
Choice, Effort & Grace

The instrument of wealth

[Riches] lie at hand and are put at our disposal as a sort of material and as instruments to be well used by those who know. An instrument, if you use it with artistic skill, is a thing of art; but if you are lacking in skill, it reaps the benefit of your unmusical nature, though not itself responsible ... We must not therefore put the responsibility on that which, having in itself neither good nor evil, is not responsible, but on that which has the power of using things either well or badly, as a result of choice ... and this is the mind of man, which has in itself both free judgment and full liberty to deal with what is given to it. So let a man do away, not with his possessions, but rather with the passions of his soul, which do not consent to the better use of what he has.¹

Seize life from God

When practising and striving after the passionless state by himself man achieves nothing, but if he makes it clear that he is eagerly pursuing this aim and is in deep earnest, he prevails by the addition of the power that comes from God. For God breathes His own power into souls when they desire, but if ever they desist from their eagerness, then too the spirit given from God is withdrawn; for to save men against their will is an act of force, but to save them when they choose is an act of grace. Nor does the kingdom of God belong to sleepers and sluggards, but “the men of force seize it.” This is the only good force, to force God and to seize life from God; and He, knowing those who forcibly, or rather persistently, cling to him, yields; for God welcomes being worsted in such contests.²

(See also Genesis 32:22-32 for the account of Jacob’s wrestling with God)

The magnetic attraction of the Holy Spirit

As, then, the minutest particle of steel is moved by the spirit of the Heracleian stone (magnet) when diffused over many steel rings; so also, attracted by the Holy Spirit, the virtuous are added by affinity to the first abode, and the others in succession down to the last. But those who are bad from infirmity, having fallen from vicious insatiableness into a depraved state, neither controlling nor controlled, rush round and round, whirled about by the passions, and fall down to the ground. For this was the law from the first, that virtue should be the object of voluntary choice.³

¹ *QDS* 14 (Loeb, p.299)

² *QDS* 21 (Loeb, p.315)

³ *Strom.* 7.2 (ANF Vol.2, p.525b)