

Lecture #1: Understanding Myself

We strive to lead a spiritual life; but we continue to struggle. In order to grow spiritually, we need first to understand the reasons that hinder our growth. Not understanding one's self is a main obstacle towards spiritual maturity. This lack of self understanding could be due to indulgence in a sinful life with the consequent separation from God and quenching of the Holy Spirit; or due to an unforgiving spirit and the subsequent bitterness and anger.

1. Sin patterns

We may have weaknesses that we often fall into. St. Paul said: "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice." (Rom 7:19). The indulgence in a life of sin leads to cloudiness of the mind and the inability to understand self or the goodwill of God towards us.

So why do we continue to stumble?

- Sinful nature – we are born with an inclination to sin. It is a lifestyle, a mindset, a state of being. Yet, through Baptism we have acquired a new nature that has the potential to lead a life of righteousness if kept in the presence of God all the time
- Temptations - Satan attacks everyone in a different way depending on his weaknesses. We only fall when we accept his temptations and yield to them.

There are sins that are easily recognizable such as killing or stealing. Most Christians do not commit these sins. However, there are other sins that are more subtle and are easier to fall into. Pride and jealousy are examples of the latter category.

In order to overcome these sins, we should first understand ourselves. We need to honestly evaluate our behavior and recognize the underlying reasons for this behavior. Sincere self examination under the light of the Word of God, with the help of the Holy Spirit will help us get to know who we really are.

For example, boasting of accomplishments, possibly out of insecurity, is a sign of pride, but may also indicate self-centeredness.

Once we have identified the reasons for our behavior, we need to understand the root causes of our weakness. Do you recognize yourself in the following behavioral patterns?

| Behaviors | Possible Reasons | Possible Causes |
|--|----------------------|---------------------------|
| Easily offended | Lack of contentment | Childhood problems |
| Difficulty establishing long relationships | Poor self confidence | Tragedy |
| Anger | Discouragement | Underdeveloped skills |
| Poor performance | Insecurity | Unrealistic expectations |
| Indecisiveness | Jealousy | Constant criticism |
| Critical spirit | Fear | Poor self image |
| Taking credit for others work | Depression | Unresolved disappointment |
| Pride | Unforgiving spirit | No prayer life |

Manifestations of Pride

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|--------------------------------------|--|
| Desire to be the center of attention | Insecurity |
| Desire to be number one | Self-centeredness |
| Dressing to draw attention | Belief in all praise |
| Attitude of self sufficiency | Failure to recognize God as source of everything |
| Ignoring less fortunate people | Hardness of heart |
| Not pleased with others' success | Lack of love for God |

Dealing with these weaknesses

- Acknowledge your behavior and identify the causes.
- Take full responsibility.
- Use the help and guidance offered in the Mystery of confession. Your spiritual father will help you to see your real self and try to correct it.
- Fellowship with the saints at church will help you see yourself in comparison to others. The Agape love that is shared among them will reveal any hidden selfishness and ego-centeredness.
- Forgive any person who hurt you (see below).
- Make a decision to overcome temptations in Christ.
- Ask for help and prayers from the cloud of witnesses.
- Focus on your positive qualities.
- Stop comparing yourself with others.
- Frequently recall God's blessings.
- Fill your mind with the Word of God.
- Set your mind on being a new nature that is able in the Lord Christ.

2. Unforgiving spirit

This is the deliberate decision to refuse to give up the resentment towards someone and the right to get even. It amounts to refusing to extend to others what God extended to you, and is against the Will of God.

- It is an act of pride and rebellion against the Will of God.
- It is a choice we make.
- It is self-inflicted pain.

Dealing with an unforgiving spirit

- Take it seriously and assume full responsibility.
- Acknowledge that it is a sin and confess it honestly.
- Lay down your anger.
- Begin praying for the person who hurt you.
- Ask this person for forgiveness (if they know of your unforgiving heart).
- Don't dwell on the issue that is hurting you.

