whoever loves God deeply, reaches the level of satisfying with God

God fills his heart, his mind, emotions satisfies him, Hence he says with David the prophet “I shall not want”(Psalms 23:1). And feels that he cannot add anything besides God in his heart, therefore he lives happily with God and says in love “And there is none upon earth that I desire besides you”.

That's exactly how our saint fathers lived, and God filled their lives.

David the Prophet as an example;

He was a king with all authority and glory that a king had at that time and he was an army commander, a judge of the people, head of a large family, he was respected by everyone.

It seems that he did not lack any of the pleasures of life. However, none of these filled his heart, but he left all that behind and said, “one thing I ask of the lord... ‘ What is that one thing that you lack, O great king? He says “One thing I have desired of the lord, that will I seek; That I may dwell in the house of the lord all days of my life, To behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple” (Psalms 27:4). There, In that holy place, he asked the lord saying; “Your face Lord I will seek, do not hide You face from me (Psalms 27:8-9).

Is that your only request? What about the kingdom, the army, the court, the family and the wealth? No Lord, “There is none upon earth that I desire besides you”

“O God, you are my God, early will I seek you. My soul thirsts for You” (Psalms 63:1) “I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness” “Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise you” “When I remember you on my bed, I meditate on You in the night watches” (Psalms63)

This is the love, which fills the heart, David says

“Beloved is your name, O Lord! It is my meditation the whole day” (Psalms 118:13)

What about your responsibilities David? It can't take me from you Lord “Seven times a day I praise you” (Psalms 119:164). "At midnight I will rise to give thanks to you" (Psalms 119:62) “My eyes are awake through the night watches,

that I may meditate on Your word” (Psalms 119:148) “How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth ” (Psalms 119:103).

Truly who loves God, sees everything smaller

David was not tempted by his palace or his thrown, but said “How lovely is your tabernacle, O lord of hosts, my soul longs yes, even faints for the courts of the lord.....Blessed are those who dwell in your house. They will still be praising you” (Psalms 84:1-4) “I was glad when they said to me let us go into the house of the lord” (Psalms 122:1) “I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness” Why? “For a day in your courts is better than a thousand” (psalms 84:10).

Truly “There is none upon earth that I desire besides you”

This phrase is a true expression of the fervent heart and its relationship with God. Let us take another example;

Our father Abraham was called by this test

When God told him “Get out of your country, from your family and from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you” (Genesis 12:1). Abraham left his country, his family, and his father’s house and said to the Lord in his heart “There is none upon earth that I desire besides you”. He followed God as the apostle said, “And he went out, not knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8) He was satisfied following the Lord.

He did not care about the place he was going, what is that place? Or, where is it? He was only thinking of the Lord who will follow him.

When his father “Terah” accompanied him, he was delayed in Haran (Genesis 11:31), and when “Lot” his nephew, accompanied him, a fight broke out between his shepherds and Lot’s shepherds. When Lot was separated from him and chooses the most fertile land in the area, the blessings began to multiply.

How can you live Abram, when “Lot” “chose for himself all the plain of Jordan” (Genesis 13:11) and left you in the wilderness? Abram says “I am with God, and I do not desire anything from the world. The Lord and His grace are sufficient for me”.

The Lord blessed him and told him “Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are –northward, southward eastward and westward; for all the land

which you see I give to you and your descendants forever" (Genesis 13:14-15). Abram lived as a stranger but with the Lord.

His pilgrimage was represented in his life in the tent, and his relationship with God was represented in the altar He built in everywhere.

This strange man, satisfied with God, saved Lot from captivity (Genesis 14) "The king of Sodom went out to meet himthen Melchizedek king of Salem ...And he blessed him" (Genesis 14:17-18)

Was the principle of "I desire none from the earth besides You" ever shaken a little inside Abraham's heart? Yes, he wished to have a son.

When he wished a son, he has been tested...

Hagar (Genesis 16), Keturah (Genesis 25). Even when Isaac was born from Sarah, another test came, God tested him in Isaac.

