

A Passionate View of Health Behavior

Mark D. Faries, PhD

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Abstract

The struggle to adopt a healthy lifestyle is a real and prevalent problem for many people, despite the known risks to health, and suggested solutions in prominent theories of health behavior change. Yet, the struggle remains, as does the question—*why* is change so hard? This paper seeks to share an introduction to the ancient Christian perspective on the passions to help provide an explanation for *why* change can be so difficult, and *how* to overcome the struggle (and perhaps, the war) to adopt a healthful lifestyle.

Introduction

Change is hard. As little as 5% of US adults are estimated to maintain a healthful lifestyle of four key factors that are able to prevent nearly 80% of all chronic disease, the most common and costly of all diseases:¹ eating a healthful diet, being physically active, not smoking tobacco, and a keeping a healthful bodyweight.² More so, 80% of adults do not get enough physical activity to support general health and function,³ 90% of adults do not eat enough vegetables, while only 2% of high school students meet the vegetable recommendation for health,⁴ and 50% of adolescents (one out of every two) have been found to not eat a single serving of vegetable each day.⁵ Yet, unhealthy diets, such as from our Standard American Diet (appropriately, SAD, for short), have surpassed tobacco smoking as the leading risk factor for premature death in the US—accounting for one out of five deaths.⁶

¹ “About Chronic Diseases,” CDC, last modified May 15, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/chronic-disease/about/index.html>.

² Jonathan P. Troost, Ann P. Rafferty, Zhehui Luo, and Mathew J. Reeves. "Temporal and regional trends in the prevalence of healthy lifestyle characteristics: United States, 1994–2007." *American Journal of Public Health* 102, no. 7 (2012): 1392–1398.; Michael J. McGinnis, and William H. Foege. "Actual causes of death in the United States." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 270, no. 18 (1993): 2207–2212.; Ali H. Mokdad et al. "The state of US health, 1990–2016: burden of diseases, injuries, and risk factors among US states." *Journal of the American Medical Association* 319, no. 14 (2018): 1444–1472.; Christopher J. Murray. "Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study." *Lancet* 393, no. 10184 (2019): 1958–72.

³ “Data & Statistics for Physical Activity,” Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), last modified February 28, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/physical-activity/php/data/index.html>.

⁴ “2018 State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables,” CDC, accessed on October 1, 2024, <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/downloads/fruits-vegetables/2018/2018-fruit-vegetable-report-508.pdf>.

⁵ “2013 State Indicator Report on Fruits and Vegetables,” CDC, accessed on October 1, 2024, <https://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/21642>.

⁶ Ashkan Afshin, Patrick John Sur, Kairsten A. Fay, Leslie Cornaby, Giannina Ferrara, Joseph S. Salama, Erin C. Mullany et al. "Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017." *The Lancet* 393, no. 10184 (2019): 1958–1972.

Why should you destroy yourself? Be not overly wicked, neither be a fool.
Why should you die before your time? (Eccl 7:16–17)

In response, prominent theories of health behavior change propose the solution lies in our own efforts—*self-help*—to find the right motivation, train the right abilities, learn the right tactic, join the right program, and reap enough of the elusive, key ingredient, *self-control*, to override the unhealthful response to make the healthful response possible. Yet, the struggle remains, as does the question—*why* is change so hard?

In lieu of time, I will spare you the back story, but I have a new perspective on health behavior and its struggle—what I call a *passionate view of health behavior*—confessedly, with a minor caveat. This perspective or paradigm is neither mine *nor* new. In fact, it is quite ancient, from the wisdom of those who have come before us—rich with instruction and principles for our health and wellness, including explanation for *why* change can be so difficult, and *how* we, as Christians, can overcome the struggle to adopt a healthful lifestyle. From this perspective, however, we are not merely engaged in a *struggle* for control, but a *war*. For ease of application, I will organize the war into four levels: War of Body, War of Flesh, War of Soul, and War of Spirit. The outline presented here is a brief introduction; a prelude, not a finale; direction, not dogma. Please, forgive me of my ignorance.

