

Step 23 on Mad2 Pride, And, in the Same Step, on Unclean Blasphemous Thoughts.

by St. John Climacus

St. John Climacus explores the destructive nature of pride and its connection to blasphemous thoughts, emphasizing the necessity of humility and confession for spiritual growth.

Scripture: Psalm 138:6, Proverbs 11:2, Proverbs 16:5, Proverbs 16:18, Proverbs 29:23, Romans 12:3, 1 Corinthians 10:12, Philippians 2:3, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

Topics: "Pride And Humility", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

St. John Climacus preaches about the dangers and consequences of pride, describing it as denial of God, the root of various sins, and a hindrance to humility and spiritual growth. He emphasizes the importance of humility, self-examination, and submission to God to overcome pride and avoid falling into sin. St. John Climacus warns against the deceptive nature of pride, highlighting how it can lead to blasphemy, separation from God, and spiritual delusion. He provides insights on the struggles faced by those battling with blasphemous thoughts and offers guidance on seeking deliverance through humility, confession, and reliance on God's mercy.

Transcript

1. Pride is denial of God, an invention of the devil, the despising of men, the mother of condemnation, the offspring of praise, a sign of sterility, flight from divine assistance, the precursor of madness, the herald of falls, a foothold for satanic possession, source of anger, door of hypocrisy, the support of demons, the guardian of sins, the patron of unsympathy, the rejection of compassion, a bitter inquisitor, an inhuman judge, an opponent of God, a root of blasphemy.

2. The beginning of pride is the consummation of vainglory; the middle is the humiliation of our neighbour, the shameless parade of our labours, complacency in the heart, hatred of exposure; and the end is denial of God's help, the extolling of one's own exertions, fiendish character.

3. Let all of us who wish to avoid this pit listen: this passion often finds food in gratitude, for at first it does not shamelessly advise us to deny God. I have seen people who thank God with their mouth but mentally magnify themselves. And this is confirmed by that Pharisee who said ironically: God, I thank Thee.³

4. Where a fall has overtaken us, there pride has already pitched its tent; because a fall is an indication of pride.
5. A venerable man said to me: 'Suppose that there are twelve shameful passions. If we deliberately love one of them (I mean, pride), it will fill the place of the remaining eleven.'
- 2 Or, 'headless', 'headstrong'.
- 3 St. Luke xviii, 11.
6. A haughty monk contradicts violently, but a humble one cannot even look one in the face.
7. The cypress does not bend to live on earth; nor does a lofty-hearted monk do so to acquire obedience.
8. A proud person grasps at authority, because otherwise he cannot, or rather, does not want to be utterly lost.
9. God resists the proud.¹ Who then can have mercy on them? Every proud-hearted man is unclean before God.² Who then can cleanse such a person?
10. The proud are corrected by falling into sin.³ It is a devil which spurs them on.⁴ But apostasy is madness. In the first two cases people have often been healed by men, but the last is humanly incurable.
11. He who refuses reproof shows his passion (pride), but he who accepts it is free of this fetter.
12. An angel⁵ fell from heaven without any other passion except pride, and so we may ask whether it is possible to ascend to heaven by humility alone without any other of the virtues.
13. Pride is loss of wealth and sweat. They cried but there was none to save, no doubt because they cried with pride. They cried to the Lord and He heard them not,⁶ no doubt because they were not trying to cut out the faults against which they prayed.
14. A most learned old man spiritually admonished a proud brother, but he in his blindness said: 'Excuse me, Father, I am not proud.' The wise old man said to him: 'What clearer proof of this passion could you have given us, son, than to say, "I am not proud"?'
15. Such people can make good use of submission, a more rigorous and humiliating life, and the reading of the supernatural feats of the Fathers. Perhaps even then, there will be little hope of salvation for those suffering from this malady.
16. It is shameful to be proud of the adornments of others, but utter madness to fancy one deserves God's gifts. Be exalted only by such merits⁷ as you had before your birth. But what you got after your birth, as also birth itself, God gave you. Only those virtues which you have obtained without the co-operation of the mind belong to you, because your mind was given you by God. Only such victories as you have won without the co-operation of the body have been accomplished by your efforts, because the body is not yours but a work of God.
17. Do not be self-confident until you hear the final sentence passed upon yourself, bearing in mind the guest who got as far as joining in the marriage feast and then was bound hand and foot and cast out into the outer darkness.⁸