God told Him "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love.....And offer him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2)

Abraham who lived with the principle "I desire none from the earth besides you", because he loved God with all his heart, he rose very early in the morning and took his son Isaac, wood and knife and he tied Isaac to the wood and took the knife to offer his son as a sacrifice. Therefor God blessed Abraham, as he loved Him more than his only son. And all his generations were blessed.S

Abraham's heart focused on God more than in Isaac.

The Christ said "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me" (Matthew 10:37), Our father Abraham applied this commandment long time ago before Christ said it.

God meant to him more than family, country and his only son. It is a virtue to love one's family, but it was not God's partners inside Abraham's heart.

Yes, inside the love of God, but not beside it.

Spiritual man loves all people as a part of his love to God, but he does not love anyone who competes in God' love or sit beside God in the heart.

No one competes with God in love

True love toward God require self-deprivation, the bible says “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.....and the world is passing away, and the lust of it” (1 John2:15-17) also “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4), No one can serve two masters or worship two Gods either God or the world the bible says, **“What communion has light with darkness” (2 Corinthians 6:14).**

God is the true light. Everything outside Him is darkness. Everything against God and His love is darkness, and we who are invited to be the sons of the Light, do not participate in the acts of darkness.

Darkness varies in degrees, the worst is the sin, the trivia and materialistic are also darkness if they separate us from God. They should not enter our hearts.

We want God alone to remain in our hearts, beside Him we desire none upon earth, we fight every lust and every thought that interferes with God’s love, as we say in the song

“I have no opinion nor thought or lust except following You”.

God’s children may own money but money doesn’t own them.

They may “Use the world as not misusing it for the form of this world is passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31). Hence, love of the world should not be put beside God’s love.

Another example, Lot and his wife...

Lot could not reach the degree in which he loves God from all his heart saying “There is none upon earth that I desire besides You”, That is why he picked the fertile land where he could live with God! What was the result? He was captivated (Genesis 14), he lost all his possessions. Then Abraham rescued him, but he did not learn the lesson. He tortured himself day by day with the sights of the wicked. Finally, he lost everything in the fire of Sodom.

Here Lot’s repentance appeared and he came back to God. When the two angels called him to go out of the city and run to the mountains (Genesis 19), he didn’t say “My possessions, my cattle, my money and my family” But finally complied and said to God “There is none upon earth that I desire besides you”.

He left Sodom empty handed, owning nothing, satisfied with God who will start with him again from nothing.

But Lot's wife whom the phrase of "There is none upon earth that I desire besides you" was not inside her heart, She looked behind to the world which her heart was attached to, Therefore she became a pillar of salt, and became a lesson to who puts another desire beside God.

Disciples of the Christ and his apostles, are one of the beautiful examples.

Simon and Andrews who "Immediately left their nets and followed him" (Mark 1:18), John and James the sons of Zebedee who "Left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants, and went after him" (Mark 1:20) and Matthew who left tax collecting and didn't care of his responsibilities. And others forsook their homes and their wives, every one of them in their hearts were saying "There is none upon earth I desire besides you". Also, Paul the apostle who forsook his great position and his power and bared the pain for the sake of Christ saying, "For whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish that I may gain Christ" (Philippians 3:8). Hence, he was so attached to the phrase "There is none upon earth I desire besides you".

None of them regretted after they left everything.

Everyone's feelings were: How I shall desire anything from the world, after this Great Light has shone in my heart, and after I knew God who is superior to everything, whom I give all of my heart to. so, I became his and he became mine.

The monks, and the merchant of pearls.

The monks who lived pious lives, the life of self-deprivation, did not own anything, but they vowed the live of voluntary poverty, and they rose above the level of the home and children and above the materialism, they wandered in the wilderness, for their great love to Christ their king, they said, "There is none upon the earth that I desire beside You".

Among them, were the princes who left the kingdom, like Maximus and Domadius, and some forsook their great position like saint Arsenios the teacher of king's sons. Also, rich people left their richness like the great saint Anthony. And married people who left their wives like saint Ammon and Saint Boulos the Simple...They all said to God "There is none upon the earth that I desire beside You".

May be this reminds us with the parable of the merchant which Christ said about him “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls. Who when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46). This pearl of great price is life with God and his enjoyment, for which the wise man sells everything he has and say to God you are enough to me, I do not desire anything besides you.

