

CONCERNING CARNAL SINS

From the writings of St. Isaac the Syrian

Our salvation is a very serious and important matter—more important than anything else. What good is it to possess all the riches and treasures of the earth, said the Lord, if we end up losing our soul? (Mt. 16:26). This is why we must preserve the fear of God in our souls, and proceed through this life prudently and cautiously.

We must be cautious of everything—especially carnal sins, which proceed to ravage our soul. God destroyed the city of Sodom because its inhabitants were only “flesh” and nothing spiritual existed within its boundaries. They were full of spiritual impurity, and on account of this God turned away from them (Gn. 18:24).

On account of the fornication of only one person, twenty five thousand Jews were put to death in one hour (Nm. 25:9). What was the cause of Sampson’s fall, this giant figure who had been dedicated to God while he was still in his mother’s womb? He defiled his body with fornication and surrendered his body parts to sin. Even though he had accomplished great and awesome things, he subsequently fell because he was seduced by carnal sin. Thereafter, God abandoned him, he was taken captive, chained, and handed over to his enemies (Jdg. 16:21). The prophet and king David, from whom Christ came forth, suffered identically. Because he was careless for only a split second, he was allured by the beauty of a woman, and he fell into the dreadful sin of adultery (2Kg. 11:2-4). This is why God punished him. David, however, repented with many tears for this serious sin, and God forgave him (2Kg. 12:13).

With all these examples, we must realize that God does not make exceptions. He punishes everyone regardless of whether they happen to be prophets, priests, judges, rulers, or other sanctified people chosen to reveal His name to the people. God does not take revenge; rather, He uses various disciplinary means so that man may realize his mistake, come to his senses, wake up from sin, and seek His mercy and forgiveness. From all the above, we can see that God punishes even His saints when they transgress His commandments. The prophet Ezekiel writes that God does not take into consideration the elderly or the young (i.e. man’s age), illustrating in this manner that the Lord’s genuine and beloved people are they who have within them godly fear and who live devoutly according to His will. For God, the saints are they who keep His commandments and who have a clean conscience. Conversely, they who disregard God’s

commandments are disregarded by God Himself: He turns His face away from such people and detracts His grace from them.

Why did God punish Belshazzar? It was because he disregarded the sacred vessels that had been offered to God, which his father had pillaged from Jerusalem, and he dared using them to drink along with his concubines (Dan. 5:2-4). In this same manner, they who have devoted their bodies to God and subsequently dare to use their body parts for sinful deeds are punished harshly by the Lord.

Therefore, let us not disregard the divine words and the warnings contained in the Holy Scriptures. Let us not enrage God with our immoral deeds and improprieties. Let us not shamelessly defile our bodies, which are the temple of God, as the Apostle Paul states (1Cor. 6:19).

From the teachings of St. Gregory Palamas

Do not fornicate, lest you become a "member of an harlot" (1Cor. 6:15) instead of a member of Christ, and so you are not severed from the divine body, deprived of the heavenly inheritance, and cast into Hell.

We have been commanded to crucify our body along with its desires (Gal. 5:24). However, we fall into the same [carnal sins], on account of which "the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). Even though we have been ordered to mortify our "bodily members which are upon the earth" (Col. 3:5), we do not execute this directive. Shouldn't we tremble the apostolic warnings, decisions, and counsels that have been voiced? "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1Cor. 3:17). And elsewhere, "This you should know: that no fornicator, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God." (Eph. 5:5). And again, "For this is the will of God: your sanctification, that you should abstain from fornication ... For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (1Th. 4:3-7).

