

797 Freedom from passions (in Greek, *apatheia*) is a precondition of Christian perfection. The struggle against passions consists of three elements: awareness, resistance, and eradication. Human reason, illumined by grace, is capable of achieving an awareness of passion; the human will, in cooperation with God's grace, can resist passion; the eradication of passion is the crown of spiritual combat and a sign of the healing power of grace. Freedom from passions is strengthened by ascetical practices. However, its only source is the love of God, which conquers all passions, and brings together all of a person's efforts and the power of the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰¹

798 Being free from passions does not mean that a person is free from tempting thoughts, for the intrusion of such thoughts does not always depend on us. However, when a person achieves the state of *apatheia*, he or she dismisses the evil thoughts that lead to passion.⁵⁰²

E. Prayer in the Spiritual Life

799 Prayer is one of the important manifestations of the spiritual life. Together with fasting and almsgiving, prayer is a component of spiritual warfare. Prayer confirms a person in the good and fosters communication with God. Prayer is a great blessing—a deep connection with God in love.⁵⁰³ "Prayer is by nature a dialogue and a union of a human being with God. Its effect is to hold the world together. It achieves a reconciliation with God."⁵⁰⁴

800 Prayer is a conversation with God initiated not by us but by God. He speaks to us continually through his Son (see Heb 1:1), although we are not immediately aware of it. When parents lean over a cradle and talk to their infant, initially the child cannot understand their words. With time, the child begins to understand and tries to imitate the sounds he hears. In this manner, a child learns to speak. However, this would not be possible if the parents had not first spoken to the child.

801 In a similar fashion, we begin to speak to God in response to his speaking to us. Gradually, through the practice of prayer, God teaches us that the conversation begins not with our words, but rather with our listening. In addition to the ability to listen, prayer teaches us something else—to regard what the person speaking with us is saying as more important than what we have to say.

⁵⁰¹ See MAXIMUS THE CONFESSOR, *Centuries on Charity, III, 50: PG 90, 1281*.

⁵⁰² See ISAAC THE SYRIAN, *The Ascetical Homilies, 1*.

⁵⁰³ See JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, *Homilies on Genesis, 30, 5: PG 53, 280*.

⁵⁰⁴ JOHN CLIMACUS, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Step 28: PG 88, 1129*.

1. Degrees of Prayer

a. Bodily Prayer

802 Bodily prayer takes place through the recitation of words, prayerful gestures, and bodily posture. This includes the sign of the Cross, prostrations, kneeling, the prayerful folding of our hands, and standing. Through these actions, a person's body also participates in prayer. A person's prayerful posture helps one concentrate one's thoughts and elevate them to God. The body should take on the form of the prayer for which the soul is preparing. For example, when we praise God, we stand, and when we confess our sins and ask forgiveness, we kneel.⁵⁰⁵

b. Prayer of the Mind

803 Prayer of the mind is the next level of prayer. It consists in focusing one's attention on the words being recited. The mind is the highest power of the soul. With the mind the soul regards the invisible world. The mind, awakened by prayer, uncovers the internal sense of the spoken words, and makes that the focus of its attention. Aided with the working of the mind, by internal attention and understanding, we protect ourselves against evil thoughts and turn to God alone, in awareness of his presence. In prayer of the mind, God allows us to recognize our thoughts, desires, and feelings. The prayer of the mind allows a person to free oneself from dependence on memories and fantasies, to control one's thoughts, and to focus attention on the prayer itself.

804 The working of the mind leads to the words of the prayer speaking to us with increasing fullness. As a longing arises to listen carefully to each word, the tempo of prayer decelerates. When the mind is not yet prepared for continual inner attention and becomes distracted, the spiritual Fathers advise us to return to the place in prayer where the distraction began, and to repeat the prayer, but this time, attentively. The purpose of this repetition is to create the possibility for deeper prayer, that is, for a transition from external bodily prayer to prayer of the mind.

c. Prayer of the Heart

805 Prayer of the heart is prayer that encompasses the entire person—one's inner "I." Prayer of the heart creates a continual bond between a person and God. It is therefore unceasing. The apostle Paul exhorts us to "pray

⁵⁰⁵ See ORIGEN, *On Prayer*, 31, 2-4: PG 11, 550.