How beautiful is the motto of the monks “Keep away from everything to be united with the One”.

Which mean that the heart dissolves from everything, and everyone to be attached to the One who is God. God satisfies him and fill his being with happiness and joy. That is how our fathers lived with their thoughts occupied with God only.

Martha and Mary....

Jesus Christ visited them in their home. Martha was busy cooking, thinking she is doing something good for Him. But Mary sat at his feet listening to him. She focused all her emotions in him saying “There is none upon earth I desire besides you” the Christ blessed her by saying “She had chosen the good portion which will not be taken away from her.

But the Lord also said to Martha “You are worried and troubled about many things but one thing is needed” (Luke 10:41). May be Martha resembles what the spiritual writer wrote:

“You have spent your life serving the lord’s house, when will you serve the lord of the house?”

Even service should not keep us busy from the relation with the Lord, as we will explain in the next pages. Now we will move to another example, which is:

The Prophet Moses between the palace and the wilderness...

Prophet Moses lived in a royal palace, and he was considered as a prince, the son of the pharaoh’s daughter, he was surrounded by richness, power. But all that never entered his heart, for his heart was attached to God’s kingdom. That is

why he put in his heart to live for God and say to the lord “There is none upon earth that I desire besides You”.

“Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater than the treasures in Egypt” (Hebrews11:25, 26). Hence, he lived with God as a shepherd in the desert and as a lost with the people in Sinai, forsaking the pleasures of life in the pharaoh’s palace, as Moses didn’t desire anything but God.....so he deserved to be the speaker with God. “A faithful in all my house, I speak with him face to face even plainly ... And he sees the form of the lord” (Numbers 12:7). That is how his relationship with God became....

And because he didn’t desire anything besides God, He Had God himself, talking to him 40 days on the mountain, making him a intercessor between God and His people. The Lord accepted his intercession for them and made Moses shine on the Mount Tabor in the transfiguration.

Solomon’s sins and his return.

Solomon was a great king, God granted him greatness and royal dignity more than anyone before him in Jerusalem, he Gave him a wisdom. Even though Solomon didn’t say to God “There is none upon earth that I desire besides You” but on the contrary he said “I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyardsI made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit in them... I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.... I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes I had greater possessions born in my house, Yes I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me... I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them” (Ecclesiastes2:4-10)

Solomon was happy with his labor, whose source was not God, nor his love and fellowship. And in all this, he was sinned. Solomon’s salvation became surrounded by a big question mark ...! What about his labor? It became vanity, and his story reminded us with Lot in Sodom.

Lot had wasted the harvest of all those years in the fire of Sodom, He had been there seeking the fertile land, and it meant forsaking the altar of God and His fellowship. working hard and fighting for the wealth, living in corrupted society

with its stumbling blocks, and marriages to wicked people. All that was burned by fire. And Lot went out with nothing, exactly like all Solomon's labor, he ended with "All was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11). Truly the relationship with God is solid and eternal. It is the beneficial in this life and the life to come "What does a man gain if he wins the whole world and loses himself?".

The greatest human example is the example of the Martyrs.

They loved God, not only more than the pleasures of the earth, but more than life itself, so they gave their lives for God's sake. confident that this life extends with him in the eternity. Therefore, they forsake the world with all that is in it and did not desire anything from it, Not even to live in this world.

Whoever loves God and satisfied with him, become prepared to forsake anything and everything for Him.

The Lord compensate him in duplicates ...

God says "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred fold, and inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29), This promise concerns the reward, However, those who forsake anything for God, They do that not for the reward but for their love to God who rules their hearts, making them pious everything and said to God "There is none upon earth we shall desire besides you"

This verse does not apply only to love, but also applies to help.

With this verse the weak, afraid Jacob could meet his brother Esau the strong and violent who had four hundred men with him (Genesis 32:6).

Jacob did not have an army like this, He had nothing but his wives, children and his male and female servants. But he had this prayer, "Deliver me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau; for I fear him, lest he come and attack me and the mother with the children. For you said 'I will surely treat you well, and make your descendants as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude'" (Genesis 32:11-12). I depend on your power, and "There is none upon earth I shall desire besides you"

Spiritual man sees that God is his shepherd, his protector and his keeper.