War of Body

We are not at war *against* the body. Father Stanley S. Harakas summarizes the patristic teaching:

One ought not deliberately harm one's own health. ... Rather, because health is a good and illness an evil, one has a basic responsibility to preserve and maintain life and health. Reckless risking of health and life, abusing the body, ignoring the basic necessities of life—all constitute inappropriate behavior for the Christian.⁷

The body (*soma*, *σῶμα*), with its powers and abilities, is a part of the whole person—a co-worker, in union with the soul on the same, sanctifying journey together (1 Thess 5:23; 2 Cor 7:1), a valued instrument, “a vessel divinely molded”⁸ from the dust of the ground (Gen 2:7), made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–27), cleansed and quickened as God's temple, to be a hallowed dwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; Rom 8:11; Heb 9–10; 1 Jn 1:5–10), and a functional member of Christ's body.

So, rather than being at war against the body, Christians are to be allies *with* the body, warring against all that aims to destroy it. Foundational to this view—to purposefully live in a way that deprives the body of its health, is to deprive it of its holiness, as St John Cassian confirms,

Bodily illness is not an obstacle to purity of heart, provided we give the body what its illness requires, not what gratifies our desire for pleasure. Food is to be taken in so far

⁷ Stanley S. Harakas. *Health and Medicine in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (4, Illness) (NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1990), 41–42.

⁸ Basil the Great. “On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 2” (4) in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series* 30, N.V. Harrison, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 51.

as it supports our life, but not to the extent of enslaving us to the impulses of desire. To eat moderately and reasonably is to keep the body in health, not to deprive it of holiness.⁹

War of Flesh

Proposed here, the primary culprit of unhealthy lifestyles against which we struggle and surrender, is the “flesh” (*sarx, σάρξ*)—referring to the mortal, *passionate* or *impassioned* condition of human nature from which the *carnal passions* arise.¹⁰ Carnal passions, or simply “the passions,” are “movements contrary to nature,”¹¹ something happening to us, a suffering of which we are not in control, or as described, not unlike a disease or illness that we experience passively, as in a *pathology*.¹² Simply, the passions make us passive. As summarized by Fr Dumitru Staniloae:

The passions represent the lowest level to which human nature can fall. ... that man is brought by them to a state of passivity, of slavery. In fact, they overcome the will, so that the man of the passions is no longer a man of will; we say that he is a man ruled, enslaved, carried along by the passions.¹³

The result, as the Scriptures warn, is living “according to the flesh,” which is unnatural, irrational, and sinful—luring us to kinship with the carnal passions, moving us toward unhealthy lifestyles, and setting the stage for the *War of Flesh*.

Appetites

A first layer is *appetite* (*hedone, ἡδονή*), often translated as *instincts* or *pleasures* of our human condition,¹⁴ working within us through the fear of death and dissolution of the body to satisfy bodily needs of our material existence (e.g., air, sex, sleep, drink, food). Appetites are compelling. We crave, store, and conserve energy, still today, through copious unhealthy choices. Appetites are also competing. Warning of the appetites, St James paints a picture of chaos, disruption, and disorder—a picture of war.

What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?
Is it not this that your *appetites* are at war within you? (Jas 4:1)

⁹ John Cassian. “On the Eight Vices: On Control of the Stomach,” in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 74.

¹⁰ The *flesh* itself, a work of God’s, is not accused, “but that sinful desire which overcame it later because of the fall,” Gregory Palamas. *The Triads: Book 1* (2.1), Robin Amis, trans. (Praxis Institute Press, 2002), 71. See also Rom. 7:18.

¹¹ John Damascus. *On the Orthodox Faith* (36), *Popular Patristics Series* 62, Norman Russell, trans. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2022), 142.

¹² Maximos Constas. *A Tale of Two Trees: Nature and Human Transformation*, posted on November 24, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tJTJk_nDDE

¹³ Dumitru Staniloae. *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar* (Part 1.7), Archimandrite Jerome (Newville) and Otilia Kloos, trans. (South Canaan, PA: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2003), 77.

¹⁴ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* (27, 64), 134, 217–218.