18. Do not lift up your neck, creature of earth! For many, though holy and spiritual, were cast from heaven.
19. When the demon of pride gets a foothold in his servants, he appears to them either in sleep or in a waking vision, as though in the form of a holy angel or some martyr, and gives them a revelation of mysteries, or a free bestowal of spiritual gifts, so that these unfortunates may be deceived and completely lose their wits.
- 1 James iv, 6.
- 2 Proverbs xvi, 5.
- 3 St. Augustine says that God allows the proud to fall into sin to humble them. 4 Cf. 'I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of satan' (2 Corinthians xii, 7).
- 5 I.e. Lucifer.
- 6 Psalm xvii, 42.
- 7 Or, 'successes', 'achievements', 'exploits'.
- 8 St. Matthew xxii, 13.
20. Even if we endure a thousand deaths for Christ, even so we shall not repay all that is due. For the blood of God, and the blood of his servants are quite different, and I am thinking here of the dignity and not of the actual physical substance.
21. We should constantly be examining and comparing ourselves with the holy Fathers and the lights who lived before us, and we should then find that we have not yet entered upon the path of the ascetic life, and have not kept our vow in holy fashion, and in disposition are still living in the world.
22. A monk, properly speaking, is he whose soul's eye does not look haughtily, and whose bodily feeling is unmoved.
23. A monk is he who calls his enemies to combat like wild beasts, and provokes them as they flee from him.
24. A monk experiences unceasing rapture of mind and sorrow of life.
25. A monk is one who is conditioned by virtues as others are by pleasures.
26. A monk possesses unfailing light in the eye of the heart.
27. A monk has an abyss of humility into which he has plunged and suffocated every evil spirit.
28. Forgetfulness of our sins is the result of conceit, for the remembrance of them leads to humility.
29. Pride is utter penury of soul, under the illusion of wealth, imagining light in its darkness. The foul passion not only blocks our advance, but even hurls us down from the heights.
30. The proud man is a pomegranate, rotten inside, while outwardly radiant with beauty.
31. A proud monk has no need of a devil; he has become a devil and enemy to himself.

32. Darkness is foreign to light; and a proud person is foreign to every virtue.

33. In the hearts of the proud, blasphemous words will find birth, but in the souls of the humble, heavenly contemplations.

34. A thief abominates the sun, as a proud man scorns the meek.

35. I do not know how it is, but the proud for the most part remain ignorant of their real selves, and they imagine that they are victorious over their passions, and they only realize their poverty when they depart from this life.

36. The man enmeshed in pride will need the help of God, for the salvation of men cannot avail him.¹

37. I once caught this mad² imposter as it was rising in my heart bearing on its shoulders its mother, vainglory. Roping them with the noose of obedience and thrashing them with the whip of humility, I demanded how they got access to me. At last, when flogged, they said: We have neither beginning nor birth, for we are the originators of all the passions. Contrition of heart that is born of obedience is our real enemy; we cannot bear to be subject to anyone; that is why we fell from heaven, though we had authority there.

In brief, we are the parents of all that opposes humility; for everything which furthers humility, opposes us. Our power extends to all short of heaven, so where will you run from our presence? We often accompany patience under dishonour, and obedience, and freedom from anger, and lack of resentment, and service of one's neighbour. Our offspring are the sins of spiritual people: anger, calumny, spite, irritability, shouting, blasphemy, hypocrisy, hatred, envy, disputing, self-will, disobedience.

¹ Psalm lix 13; cvii 13.

² See above, p. 76, note 266.

There is only one thing in which we have no power to meddle; and we shall tell you this, for we cannot bear your blows: If you keep up a sincere condemnation of yourself before the Lord you can count us as weak as a cobweb. For pride's saddle-horse, as you see, is vainglory on which I am mounted. But holy humility and self-accusation laugh at both the horse and its rider, happily singing the song of victory: Let us sing to the Lord, for gloriously has He been glorified: horse and rider He has thrown into the sea¹ and into the abyss of humility.

This is the twenty-third step. He who mounts it (if any can mount it) will be strong.

Concerning unmentionable blasphemous thoughts²

38. We have heard that from a troublesome root and mother comes a most troublesome offspring; that is to say, unspeakable blasphemy is born from foul pride. So it is necessary to bring it into the open, for it is no ordinary creature, but the most cruel of all our foes and enemies. And what is still worse, it is difficult to put into words, confess, or expose these thoughts to a spiritual physician. And so this unholy disease has produced frustration and despair in many, destroying all their hope like a worm in a tree.