If a problem arises, he turns it to God, who solves it.

He says to God, "Who am I? what is my strength? what is my intelligence to solve my problems? You know my problems better than I do.

You know the apparent and hidden problems and those that are coming on the way.

Through your wisdom, you can solve every problem. Moreover, by your love you want to, because I really trust that you love me more than I love myself, and you take care of me more than I take care for myself. I'm a child in front of you "The Lord preserves the simple" (Psalms 116:6)

That's why I leave everything in your hands, and have comfort with faith, trusting that you have plenty of solutions, confident that "Unless the lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it, Unless the lord guards the city, the watch man stays awake in vain" (Psalms 127:1)

O my lord, as long as you see my labor, this is enough for me. You are the keeper for all; you keep the Justice on earth, you comforting the worried people. You carry our pains; I do not worry about my problems. But I leave it between your hands and "There is none upon earth I desire beside you".

Whoever meets God, does not need external strength, his strength is God Himself.

Thus, he says with the David "The lord is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation" (Psalms 118:14).

His strength is God himself, not the world weapons, not human help "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psalms 118:8)

David says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. The lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Psalms 46:1, 7)

This is the kind of person who sees his strength is God himself, he does not trust himself or his talents, intelligence, or his Possibilities, and he does not depend on man or human plans, but God satisfies him, fights for him and with God he conquers. And God leads him toward his victory.

He does not think how to speak as God talks in him "For it is not you who speak, but the spirits of your father who speaks in you" (Matthew 10:20). And do not

defend himself "Stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord. The Lord will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace" (Exodus 14:13, 14).

God is your strength, and he is your salvation. Whoever is satisfied with God needs no another force but he says to the Lord "There is none upon earth I desire besides you".

With this principle David the young man stepped to fight Goliath.

King Saul offered David weapons and armor. But he didn't use them. He said to Goliath "You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the lord of hosts" (1 Samuel 17:45). O yes Lord, I don't have any weapons like him, but I have your name and your strength, There is none upon earth I desire besides you....David fought with this divine strength that spared him all the weapons of war, "For the battle is the Lord's" (1 Samuel 17:47) and God is the Conqueror in the battles.

The lord Taught Gideon a lesson in similar situation.

He gathered 32 thousand men to fight the army of Midian. But the lord saw that is too many.

"And the Lord said to Gideon, the people who are with you, are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands, lest Israel claim glory for itself against me, saying 'My own hand has saved me'" (Judges 7:2). God decreased the Number and purified it until it reached three hundred only, Gideon fought with the 3 hundred and won. So that they know that the power is from God, as long as God with him he shall not need army force to win, Therefore, there was none upon earth that he desired beside God.

With God, there is no need for human wisdom.

Often, Wise men depend on their wisdom and their understanding rather than God who says "Lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5).

That's why if you walk with God don't seek your intelligence or your wisdom because God "Has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty That no flesh should glory in his presence" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29)

Prophet David who said, "There is none upon earth I desire besides you" also

said before in the same psalm “I was so foolish and ignorant, I was like a beast before You. Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with your counsel, afterward receive me to glory” (Psalms 73:22-24).

It is not my wisdom that guides me to you. But you hold my hand guiding me with your counsel, I shall not desire anything besides You.

Saint Mark the apostle.

He came to Egypt to preach the gospel without any human help or human facilities. There were no churches there, no believers or financial resources.

On the contrary, there were many obstacles from solid religions and strong philosophies and roman power but saint Mark who entered Alexandria walking with a torn sandal, said to the lord “There is none upon earth I desire besides You” and it was. With Lord’s help only he ended his service and spread the word that converted many people to become God’s people.

The twelve apostles in their ministry.

The lord sent them, without gold or silver or copper in their money belts, or bags for their journey, though they did not need anything, they said “There is none upon earth I desire besides you”.

By the gate called “The beautiful”, Peter did not have anything to give it to the lame man but he said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

The name of the lord was sufficient; The apostles did not desire anything upon earth besides this name.

Even the Self “Ego”, we do not need it.