For many, this is the battlefield of pursuing a healthful lifestyle, with the appetites fighting for prioritization. In a perpetual king of the mountain, to supplant a strong appetite for unhealthy food, for example, a stronger appetite must arise, perhaps fear of disease, feeling more attractive, or fitting into the right social group. Any newfound self-control is likely short-lived, and few are successful in leveraging the warring flesh for benefit, nor able truly to thrive and flourish while doing so. As St Mark the Monk clarifies, “Sometimes a person reduces one passion by living another even more luxuriously... as he toils without hope of profit.”¹⁵

Desires

Appetites are volatile. Eve was lured through her appetites, denying the mortal consequence, and enticed to eat (Gen 3:1–6). She did not *need* the fruit from that tree, but now she *wanted* it. Something more sinister was conceived inside her and Adam, something willing to disobey God and forgo life to satisfy the flesh. Appetite becomes *desire*. *Desire* (*epithymia*, ἐπιθυμία) is an inordinate, excessive desire or lust—a focused *passion* inclining to baseness.¹⁶ As St James confirms, “Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own *desires*.” (Jas 1:14)

Desire moves us beyond *need*. As the proverb warns, “feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’” (Prov 30:8–9). Thus, the common objective in the ascetical life, according to St Basil the Great, is “satisfying need,” not “filling the stomach to satiety, burdening it with food” in excess to render the body unfit and susceptible to harm, “but the aim should be the sustaining of life...”¹⁷ From a health perspective, the evidence continues to support that we *need* sensible combinations of whole, nutrient-dense foods like fruits, vegetables, beans, nuts, seeds, and other plants—while more closely imitating the diet of Paradise (Gen 1:29), an invitation of return to the condition of man before the fall, as St Basil beautifully encourages:

However, now indeed as we wish to conduct ourselves in imitation of the life of Paradise, we avoid this excessively material enjoyment of foods, conducting ourselves as far as is possible according to that life, using fruits and grains and the produce of fruit trees for passing through life, but what surpasses these things we reject as unnecessary.¹⁸

Desire moves us beyond *health*. St Paul, in responding to those in Corinth saying that “all things are lawful,” especially those behaviors fulfilling carnal passions, points out that not all things

¹⁵ Mark the Monk. “On the Spiritual Law (101),” in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life, Popular Patristics Series 37*, Tim Vivian, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 101.

¹⁶ The distinction between *hedone* (pleasure) and *epithymia* (desire) is lost in many Bible translations, thus examining the original Greek can help confirm usage. See comments by Macrina the Younger in: Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Soul and the Resurrection,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 5* (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 443.

¹⁷ Basil the Great. “The Long Rules” (Q.19), in *Saint Basil: Ascetical Works, The Fathers of the Church 9*, Sister M. Monica Wagner, trans. (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 275–276.

¹⁸ Basil the Great. “On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 2” (4) in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series 30*, N.V. Harrison, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 54.

are helpful or benefit us (and can even harm us), nor do all things edify, building us up mentally, physically, or spiritually (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23). As summarized by St Mark the Monk, “He who enjoys bodily pleasures beyond the proper limit will pay for the excess a hundredfold in sufferings.”¹⁹

Desire also moves us beyond *control*. Consider an unhealthy food you choose to enjoy on a regular basis but know you should cut back. Could you give it up right now, forever? Could you at least limit to a healthful moderation? If we cannot eat or move in moderation, simply for our own health, then we reminded of a crucial and wicked aspect of the carnal passions—not only do they hurt us, but they control us. Deceptively, lack of control of unhealthy desires will disguise itself as choice or liberty—wearing a plastic facade of black-rimmed glasses, a nose, and mustache to ease through the crowd, unrecognized for what it truly is.

Works

It follows that when we live according to the flesh, we risk another transformation. Desire becomes *works* (*ἔργα*, from *ergon*, *ἔργον*)—behaviors or deeds that complete an inner desire. St Paul provides a starter list of “works of the flesh” for the churches of Galatia (Gal. 5:19–21), which includes sensuality, drunkenness, orgies, “and things like these.” St Paul expects those hearing his words to apply the list to other works that are similar in comparison, of equal rank in violating the principles. For example, in this list, is the pursuit of impurity, which connects to dishonoring the body through serving the carnal passions (Rom 1:24–25). There is also sensuality of carnal pleasure *instead of* restraint, self-indulgence *instead of* love and well-being, over-indulgence *instead of* moderation, and loss of control of fleshly passions *instead of* temperance. Even today, these works of the flesh provide an effective recipe for unhealthy lifestyles.