Who could adequately compile all the commandments that the Apostles and prophets have given us concerning this topic? What does the Apostle Paul order to them who live with modesty, and who for this reason are found amongst the members of Christ? "I wrote to you in an epistle," he says, "not to keep company with fornicators" (1Cor. 5:9). Since they themselves are not ashamed, he advises others to avoid keeping company with them in order to make them feel ashamed: "If any man that is called a brother [i.e., a Christian] is a fornicator ... with such a person do not even

eat" (1Cor. 9:11). Do you see that whoever rolls in fornication is a general defilement to the Church, and for this reason everyone must avoid him and keep him distanced? St. Paul himself handed over to Satan the fornicator from Corinth, and he did not recommend for anyone to show him love or to receive him until he displayed the necessary and satisfactory repentance (1Cor. 5:5). Therefore, definitely save your soul, dear brothers, from all the present and future evils [of fornication].

The descendants of Esau were spurned [by God] because he was a fornicator and a defilement (Rom. 9:13). Rehoboam lost the greater part of the kingdom because his father Solomon was a womanizer more than anyone else (3Kg. 11:1). If Solomon died without losing any part of the kingdom, this was due to David, who cleansed the sin he had committed with streams of tears and with other works of repentance (3Kg. 11:10-11).

The Apostle again commands us, my brothers, to flee from fornication (1Cor. 6:18). If Sampson had fled from it, he would not have fallen into the hands of Delilah (Jdg. 16:4-21). If the Jews who were being led by Moses, their commander and lawgiver, had avoided it, they would not have offered sacrifices to Baalpeor (Num. 25:1-3). If Solomon had evaded it, he would not have become estranged from the Lord, Who had rendered him a wise king (3Kg. 11:7-8).

Do you see how the passion of fornication pushes a person even to impiety? If it wasn't for this passion, the beauty of Susanna would not have fooled and defeated the elders in Babylon (Dan. 8). If Holofernes, this wretched fellow, hadn't first allowed Judith's sandal to allure his eye and previously permitted her beauty to captivate his soul (Jdt. 16:9), he wouldn't have ended up dead with his head cut off (Jdt. 13:8). This is why Job states: "I have made a covenant with my eyes, and I will not look upon a virgin" (Job 31:1). How much more should this apply to an immodest woman, whether she be single or married.

Doesn't the Law of Moses itself order for the bride who is found not to be a virgin to be stoned to death (Dt. 22:20-21)? Doesn't it also order for the daughter of any priest, if she profane herself through fornication, to be burnt with fire¹ (Lev. 21:9)? It is written: "There shall be no harlot from the daughters of Israel, and there shall be no fornicator from the sons of Israel" (Dt. 23:17). Furthermore, the scriptures state that the Jewish people "desecrated themselves through fornication" with the daughters of Moab (Num. 25:1), and as a consequence twenty three thousand men were killed by the sword in one day. This is why the great Apostle Paul announces to

¹ St. Gregory Palamas is not suggesting that the Law of Moses be implemented; for with the coming of Christ, the shadow of the Law came to an end and has been replaced by the Gospel of Grace. Rather, he wants to make known to us how serious the sin of fornication is in the eyes of God.

us, “Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand” (1Cor. 10:8). Such are the penalties of fornication prior to the Mosaic Law, during the time of the Law, and which the Law prescribes.

Either preserve God-pleasing chastity, beloved brothers, or God-given matrimony ... Avoid the honey that drips from the lips of fornication, because it has the custom of smearing lustful death, which is the separation from God. As the Prophet David says, “Thou hast destroyed everyone who fornicates from Thee” (Ps. 72:27).

If anyone has fallen into any of fornication’s filth, may he return and distance himself from it, and may he cleanse himself with repentance. For thus saith the Lord: “Shall he who falls not arise? He who turns away, shall he not return?” (Jer. 8:4).

Thus, it is necessary for the person whose body has become a temple of God through the Holy Spirit, and within whom the Spirit of God dwells (1Cor. 6:19), to hasten toward the acquisition of purity and chastity, and away from fornication and every impurity, so that we may delight eternally with the incorrupt Bridegroom [Christ] in the heavenly and immaculate bridal chambers. Amen.