In your service, God satisfies you. You do not need gold or silver, you do not need a human wisdom, even do not need yourself. The lord said, “Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself” (Mark 8:34) He also said, “He who finds his life lose it and he who loses his life for My sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39).

Therefore, stand before God stripped of everything, satisfied with his blessing. Saying to him with believe and trust “There is none upon earth that I desire

besides you". "I was like a beast before you" (Psalm 73:22). I don't know but I'm satisfied to be with you all the time.

Do you really desire nothing except God or you have other things besides him that you desire?

If you desire something besides God, this resamples a danger in your life.

What is that?

[4]

The Weak Points and Substitutes

You want to be happy in your life. There are reasons for happiness. Is God the reason of your happiness and its source? Are there other reasons which makes you happy besides God?

These other sources which make you happy, are your points of weakness, if the devil knew those sources, he will try to tempt you.

The ascetic heart in these matters of the world, is a fort that the devil cannot penetrate. However, he is watching you and looking for what you love, what you desire, what's make you happy? So he can use these to tempt you. Sometimes he presents you some matters; to test you and see if you responded to them, Once you would respond to him, rest assured he would take these matters to tempt you.

In Paradise, our first parents were offered to be like God know good and evil, That thought found its way inside their hearts, it was a point of weakness, the devil used it to make them fall.

On the mountain, he tried to know what pleases the Christ ...!

Jesus Christ spent holy time with the father in spiritual companionship. The devil wanted to know if there is something pleases Christ beside the Father to seduce Him with those things ...! Thus, he tempted him with the test of bread:

Why don't you change the stones into bread, so you eat and feed the people? So you would gain popularity, and accomplish your message as a social reformer. Jesus Christ refused the idea as He had a spiritual way by which He wanted to feed the people by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, because He came to feed their souls, which could not live with that bread Therefore, the first temptation failed.

Satan tempted him with spiritual scenes, like to throw Himself from the mountain top, and the angels will carry Him, so that the people see that and believe. Then Satan tempted him with the kingdom. So He may have the authority over these kingdoms and spread the goodness through the earthly laws ... these two temptations failed too, because Jesus came to save the lost by the cross.

The devil could not find any desire inside that pure holy heart. He could not find one point of weakness that he could use. as Lord said "The ruler of the world is

coming and has nothing in me" (John 14:30). This is the pious heart, which is not attached to the kingdoms of this world and its glory, Nor the admiring looks of people, Nor transforming stones into bread, Nor any proposes or side goals except the kingdom of heaven.

The trick of the devil is to find anything that pleases the man beside God.

The pious soul which God Strengthened the locks of its gates, and whose borders made peace, this soul which doesn't need anything that the world can offer, but it's satisfied with God.

Is there any lust or desire in your heart, by which the devil can tempt you?

The devil is willing to present desires even for monks.

Even monks who forsaken the world, died to the world, chosen voluntary poverty, whom the prayers of the deceased have been read for them. Devils never give up of them, But offers them desires and hopes and things that heart could attach to them! He tried hardly to put things in the heart besides God.

He wants the man to go out from the circle of sufficiency with God.

Once desires penetrate and rule the heart, then man's happiness starts to shake. Then he starts to lose peace, and his goal transforms. He start to have many other goals after he had only one goal who is God. He gets lost in the matters of the world and goes away from God.

God becomes just a mean to fulfill his goals.

He does not want God for himself anymore, instead he wants God to achieve the other goals in his heart, which he loves. If he prays, he does not pray out of love, but to request the satisfaction of those desires. God is no longer the center of the love in his heart.

Let us have some examples for people whom the devil tricked with some special desires. these desires became points of weakness which caused them to fall.

Let us starts with the wicked first:

1- King Ahab and the desire to possess.

The devil wanted to hit King Ahab a hit that introduces him to God's anger and destroy him, he offered him to take the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to add

it to his possessions. Ahab liked the idea. Hence, It dominated his heart and his mind, so he lost happiness and peace; he could not rest until he possessed the vineyard. However, Naboth refused, Isabel interfered, and Naboth was killed and Ahab inherited his possession. God's wrath was upon him, and Ahab perished. He had a desire in his heart, it was a point of weakness through which the devil penetrated.