War of Soul

Attention must then be directed to the soul (*psyche*, *ψυχή*), with key powers or movements to help make prudent use of the body against the carnal passions—a *War of Soul*. First, is that of *sense-perception*, which “is the soul’s power of apprehending or discerning material things.”²⁰ The senses often referred to as “the gates of the soul,” which should be monitored, guarded, and shut, if needed, to protect one from being lured away.²¹ St Gregory of Nyssa gives a cautious symbol of the serpent, not easily being drawn back by its tail when it is crawling away through a narrow opening or crack (chink). The same scales that help it slide along smoothly in one direction, resist those trying to draw it out from the back. In the same way, he says, one must beware of carnal desire—a snake with scales of bodily senses—“sneaking into the soul from the back, and that one has to block up as far as possible the ‘chinks’ presented by the life of the body,” because once the serpent of

¹⁹ Mark the Monk. “Those Who Imagine That They Are Justified by Works (119),” in *Counsels on the Spiritual Life* 1, *Popular Patristics Series* 37, Tim Vivian, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 126.

²⁰ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* (32), 137.

²¹ Isaiah the Solitary. “On Guarding the Intellect” (7), in *The Philokalia* 1, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1979), 23.

carnal passions sneaks in through the chinks, it “is difficult to dislodge from the precincts of the mind because of the scales.”²²

Thus, a passion has been described as, “an animal affection which is succeeded by pleasure and pain,” which is a brutish “irrational activity of the soul,” and an appetite without reasoning.²³ Yet, made in the image and likeness of God, the soul is rational (*logos, λόγος*) to rule the irrational (*alogos, άλογος*), and make prudent use of the body against the carnal passions through knowing and resembling the Word (*Logos*), Christ Himself.²⁴ However, “if reason drops the reins,” St Macrina warns, it will be “dragged behind like a charioteer who has got entangled in his car... just as we see happens amongst the brutes.”²⁵ For many, this is a fitting description of what trying to overcome an unhealthy lifestyle feels like—as if being dragged by their irrational, brutish desires for food, laziness, and other passions. Change is hard.

This irrational state of the soul is pointed to as a sign of surrender—*of slavery*. St Basil adds, “O human, you are a ruling being, and why do you serve the passions as a slave?”²⁶ And, as St Paul lamented, “I am [carnal] of the flesh, having been sold under sin [devoted as a slave to sin]... For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out,” (Rom 7:14–20). So too, many often know they need (and want) to be rational, prudent, watchful, temperate, and self-controlled, while making no provision for the flesh to gratify its desires (Rom 13:14). As I often ask, “How *easy* is it for you to eat *unhealthfully* in your house?”

And thus, this irrational state of the soul is also pointed to as a sign of weakness—*of sickness*. St John Chrysostom comments that when sin enters the soul, it renders men “base, and weak, and cause them to be sick and diseased.”²⁷ St Gregory Palamas emphasizes that the passions, especially gluttony, are a result of a “sick soul,” and when “we coddle the flesh in order to foster its desires, then the passion becomes evil and self-indulgence gives rise to the carnal passions and renders the soul diseased.”²⁸

Simply put, if the *healthy soul* is the life that takes pleasure in and ascends with the body toward the likeness of Christ in virtue, then the *sick soul* is the life that takes pleasure in and descends with the body toward likeness of the flesh in vice. Thus, through the lens of a passionate view of health behavior—our succumbing to the control of the carnal passions is a sign of bondage

²² Gregory of Nyssa. *Homilies on The Lord’s Prayer and the Beatitudes* (Homily 3), H.C. Graef, trans. (Florence, AZ: SAGOM Press, 2021), 49.

²³ John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* (36), 141.

²⁴ Athanasius of Alexandria. *On the Incarnation* (Introduction), *Popular Patristics Series* 44A, John Behr, trans. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2011), 27–28.

²⁵ Gregory of Nyssa. “On the Soul and the Resurrection,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 5 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 442.

²⁶ Basil the Great. “On the Origin of Humanity, Discourse 1” (8) in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series* 30, N.V. Harrison, trans. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 37.

²⁷ John Chrysostom. “Homilies on Ephesians” (24), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 13 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 171.

