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5. Passion

nature. All their energy was totally focused around one motion - the motion toward God. Their spiritual mind had one ceaseless preoccupation, ceaseless prayer to God. Their sole experience was what the elders call Theoria, that is the vision of God”

“Adam and Eve, the earliest humans, disrupted this relationship with God through the Fall. They became trapped in their own egotistical passions. They ceased being in a constant prayerful state, their essential and true function by nature. What we have now is the ceaseless production of thoughts instead of ceaseless prayer.”

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What can be done?

separation and alienation of the entire human race from God. The result is our spiritual sickness, which can get worse and

worse throughout our life.

How exactly does this happen? The holy elders of Christian tradition teach us that there are five basic stages to it.

A thought knocks on the door of our mind, and suggests, “Look at this pile of money. Nobody is looking - take it!”.

Just because a thought comes, we're not responsible for it. We commit no sin. Even Jesus Himself was tempted by Satan. When thoughts assault us, we should feel no guilt whatsoever. No human being has ever lived without being assaulted by the *logismoi*, the thoughts. Only the dead are free from them.

These thoughts have nothing to do with the quality of our soul. Some people fall into real despair and ask, “Why me?” Being obsessed with such feelings is simply our ego at work. The lives of the saints and holy ones must be our guides. Do you know why? Because they reached a point where although they were bothered by hundreds of thoughts, they had reached a state beyond the passions, a state of stillness of heart. *(Other pamphlets in this series talk about the way in which one begins doing this).*

All Saints of North America
Orthodox Church

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The 5 Stages of SIN

Understanding the reasons
we do the things we do,
and the things we hate.

In his book *The Mountain of Silence*, Kyriacos Markides presents his talks with the engaging Father Maximos, a monk from Cyprus. Father Maximos offers Kyriacos a glimpse into the mystical life of Orthodox Christianity. One of the greatest gifts he gives him is the insights of generations of holy elders into the workings of the spiritual heart - the Five Stages of Sin.

Father Maximos explains that all sins begin with thoughts, images in the mind that

come from the intellect, the world, and the demons. The Greeks call these thoughts *logismoi*, and Father Maximos points out that they are not natural for us:

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1. Assault

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2. Interaction

This is the stage where we open the door of our spiritual mind to a thought. When a thought urges you, for example, to steal that pile of money, you begin to wonder, “Should I or should I not? What's going to happen if I steal it?”

This is risky and dangerous. Yet even at this stage, there is no accountability of the part of the individual - no sin is committed as yet. But if the person is weak, as we all are most of the time, then defeat is the likely outcome of this conversation with the thought.

3. Consent

At this stage, you consent to do what the thought is urging you to do - you invite the thought in, and ask it to sit down and be comfortable! You have made a decision. That's when guilt and accountability begin to emerge. This is the beginning of sin. Jesus was referring to this stage when He said that if you covet a woman in your mind you have already committed adultery with her in your heart. The moment this decision is allowed to take root in your heart, you are well on the way to actually committing the act in the outer world.

It's still possible, though, to liberate yourself from the stage of consent.

4. Captivity

In the event that you are not able to free yourself from the stage of consent, then there is real defeat. You become captive to the thought - you are no longer in control: you are a hostage.

The moment the person gives in, the next time around, the thought returns with greater force. That's when the person can no longer retreat and proceeds with the act, which now becomes a habit which is repeated time and time again.