However, the heart that is above the level of these desires, whose portion is God and God only, the devil can't defeat him, as he can't find any desires beside God to trick him, However, he can easily defeat the heart that has desires that separates him from God.

2-This was the problem of Judas Iscariot also.

He was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, he lived with the Lord and saw His miracles and listened to His teaching However, the Master was not everything for him. Judas had desires beside the lord, he put in his heart.

He loved the money in the offering box that he had. The Lord was no longer everything for him as He was to the other eleven disciples. Judas couldn't serve two masters, Hence, he sacrificed the Lord and perished.

2- This was the Jews problem with Christ.

Jews were waiting for the Messiah (Jesus Christ), However, they didn't love Him for Himself, but they wanted him as a mean to save them from the imperialism and the brutality of the Romans, and to establish empire for them an empire to restore David and Solomon's reign.

There was a desire in their hearts beside God, a deep desire, God was not inside their hearts, But He was only sought to fulfill this desire. When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, they called him a King not because they love him, but rather out of their self-love and their love to the kingdom of David.

The Self was the basis, not the Christ ...that is why when Christ declared that His kingdom was a spiritual one, not from this world, they departed from Him and conspired to kill Him in the same week!

Is God your Goal or just means?

Greatness of saints merged from their satisfaction with God.

God was their only Goal, they concentrated all their emotions in Him.

There was no other desire beside God that could act as point of weakness,

that devil could use, to make them fall, therefore it was easy for them to leave everything for God's sake willingly and joyfully.

Evils people have weak points deriving from their desires which tempts them, as we mentioned in the examples of King Ahab, Judas Iscariot and Jews who crucified Jesus. But what about God's children?

The devil tempts them with substitutes that may appear holy.

Service as example:

A man may know God, walk in His way, eager to serve Him. The devil does not hinder him at all, because those evil tricks are known to God's children and would immediately reject them saying (Go away O devil) but the devil says (serve and I shall with you).

Moreover, drawn him in plenty of services until he could not find any time to pray.

The service becomes everything at his eyes. He devotes all his time, all his effort all his heart, to the extent that he could not find a time to enjoy with God

You may ask that person, where are your prayers? Where are your spiritual readings? Where are the holy hours in which you pour yourself before God? In love and respect to open your heart to give him your love and enjoy his love.

This person may tell you, "I am busy preparing the lessons, visiting those whom I serve, busy with the Club, the parties, the journeys, photos, prizes, the financial and administrative issues, the library, and visual aids... How can I find a time for all of that? How can I find a time for prayers? Moreover, even if I found time, my thoughts will wander in all of those matters while I pray...!"

It is good to care about the service, with active and faithful heart. But not to become a substitute for God.

Service is a spiritual way in which the man expresses his love to God; and attract others to God's love. However, service should not separate man from God.

It should not be transformed from a mean to a goal. It is not good for the servants to be spiritually dried due to their continuous work that does not have a time for praying.

Martha was serving the Lord, but her service took her away from sitting under

His feet and listening to him, so the Lord told her “Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things but one thing is needed” (Luke 10:42-43). Also the oldest son who served his father many years, but while he was busy, he had not a loving relationship with his father, talked to him in an inappropriate way (Luke15:28-30).

No wonder that a person mistakes increase during the service.

Not only, the service takes him away from the direct relationship with God, but also by due to “Holy zeal”, he starts to combat everything that he does not like.

Moreover, he curses, fights, and raises his voice condemning others, and accuses others cruelly without any love.....He consider himself a hero defending the truth! He may even compare between his righteousness and the mistakes of others, as the Pharisee did with publican.

All this may happen inside the church and inside the service ...during that you may look for the relationship of the servant with God, But you cannot find it. He lost his inner peace, and his life with the Lord, he lost love. While he was trying to cut off what he thinks tares, he himself became one of the tares...! The service became a goal instead of God, so he lose the purity of his heart, while the bible says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew5:8).

True spiritual service leads to God, and not a substitute for God.

Therefore, if you found that the service took you away from your prayers and your fellowship with the Lord. Or if the service affected the purity of your heart, or caused you to lose your meekness and humility, then you should realize that you have deviated from the right path, or the service became a goal instead of God, so be very cautious and try to correct your path.

