

Asceticism By Bishop Serapion

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Asceticism

Asceticism is to live with satisfaction on your minimal needs without experiencing delight and getting away from materialism,. St. Paul the Apostle reminded his disciple Timothy in his first epistle, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." ; "And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content." and "But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. (1 Timothy 6:6 - 9) St. Paul talked about those who were seeking wealth as a goal in their life and he named them as "money lovers", the essence of all evil, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows".(1 Timothy 6:10) The Lord of glory, our Lord Christ, warned those who took wealth as their master instead of worshipping God, "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." (Matthew 6:24) How difficult is it, for those who depend on their wealth to enter the Kingdom of God?. St. Paul asked Timothy to advice the rich, "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not high minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who gave us richly all things to enjoy." (1 Timothy 6:17) Living a devoting life, my brothers, is to live away from the greed for money and not to worship it. It means also, don't go after your wealth and become dependent on it. It does not mean that a person can't have money, he can, but he shouldn't be possessed by money itself. He can use his money and not to be used himself by that money. Let the money serves him without becoming a servant to that money. An ascetic person must become the master of his assets, whether these are too much or too little. Many people leave money, but they don't abandon loving it. Many gave money to others, literally, from their pockets only, without experiencing the pleasure of giving it cheerfully. Don't we hear about people who struggle about money and go into financial disputes, at a time they are living and acting like the poor? Let us lead our true devoted life, as we were instructed by God, using our hearts and avoiding false display. Our fathers, the Apostles, had lots of money, collected at their feet!, and were distributed to anyone in need." (Acts 4:35) Our greatest model, Lord Christ, used money, he asked Peter to pay taxes for Him and Peter. He accepted the women to serve Him with their money and permitted His disciples to distribute the money for their needs and for the poor. (John 13:29) Lord Christ showed us the real meaning of asceticism in the tenth chapter of the Gospel after St. Mark, when a rich man met the Lord. He defined to him, the perfect path by saying, "One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me."; " But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions."; "Then Jesus looked around and said to His disciples, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" ; "And the disciples were astonished at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, 'Children, how hard it is for those who trust in riches to enter the kingdom of God!' [Mark 10:21 - 25] In spite of the true desire of this rich man to have the eternal life and in spite that he met Lord Christ, observed the commandments, yet he didn't gain a thing and left in sadness. It was difficult for him to enter the Kingdom of God as he was enslaved by his money. The Kingdom of God

is reserved only for the free people! Those who worship the money and worldly lust have no place in that Kingdom. The true ascetic life requires you to be free from the mastery of money and wealth. God has ordered us to be completely liberated from slavery, love dependence on money and not to have it as a goal in our life. This is the Lord's call to everyone without exception. Asceticism thus, is a liberation from the influence of money and wealth. This call is to the monks as well as to the married people and also to both the clergy and the laymen. Whoever becomes liberated from the compulsives of money, usually can live a true ascetic life leaving everything to Christ. Asceticism starts within the heart and reflects every external feature of one's life. However, who is concerned by appearance only, will never succeed in a devoting life. Alone those who are liberated, in their hearts, from the "love of money", can have this perfect life. As we approach the holy fast preceding Nativity, we pray God to grant us a true ascetic life and to purify our hearts from "the love of money and the lust of the world".