

Step 2 on Detachment

by St. John Climacus

St. John Climacus teaches the necessity of detachment from worldly ties to fully embrace a life devoted to Christ and the pursuit of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Topics: "Spiritual Detachment", "Christian Discipleship"

Description

St. John Climacus preaches about the true love for the Lord, emphasizing the need to detach from earthly possessions and relationships to fully follow Christ without hesitation, always looking towards heaven for help. He warns against being distracted by worldly concerns, urging a complete renunciation of the world and a focus on the eternal. St. John also addresses the challenges monks face, including envy, false humility, and the temptation to return to worldly ways. He highlights the importance of following the narrow path of self-denial, endurance, and humility to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

Transcript

1. The man who really loves the Lord, who has made a real effort to find the coming Kingdom, who has really begun to be troubled by his sins, who is really mindful of eternal torment and judgment, who really lives in fear of his own departure, will not love, care or worry about money, or possessions, or parents, or worldly glory, or friends, or brothers, or anything at all on earth. But having shaken off all ties with earthly things and having stripped himself of all his cares, and having come to hate even his own flesh, and having stripped himself of everything, he will follow Christ without anxiety or hesitation, always looking heavenward and expecting help from there, according to the word of the holy man: My soul sticks close behind Thee,⁶ and according to the ever-memorable author who said: I have not wearied of following Thee, nor have I desired the day (or rest) of man, O Lord.⁷

2. After our call, which comes from God and not man, we have left all that is mentioned above, and it is a great disgrace for us to worry about anything that cannot help us in the hour of our need--that is to say, the hour of our death. For as the Lord said, this means looking back and not being fit for the Kingdom of Heaven.⁸ Knowing how fickle we novices are and how easily we turn to the world through visiting, or being with, worldly people, when someone said to Him: 'Suffer me first to go and bury my father,' our Lord replied, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead.'⁹

6 Psalm lxii, 9. (R.V. Psalm lxiii, 8); 'My soul followeth hard after Thee'. Using the Old Latin, Agglutinata est

anima mea post Te, my soul is glued behind Thee, St. Augustine asks: 'What is that glue? It is love.' And St. Chrysostom compares this close union to the nails of the Cross.

7 Jeremiah xvii, 16.

8 St. Luke ix, 62.

9 St. Matthew viii, 22.

3. After our renunciation of the world, the demons suggest to us that we should envy those living in the world who are merciful and compassionate, and be sorry for ourselves as deprived of these virtues. The aim of our foes is, by false humility, either to make us return to the world, or, if we remain monks, to plunge us into despair. It is possible to belittle those living in the world out of conceit; and it is also possible to disparage them behind their backs in order to avoid despair and to obtain hope.

4. Let us listen to what the Lord said to the young man who had fulfilled nearly all the commandments: 'One thing thou lackest; sell what thou hast and give to the poor¹ and become a beggar who receives alms from others.'

5. Having resolved to run our race with ardour and fervour, let us consider carefully how the Lord gave judgment concerning all living in the world, speaking of even those who are alive as 'dead', when He said to someone: Leave those in the world who are 'dead' to bury the dead in body.² His wealth did not in the least prevent the young man from being baptized. And so it is in vain that some say that the Lord commanded him to sell what he had for the sake of baptism. This³ is more than sufficient to give us the most firm assurance of the surpassing glory of our vow.

6. It is worth investigating why those who live in the world and spend their life in vigils, fasts, labours and hardships, when they withdraw from the world and begin the monastic life, as if at some trial or on the practising ground, no longer continue the discipline of their former spurious and sham asceticism. I have seen how in the world they planted many different plants of the virtues, which were watered by vainglory as by an underground sewage pipe, and were hoed by ostentation, and for manure were heaped with praise. But when transplanted to a desert soil, in accessible to people of the world and so not manured with the foul-smelling water of vanity, they withered at once. For water-loving plants are not such as to produce fruit in hard and arid training fields.

7. The man who has come to hate the world has escaped sorrow. But he who has an attachment to anything visible is not yet delivered from grief. For how is it possible not to be sad at the loss of something we love? We need to have great vigilance in all things. But we must give our whole attention to this above everything else. I have seen many people in the world, who by reason of cares, worries, occupations and vigils, avoided the wild desires of their body. But after entering the monastic life, and in complete freedom from anxiety, they polluted themselves in a pitiful way by the disturbing demands of the body.

8. Let us pay close attention to ourselves so that we are not deceived into thinking that we are following the strait and narrow way when in actual fact we are keeping to the wide and broad way. The following will show you what the narrow way means: mortification of the stomach, all-night standing, water in moderation, short rations of bread, the purifying draught of dishonour, sneers, derision, insults, the cutting out of one's own will, patience in annoyances, uncomplaining endurance of scorn, disregard of insults, and the habit, when wronged, of bearing it sturdily; when slandered, of not being indignant; when humiliated,

not to be angry; when condemned, to be humble. Blessed are they who follow the way we have just described, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.⁴

9. No one will enter the heavenly bridechamber wearing a crown unless he makes the first, second and third renunciation. I mean the renunciation of all business, and people, and parents; the cutting out of one's will; and the third renunciation, of the conceit that dogs obedience. 'Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate,' saith the Lord, 'and touch not the unclean world.'⁵ For who amongst them has ever worked any miracles? Who has raised the dead? Who has driven out devils? No one. All these

1 St. Mark x, 21.

2 St. Matthew viii, 22.

3 I.e. the story of the rich young man. 4 St. Matthew v, 3--12.

5 2 Corinthians vi, 17.

are the victorious rewards of monks, rewards which the world cannot receive; and if it could, then what is the need of asceticism or solitude?

10. After our renunciation, when the demons inflame our hearts by reminding us of our parents and brethren, then let us arm ourselves against them with prayer, and let us inflame ourselves with the remembrance of the eternal fire, so that by reminding ourselves of this, we may quench the untimely fire of our heart.

11. If anyone thinks he is without attachment to some object, but is grieved at its loss, then he is completely deceiving himself.

12. If young people who are prone to the desires of physical love and to luxurious ways wish to enter the monastic life, let them exercise themselves in all fasting and prayer, and persuade themselves to abstain from all luxury and vice, lest their last state be worse than the first.¹ This harbour provides safety, but also exposes one to danger. Those who sail the spiritual seas know this. But it is a pitiful sight to behold those who have survived perils at sea suffering shipwreck in harbour.

This is the second step. Let those who run the race imitate not Lot's wife but Lot himself, and flee.

1 St. Matthew xii, 45.

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