Sit with yourself and examine yourself as Arsanius used to do.

This great saint used to examine himself continuously, to know how he is doing. So, you too, calm down and examine yourself.

What is your relationship with God? Is He your only goal? Examine all the

spiritual means which you practice, whether they draw you closer to God? Or whether you practice them in superficial routine way away from God's love? Did some of these spiritual means become goals in themselves? Have you deviated from the right path?

As we spoke about the service, we will talk about praying...

You may stand to pray, and the devil may not prevent you from praying. but he watches you to hinder you from benefiting. While you meditate on a beautiful prayer, he may tell you, "what a beautiful meditation, it will be useful for people if they hear it from you" and if you liked the idea, than he has succeeded in taking you away from God and gets you concerned with people.... Then he may even proceed further saying, "How do you guarantee keeping this beautiful meditation in your memory, take a pen and a piece of paper and write it down so you do not forget it"

Hence, he shifted you focus from God to people, from the praying to the service, and disrupts your prayer by a way that you accept...!

Then you leave your prayer, and sit down to write your meditation, and this process may be repeated several times, and the meditation became a way for others and no longer an express of your feelings toward God and deep love to him, So God stands beside.

The devil changed your values of matters.

He convinced you to give the service more value than praying. And has convinced you to care about people more than God's love, and he destroyed the value of concentration and focusing in prayers, and made you leave it to sit and write, moreover he keeps you busy somehow with other things than God!.....little by little, he may change the value of praying completely in your eyes.

He may even tempt you in a different way in your meditation, he may make these meditations a subject for pride, ego and vain glory, instead of serving others and making them benefit. you may say these meditations in a spirit of bragging and not the spirit of the service. Your prayers and meditation became the devil's means to harm you and to keep you away from God, so he gave the service another definition.

He may give the work more value than the praying.

Satan may also keep you busy in any activity, that you might call it a “service”, This activity may even lack any spiritual benefit. And because of that activity, he keeps you away from praying or may even tell you that this activity is prayer! Always remember that you can pray at any time, at any place.... Whether you are walking or while you are sitting or talking to people, as long as you really feel that you are in the presence of God.

There are the enemy temptations, even in the spiritual means.

You, God’s beloved one, be alert, keep God be in front of you all the time. Have the differentiation to understand the tricks of the enemy, so that you Keep God in your heart constantly, and let Him be your goal and the top priority of your interests.

Be aware of the beloved sins that are covered with the clothes of righteousness, Which may come to you in clothes of lambs, hiding their identities.

[5]
Gradual Progress

Let God be your goal, and proceed toward Him step by step.

Definitely you cannot start your spiritual life with perfection, and you cannot start it having God become everything to you. However, start by knowing and loving God, and grow in that knowledge and love. Give him from your heart and grow in that giving. Open your heart so God may dwell in it and widen the place of his dwelling.

Train yourself to forsake continuously some of what you like for God's sake.

Till the time comes when you can forsake everything for Him. Fasting as example: Is it just forsaking a delicious food for God? No, it is a preparation for yourself to forsake all what you desire for the Lord's sake. It is a spiritual period, in which strengthen your spirit over the body, to get closer to God, and this gets closer day after day. The less you love the worldly, the more you love God. The most important thing is that you never stop at certain step, but rather progress continuously.

Be like the seed, which becomes a tree, that grows and grows.

The Lord Said "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head" (Mark 4:26-28).

This is the nature of growth, the seed, the blade, the head then the fruit.

Bring any seed, throw it on the ground, it will not stop growing. Once it becomes a tree, the tree will continue growing every minute, every hour and every day. Growing is its nature, whatever you notice it or not. Definitely if you are away from it for a period of time, you will notice the growth distinctly, and the tree never get weary of extending upwards and never stop growing.

Be like this tree which grows upwards all the time. Expands to the right and to the left. It grows from a seed under the earth to a plant above the earth.

Likewise, take a lesson from the tree that grows, devote time to God, and let that time grow gradually step by step, Give God from you emotions and love, fight that this love grows day after a day, and let this growth appears in your life and

your relationship with God.

