

AN ELDER SAID...



Edifying Stories and Teachings from Ancient and Modern Times

Avoidance of Deceptive Self-Sufficiency*

St. Theophan the Recluse
(Commemorated 10 January)

Being busied with many things, impatience, anxiety, irritability... These things are certainly unpleasant. Pleasing, however, is that you sense how much they damage your soul and that you wish to be cured. You need only find out from whence they arise, what their source is. If you eradicate the source, then they will disappear on their own.

Examine yourself to see if perhaps excessive self-confidence, self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth exist within you. These things create an egotistical and deceptive sense of self-sufficiency in a person: He believes that he can unerringly arrange and accomplish everything on his own, without the contribution or advice of his fellow man and, above all, without God's help. If, then, some obstacle occurs and his plans are upset, and if things do not turn out the way he desired and planned, then he grumbles against God and becomes angry with people.



Perhaps you also rely more than you should on your own abilities? Perhaps you have “pushed” God to the edge of your life? Do you begin your every work with prayer, do you continue it in prayer, and do you finish it in prayer? Do you believe that you are completely worthless and that you owe all of your achievements to the Lord? Do you humbly place yourself below all of creation?

If not, then you must reevaluate your position before your Creator and His creations. In your relations with God and other people, be profoundly conscious of your own insignificance. Pray unceasingly.

And unshakably believe that the Lord is the ruler of the world and of your life. Without Him, nothing good can take root in us.

Let us, then, place ourselves with trust in His hands. This does not mean that we will abandon or reduce our struggles, efforts, and labors for our spiritual cultivation. Let us not, however, rely on these labors, because if God does not bless them, they will not bear spiritual fruit.



(*) Source: Άγιος Κυπριανός, No. 330 (January-February 2006), p. 272.

St. Theophan the Recluse, *Handbook to the Spiritual Life* (extracts from his letters), (Oropos, Attika: Ekdoseis Hieras Mones Parakletou, 2003), pp. 145-146.