

The Way of Perfection

Section 2: Foundations of Prayer

Detachment

Chapters 8-11 (summary)

Saint Teresa of Avila

Chapter 8 The great good that lies in detaching oneself inwardly and outwardly from all created things.

Let us talk about the **detachment** that we ought to have ... and if it is practiced with perfection, it includes **everything**. In other words, if we **embrace** the Creator and **care not** at all for the whole of creation, His Majesty will **infuse the virtues**. Doing what we can gradually ... it is the Lord who is our **defense** and takes up the **battle** against the **demons** and the **world**.

Do you think, Sisters it is a small blessing to receive the **grace** to give ourselves to give ourselves entirely and without reserve? ... It is much easier to write about these **virtues** than it is to put them into practice ...

2. With regard to externals, we are obviously separated from everything here ... His Majesty wants all of us ... to withdraw from everything so that He may unite us to Himself with no hindrance ... O Sisters, understand ... the great favor the Lord granted those He brought here ... One cannot repay You this favor, Lord ...

3. What I ask, Sisters, is that if anyone sees she is unable to follow what is practiced here, that she say so; ... Do not disturb these few nuns brought here by His Majesty ... In other places there is **freedom** to find **relief** with relatives; ... but here, the nun who desires to see them for her own **consolation**, if they are not spiritual, should consider herself **imperfect**. She ought to believe she is **not detached**, not healthy; she will not possess **freedom of spirit** nor **complete peace** ... If this **attachment** is not **removed** ... she is not meant for this house.

4. The **best remedy** is that she **not see them** until she is obviously free and obtains this **freedom** from the Lord through much prayer. When it is clear that she considers these visits a **cross**, it will be alright for her to see them, for then she will benefit her

relatives and not harm herself. But if she loves her relatives, grieves over their sufferings and eagerly listens to what they tell her about their worldly affairs ... she will bring harm to herself and no good to them.

Chapter 9 On how good it is for those who have left the world to flee from relatives and how they find truer friends.

Oh, if we religious could understand the **harm** that comes from having too much to do with **relatives!** How we would flee them! I do not know what consolation they give us if we do not talk to them about God but only about our **comfort** and **rest**. We cannot enjoy their recreations ... Oh yes, we can **grieve** over their trials ... but here, you are removed from that. All is held in common so no one can have **special comfort**. The alms they give are given in a general way; and so you are **freed** from trying to please them on this account. After all, it is the Lord who provides for all in common.

2. I am astonished by the **harm** that is caused from dealing with **relatives** ... This **practice of perfection** seems to be forgotten nowadays in religious orders. I don't know what we **renounce** for God if we do not give up the **main thing**, namely, our **relatives** ...

3. In this house, daughters, we need to **recommend them to God**; that is right. As for the rest, we should keep them out of our minds as much as possible for it is **natural** for the **will** to become **attached** to them more than to others.

I have been much loved by my relatives ... and I loved them very much ... But I know through experience ... that in time of trial my relatives helped me least. It was the servants of God who helped me.

By relatives I do not mean parents who seldom fail to help their children, and it is right to console them in their need. Let us not remain **aloof** from them if it does no harm to our religious life. This communication can be carried out with **detachment**; and so, too, with brothers and sisters.

4. If you serve His Majesty as you ought, you will not find better relatives than those **He sends you**. ... Believe that in a very short time you will gain

this **freedom**. Believe that you can trust those who love you only for His sake more than you can all your relatives ... You will find fathers and brothers in those about whom you had not even thought. They seek to be **repaid by God** so they do for us. While those who seek to be **repaid by us** soon grow **tired**, since they see we are **poor** and **unable** to help them in any way ... It may not be universally so ... but the world is the world ...

5. All that the saints counsel us about **fleeing the world** is clearly good. Well, believe me, our **relatives** are what cling to us most from the world and are the most **difficult to detach** ourselves from. Those who flee their own countries do well if it helps them ... but I don't think it helps to flee bodily; rather what helps the soul is to **embrace the good Jesus with determination**, for in Him all is found and all is forgotten. It is a very great help to withdraw bodily until we know this **truth**. For later, the Lord may want us to have dealings with them, giving us a **cross** where we used to find pleasure.

Chapter 10 How it is not enough to be detached from what was mentioned if we are not detached from ourselves, and how both this virtue of detachment and humility go together.

Once we have **detached** from the **world** and **relatives** and enclosed ourselves here ... it seems we have done all there is to do and that we no longer have to **struggle** with anything. Oh, my Sisters, do not feel **secure** or go to sleep! ... If you do not walk very carefully and go against your own **will** ... there are many things that will take away this **holy freedom of spirit** by which you can fly to your Maker without being held down by clay or leaden feet.