However, Be aware If you could not grow and you stopped. be even more careful that you don't go backwards...

Since then, the Lord may tell you “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love” (Revelation 2:4).

It is a real tragedy if God’s love stops growing, or when the warm spirit cools down, and you seek one those old days of spiritual heat, but you cannot find it. You may cry saying “Oh, I wish I were as in months past, As in the days when God watched over me, when His lamp shone upon my head, and when by His light I walked through darkness” (Job29:2-3).

If you are stepping backwards, when will you reach your goal? because the way is still far ahead, and the target still away.

You have known God, that is so good. I wish you could grow in that knowledge.

You may be asking: what are the limits of that growing?

If you wanted, no limits are there

You have reconciled with God by repentance, and formed a relationship with Him you walked in His way with love, and what else? the apostle says “That Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height, to know love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

“That you may be filled with all the fullness of God” what a wonderful verse!

I stand perplexed thinking of that verse, impressed, I do not know ... whenever I ponder its depth, I find it deeper than my understanding Indeed, who can comprehend “all the fullness of God”...? Who can come closer to that fullness? Or at least to the fullness of love, that attaches man to God...?

Another expression, which is also sayings of the apostle:

“But be filled with the spirit” (Ephesians 5:18). You should not only have a relationship with the Spirit, or be in submission and obedience to the Spirit, or

have the Spirit dwell in you, but you should also be filled with the Spirit.

No part of you, neither your heart, nor your thought, nor your senses should be free from the Spirit, The Spirit fills every part of you. What a high degree!

Have you reached the fullness of the Spirit? Have you emptied yourself of anything else, to be filled with the Spirit and to live by the Spirit. So “By the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body” (Romans8:13).

Look at Saint John the apostle in Revelation saying, “I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” (Revelation 1:10), Because he was in the Spirit, he saw the heavens opened, he saw God’s throne, Jesus Christ and His face was shining as the sun in its brightness All that because he was in the spirit... so what it means the phrase of “Be filled with the spirit”? How do you reach that level?

If you have not reached that level, at least do not stop. But rather proceed toward it.

You have to realize that if you are walking towards a certain goal. and you have reached half the way through or three-fourths of It. Still you have not reached your goal yet, you should complete your struggle toward your target, honestly, happy with the word of King David in psalms “Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the Lord” (Psalms 119:1).

You should walk continuously on the way to your goal, stepping forward step by step gradually. Become closer to it today more than yesterday.

Saying with the apostle:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold for me”

Explaining that by “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize” (Philippians 3:12-14). Walk with Saint Paul dear beloved reaching forward...

Make every day that pass, gets you closer to God.

In your spiritual growth, and in your relationship with God, make every day passing, increases your knowledge of God. In addition, increase your love to Him. Increase your abiding in Him. Increase your service for Him, increase

building his kingdom. Moreover, while you are approaching God every day, be aware of the hindrance that you may encounter on the way.

Be aware of the distracting goals which hinder you from approaching God.

God is your only goal, and you have no other goal besides Him. However, the enemy wants to hinder your progress, offers you other goals in your spiritual life. they may appear to be all right, but his purpose is to hinder your focus on God and His love. So be careful.

Believe me that God's angels which are "all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation" (Hebrews1:14), they become very surprised when they see us occupied with trifle matters, considering them our goals and hindering us from getting closer to God!

Truly, any desire besides God, is a trifle desire, which cannot satisfy the heart full satisfaction. As saint Augustin said, "**Our hearts will remain restless, till they find their rest in you**".

If God didn't see us progressing toward his way, stopping at some side goals that occupied our time, passion, health and attention, thus distracting us from Him, we shall hear what the Lord said to His people who had wandered in the wilderness, "**You have dwelt long enough at this mountain**" (**Deuteronomy1:6**)

Therefore, progress and move forward toward your God, do not let anything hinder you on the way. Try to cast away any love or desire that tries to substitute God's love in your heart. Those desires that causes you to be lukewarm in your spirituality, examine them and throw them away. And Keep God only in your heart. So that no one or nothing competes with Him.

May the Lord be with you, strengthen you, make you grow and lead your steps toward him. Amen.

Amen