²⁸ Gregory Palamas. “To the Most Reverend Nun Xenia” (41), in *The Philokalia* 4, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1995), 309.

in need of manumission, of corruption in need of cleansing, that we are weak in need of strength, that we are ailing in need of nourishment, and that we are sick in need of healing.

War of Spirit

The unwillingness to control the belly with its carnal passions, where the sick, enslaved soul images the irrational, brute creation, rather than the Divine, is described as a descent from the Spiritual to the sensual. St Basil warns, Adam “quickly became full of everything. And as it were becoming insolent through satiety, he preferred what appeared delightful to the fleshly eyes to the Spiritual beauty and considered the filling of the stomach more valuable than the Spiritual enjoyments.”²⁹ Or simply, from Father Maximos Constas, “The fleshly passions lure our energy from the Spiritual reality to the sensual reality, and our attention from the depths of things to the surface of things, more interested in pleasure than truth.”³⁰

And there are spiritual powers welcoming the Christian to continue to walk and waddle in the unhealthfulness of carnal desires. St Paul teaches that to live according to the flesh and its passions is to live according to the “elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ,” (Col 2:8–20), and that the “desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” (Gal 5:17). It is in these Spiritual trenches that the true war wages—a *War of Spirit* (Eph 6:10–12; 2 Cor 10:3–4; Rom 8).

Here, the rational power of the soul is not left to war alone. Humans were not only created as *sensible* beings, moved by senses, but as *intelligible* (*noetos, νοητός*) beings with a noetic motion, moved by the by *intellect* (*nous, νοῦς*)—a “mingled worshiper.”³¹ It is the *nous*,³² the higher power and “purest part of the soul,”³³ as a spiritual sensory organ (Mt 6:22–23; Lk 24:45; Acts 26:18; Eph 1:18, 4:23),³⁴ “which perceives the perfection of godly life,”³⁵ and that is exercised when we love God

²⁹ Basil the Great. “Homily Explaining that God is Not the Cause of Evil” (7), in *On the Human Condition, Popular Patristics Series 30*, N.V. Harrison, trans. (St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 74.

³⁰ Constas, *A Tale of Two Trees: Nature and Human Transformation*. Maximus the Confessor. *The Ambigua 1* (10.2), Nicholas Constas, trans. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 159–161.

³¹ Gregory Nazianzen. “Orations” (38.11, 45.5–45.7), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 7* (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 348, 424–425.

³² The word “*nous*” is often translated into English as “intellect,” but is often made distinct from the “rational intellect” or “rational mind”—the former being (as described above) the highest power and purest part of the human soul, and the latter being the rational (*logos*) part or faculty of the soul that apprehends, deliberates, and reasons in relation to the world. For the present purposes, it is through the *nous*, that all other faculties/powers of the soul and body are Spiritually elevated and transformed.

³³ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (1.6), 37–38.

³⁴ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (1.6), 37. John of Damascus, *On the Orthodox Faith* (26), 131. John of Damascus. “On the Virtues and the Vices,” in *The Philokalia 2*, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1981), 335.

³⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man” (8.6), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 5* (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1954), 394.

through and with all of our heart and soul and *mind* (Mk 12:30)³⁶—to have the mind (*nous*) of Christ (1 Cor 2:16).

From Futility to Freedom

Rather than making provision for the flesh, we “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 13:14)—the Great Physician. In the War for Control, the cure handed down to us is not a *what*, but a *Who*. Deliverance is not from a program, but from a Person. Salvation is not from a rule, but a Redeemer. Jesus Christ trampled down death by death. And thus, the fear of death has been vanquished, and sin, the sting of death infecting us in our fearful state, has been sterilized. In Baptism, the flesh—the dead, hardened, unfeeling, and festering part of the soul that, in futility, seeks indulgence of carnal passions—is cut away (1 Pet 4:3; Col 2:11–12). By God’s grace, we have received freedom—not freedom *for* the flesh, but freedom *from* the flesh. As is sung from the Lenten Triodion, “Through Thy Passion, loving Lord, Thou has given to all men freedom from the passions, putting to death the passions of my flesh by Thy Cross.”³⁷

From Freedom to Filling

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.
(Eph 5:18)

Freed from the flesh, we can be filled with the Holy Spirit. *Without* the Spirit, our behavior will be imperfect and incomplete, *out of control*, and our body and soul are left on their own to war against the impassioned flesh from which we are freed. *With* the Spirit, in communion and filled, *in control*, we can live in freedom and power over the impassioned flesh—to “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him,” (Col 1:9–14).

