

ASCESIS: CHRISTIAN TRAINING

The Apostle Paul spoke frankly about the ongoing conflict that even believers have within themselves: “For the good which I will [to do], I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do.” *Romans 7:19*. Our souls, and bodies, need to be trained by our efforts, and guided by the grace of God. Passions are inordinate desires that move us to act selfishly and unwisely. Efforts we make to control or manage the passions are called asceticism. Prayer, fasting, acts of self-denial, acts of mercy to others, are all ascetical practices. The Greek term ‘*ascesis*’ means training. This same word is used in regard to training for sports. Saint Paul himself used the language of sports in his preaching: “Do you not know that in a race all the runners compete, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable.” *1 Cor. 9:24,25*.