2. A great aid to going against your own will is to always remember that **all is vanity** and how quickly **things come to an end**. This helps us to remove our attachment to trivia and focus on the eternal ... This practice greatly strengthens the soul ... When we feel ourselves becoming attached to something, we should strive to bring our thoughts back to God. He has done us a great favor because in this house most of the work of detachment has been done but

turning against ourselves is difficult because we live close together and love ourselves greatly.

3. The virtues of true **humility** and **detachment** seem to go together as two inseparable sisters. Embrace them, love them and never be seen without them. They are **sovereign virtues** ... deliverers from all snares and entanglements laid by the devil, so loved by our teacher Christ! Whoever has them can fight against the whole world ... Such a person fears no one for his is the kingdom of heaven. He doesn't care if he loses everything ... He only fears displeasing God and he begs God to sustain him in these virtues.

4. These **virtues** tend to **hide** themselves from the person who has them ... He strives to obtain them and gradually **perfects** them within himself ... These virtues are at once **recognized** by those who deal with him.

... This is the work, my daughters, that must be done to escape from the land of Egypt, for in finding these virtues you will find the manna. All these will taste good to you. However bad something may taste to the worldly, you will find it sweet.

5. We must first strive to be **free** from the love of our **bodies** for some of us are lovers of **comfort**. We are also very fond of our **health** ... Be determined, Sisters, that you came to **die for Christ**, not to live comfortably for Him ... A nun will strive to care for her health in order to **observe the rule** but then dies without ever having kept it for so much as a month, nor perhaps for even a day. Well, I don't know why we have come here!

6. ... I find for myself that the Lord wishes that we be **sickly**; at least in my case He granted me a great mercy in my being sick; for since I would have looked after my comfort anyway He desired that there be at least a **reason** for my doing so. There are persons who put themselves through torment doing penance ... then subsequently imagine the penance did them harm. Now they fear penance ... and don't carry out what the order commands. We don't keep some very ordinary things of the rule, such as silence, which isn't going to harm us. Hardly does our head begin to ache that we stop going to choir, which won't kill us either ...

and we think we aren't obliged to do anything since we asked permission.

7. You will ask why the prioress gives it ... well, she has a scruple that she might **fail in charity**. She would rather you fail than she herself fail ... Oh, God help me, this complaining among nuns! ... I fear it has already become a custom...

8. ... If the devil begins to frighten us about losing our health, we shall never do anything. May the Lord give us the light to be **right about everything**, amen.

Chapter 11 Continues to discuss mortification, and speaks about what must be acquired in sickness.

It seems to me an **imperfection**, my Sisters, to always be **complaining** about light illness ... If one has this **habit**, it wears everyone out if you have love for one another and there is **charity**. If you are sick, say so and take the necessary remedy ... and it would be very wrong if the others did not feel **compassion** for you.

2. Where there is **charity**, concern about you getting well will not be lacking ... If you do not lose the habit of complaining about everything ... you will never finish lamenting ... A fault this body has is that the more comfort we give it the more needs it discovers ... In the case of health the need presents itself as good ... the poor soul is **deceived** and then doesn't **grow**.

3. ... You who are **free** from the great trials of the world, learn to **suffer** a little for love of God without having everyone know about it! ... If a woman in an unhappy marriage suffers much adversity with no comfort ... lest her husband learn she complains about it, shouldn't we **suffer** just between ourselves and God some of the **illnesses** He gives us because of our sins? ... Even more so because by our **complaining** the sickness is **not alleviated**.

4. In all I have said I am not dealing with serious illness ... Remember our holy fathers of the past, those hermits on Mount Carmel whose **lives we aim to imitate**, what **sufferings** they endured! What solitude, cold, and hunger, and what sun and heat, without anyone to complain to but God!... They were as delicate as we are ... Believe, daughters

that when we begin to conquer these wretched bodies, we will not be so troubled by them ...

Forget about yourselves except in what concerns a **definite need**. Let us be determined to **swallow death** and the **lack of health**, if not we will never do anything ... Abandon yourselves totally to God, come what may. So what if we die! ...

5. This **determination** is more important than we realize. As we gradually grow accustomed to this **attitude** we shall, with God's help, remain lords of our bodies. Conquering this enemy is important in enduring the battle of life. May the Lord conquer him as He alone can. The benefits from this practice are many. No one would feel he was undergoing a trial if he could remain in this **calm** and **dominion**.

Amen