From Filling to Footsteps

So, St Paul can say, “walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh,” (Gal 5:16). St John Chrysostom comments here, “...having spoken of the cause of the disease, he likewise mentions the remedy which confers health.”³⁸ It is only drawing near to the Paraclete, St Basil says, that the one stained from friendship to the flesh, can be purified, and “come back again to his natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form.”³⁹

From Footsteps to Fruit

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,
goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, *self-control*... (Gal 5:22–23)

³⁶ See also Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* (8.5), 393–394.

³⁷ *The Lenten Triodion, Wednesday (Matins) of the First Week*, Mother Mary & Archimandrite Kallistos Ware, trans. (St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2002), 229.

³⁸ John Chrysostom. “Homilies on Galatians,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 13 (First Series), Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 40.

³⁹ Basil the Great. “On the Holy Spirit” (9.23), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 8 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 15.

Freed and filled, the fruit of *walking in the Spirit* is gaining of control over the flesh and its passions (1 Tim 6:11; 2 Pet 1:3–6). The elusive control over the insatiable, fleshly desires that feed unhealthy lifestyles is not presented as the fruit of the self, *but* the fruit of the Spirit. *Self-control* (*egkrateia, ἐγκράτεια*) is more aptly described as *continence* or *dominion within*, and with it, there is much hope for change. This fruit guards the senses at the gates of the soul, determining their direction and limits of their actions, cutting off the passions.⁴⁰ To St Basil, continence is “the mother of chastity, the friend of health, and the great conqueror of all that hinders us from showing forth the fruit of good works in Christ.”⁴¹ He summarizes:

Concupiscence [strong, fleshly desire] is a disease of the soul, whereas its health is continence...Not to be drunken is continency. Not to overeat one’s self is continency...continency makes one free, being at once a medicine and a power, for it does not teach temperance; it gives it. Continency is a grace of God.⁴²

This essential fruit is thus seen as an outgrowth of our cultivating the garden of our soul, with our whole person, in co-operation and synergy with the Holy Spirit, who we are given without measure (Jn 3:34)—not an external force, but God Himself. So, we tend, weed, prune, and protect through an ascetical and sacramental life—love, faithfulness in keeping the commandments, prayer, fasting, vigils, confession, and other virtues, which according to St Maximus, will subdue, diminish, and even “stop the movement of the passions and do not allow them to grow.”⁴³ Christ has given Himself, true food and bread of life (Jn 6:35–57), to those who worthily partake unto the healing of soul and body, so that, as we pray, “through the entrance of Thy Communion, every evil deed and every passion may flee as from fire.”⁴⁴

Conclusion

Thus, true healing and hope comes only with the union of body, soul, *and* Holy Spirit—not a perfection *of* man, but of God *in* man.⁴⁵ True “well-being” is experienced in the partaking of the Spirit of God dwelling in us—in motion in a single direction, a dispassionate ascent toward acquiring the image and likeness of God in Christ. Within a passionate view of health behavior, herein lies not only the cause of the struggle with unhealthy lifestyles, but its solution. Our well-being in the likeness of Christ, to be truly human, is why we war and why we have victory.

Acknowledgments

⁴⁰ Gregory Palamas, *The Triads* (2.2), 71. Evagrius. *Praktikos* (35), John Eudes Bamberger, trans. (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 25.

⁴¹ E.F. Morison. *St Basil and His Rule: A Study in Early Monasticism* (Oxford University Press, 1912), 112.

⁴² Basil the Great. “Letters” (366), in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* 8 (Second Series), Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 327.

⁴³ Maximus the Confessor. “Four Hundred Texts on Love” (Second Century, 47), in *The Philokalia* 2, G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, ed. (Faber and Faber, 1981), 73.

⁴⁴ *Service Book of the Holy Eastern Orthodox Catholic and Apostolic Church* 13 (Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, 2012), 129–130.

⁴⁵ Jean-Claude Larchet, *Elder Sergei of Vanves: Life and Teachings* (Manton, CA: Divine Ascent Press, 2012), 141.

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