39. During the Holy Liturgy, at the very moment when the Mysteries are being accomplished, this vile enemy often blasphemes the Lord and the holy events that are being enacted. This shows clearly that it is not our soul that pronounces these unspeakable, godless and unthinkable words within us, but the

God-hating fiend who fled from heaven for uttering blasphemies against the Lord there too, as it would seem. For if these shameless and disgraceful words are my own, how could I worship after receiving the gift? How can I praise and revile at one and the same time?

40. This deceiver and corrupter of souls has often driven many out of their mind. No other thought is so difficult to tell in confession as this. That is why it often remains with many to the very end of their lives. For nothing gives the demons and bad thoughts such power over us as nourishing and hiding them in our heart unconfessed.

41. No one in the face of blasphemous thoughts need think that the guilt lies within him, for the Lord is the Knower of hearts and He is aware that such words and thoughts do not come from us but from our foes.

42. Drunkenness is a cause of stumbling, and pride is a cause of unseemly thoughts. As far as his stumbling is concerned the drunkard is not to blame, but he will certainly be punished for his drunkenness.

43. When we stand in prayer, those unclean and unspeakable thoughts assail us; but if we continue praying to the end they retire at once, for they do not fight those who stand up to them.

44. The godless foe not only blasphemes God and everything Divine but utters the most shameful and indecent words within our minds to make us either give up praying or else despair of ourselves. He has prevented many from praying, and separated many from the Holy Mysteries.

45. This evil and inhuman tyrant has wearied the bodies of some with grief, has exhausted others with fasting, and has given them no rest. He does this with those living the monastic life as well as with people living in the world, suggesting to them that there is no hope whatsoever of salvation for them, and assuring them that they are more to be pitied and more wretched than all the unbelievers and heathen.

46. He who is troubled by the spirit of blasphemy and wants to be delivered from it should know for certain that it is not his soul that is the cause of such thoughts but the impure demon who once said to

1 Exodus xv, 1

2 Some versions make a new step or chapter here.

the Lord: All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.¹ And so let us too humiliate him and, without paying the least regard to his suggestion, say to him: 'Get thee behind me, Satan! I shall worship the Lord my God, and Him only will I serve.'² Thy labour and thy word will return upon thy head, and thy blasphemies will come down upon thy crown³ in the present and in the future world. Amen.'

47. He who wants to grapple with the demon of blasphemy in any other way is like a man trying to hold lightning in his hands. For how will you catch, or contend and grapple with one who bursts into the heart suddenly like the wind, utters words quicker than a flash, and immediately vanishes? All other enemies stop, wrestle, linger and give time to those who wish to struggle with them. But not this one: he has scarcely appeared, and he is gone; he has hardly said a word, and he is away.

48. This demon often likes to haunt the minds of simple and innocent people, and they are more upset and bewildered by it than others. We can certainly say of them that all this happens to them not from self-esteem but from the envy of the demons.

49. We ought to stop judging and condemning our neighbour, and then blasphemous thoughts will not alarm us; for the former is the occasion and root of the latter.

50. As one who is shut up in his house hears the words of passers-by without joining in their conversation, so the soul keeping to itself and overhearing the diabolical blasphemies is troubled by what is said by the demon passing by it.

51. He who despises this foe is delivered from its torture. But he who contrives some other way to wage war with it will end by submitting to it. He who wishes to conquer the spirits with words is like one trying to lock up the winds.

52. One careful monk who was troubled by this demon wore out his flesh for twenty years by fasts and vigils. But as he felt no benefit, he wrote his temptation on a card and went to a certain holy man and gave him the card and bowed his face to the earth, not daring to look up. As soon as the elder had read it he smiled and, raising the brother, he said to him: 'Lay your hand on my neck, son.' And when the brother had done that, the great man said: 'On my neck, brother, be this sin, for as many years as it may or may not be active in you; only after this, ignore it.' And this monk assured me that even before he had left the elder's cell, his infirmity had gone. The man who had been tempted in this way told me this himself, offering thanksgiving to God.

He who has won the victory over this infirmity, has banished pride.

1 St. Matthew iv, 9.

2 St. Matthew iv, 10.

3 Psalm vii, 17.

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