

(1.11) Peace, Zeal, and Spiritual Progress

We could have greater peace if we would not interfere with what other people are saying or doing, especially if it does not concern us. How can you remain in peace if you meddle in other people's business, allow distractions to disturb you, and do not take time for inward recollection.

Why did the saints reach such a high degree of perfection and contemplation? Simply because they made a consistent effort to wholly restrain themselves from earthly desires. This made them sensitive to the Lord's law *written on their hearts*.¹

*Everyone is put to the test by being attracted and seduced by that person's own wrong desire*² and many succumb because they are too occupied with their own passions and too anxious about transitory things. *I am afraid that, just as the snake with his cunning seduced Eve, your minds may be led astray from single-minded devotion to Christ*.³

It is rare indeed for us to overcome any one vice perfectly as our efforts for daily progress are weak and we remain cold, or at best, lukewarm. If we were in perfect control of ourselves and not entangled in worldly things, we would savor divine things and experience heavenly consolation.

The greatest hindrance is that we are not free from our passions and lusts and don't discipline ourselves to follow the perfect Way of Jesus. *Whoever abides by discipline, walks towards life, whoever ignores correction goes astray*.⁴

When we encounter even a small diversity, we become discouraged and turn to human consolation but if we would strive to be determined people in this spiritual battle, God's help would quickly come to our rescue. Our Heavenly Father is always ready to help everyone who makes an honest effort and depends upon His grace. These struggles are opportunities to strengthen us towards gaining final victory *for Yahweh loves justice and will not forsake his faithful*.⁵ Be persistent and not like the seed which fell upon stony ground: *Those on the rock are people who, when they first hear it, welcome the word with joy. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of trial they give up*.⁶

¹ Jeremiah 31:33

² James 1:14

³ 2 Cor 11:3

⁴ Proverbs 10:17

⁵ Psalm 37:28

⁶ Luke 8:13

There are also those *who keep up the outward appearance of religion but will have rejected the inner power of it. Keep away from people like that*⁷ as they will weaken your spiritual efforts.

If each year we would resolve to conquer one fault we would we would soon become perfect people. Paul writes to the Corinthians: *we are delighted to be weak if only you are strong. What we ask in our prayers is that you should be made perfect.*⁸

But we often become careless over time and eventually realize that we have lost that zeal that came with conversion, lost that passion that seeks to overcome bad habits, and as a result we find it more difficult to root them out because we fail to rigorously address our shortcomings as they surface. It is difficult to reform bad habits and to counter our will even in small things and that causes the thorny struggles we have with bigger issues.

Therefore resist evil inclinations at the start and break the unprofitable habit before it grows into something more serious and harmful. Peace and joy follow our struggle as we become more careful in seeking spiritual progress.



This article is based on Book 1, Chapter 11 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal (layperson's) reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

⁷ 2Tim 3:5

⁸ 2 Corinthians 13:9