

Confessions - Book IX - Chapter V

by St. Augustine

Transcript

9. By turns I trembled with fear and warmed with hope and rejoiced in thy mercy, O Father. And all these feelings showed forth in my eyes and voice when thy good Spirit turned to us and said, "O sons of men, how long will you be slow of heart, how long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood?" For I had loved vanity and sought after falsehood. And thou, O Lord, had already magnified thy Holy One, raising him from the dead and setting him at thy right hand, that thence he should send forth from on high his promised "Paraclete, the Spirit of Truth." Already he had sent him, and I knew it not. He had sent him because he was now magnified, rising from the dead and ascending into heaven. For till then "the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." [283] And the prophet cried out: "How long will you be slow of heart? How long will you love vanity, and seek after falsehood? Know this, that the Lord hath magnified his Holy One." He cries, "How long?" He cries, "Know this," and I--so long "loving vanity, and seeking after falsehood"--heard and trembled, because these words were spoken to such a one as I remembered that I myself had been. For in those phantoms which I once held for truth there was vanity and falsehood. And I spoke many things loudly and earnestly--in the contrition of my memory--which I wish they had heard, who still "love vanity and seek after falsehood." Perhaps they would have been troubled, and have vomited up their error, and thou wouldst have heard them when they cried to thee; for by a real death in the flesh He died for us who now maketh intercession for us with thee.

10. I read on further, "Be angry, and sin not." And how deeply was I touched, O my God; for I had now learned to be angry with myself for the things past, so that in the future I might not sin. Yes, to be angry with good cause, for it was not another nature out of the race of darkness that had sinned for me--as they affirm who are not angry with themselves, and who store up for themselves dire wrath against the day of wrath and the revelation of thy righteous judgment. Nor were the good things I saw now outside me, nor were they to be seen with the eyes of flesh in the light of the earthly sun. For they that have their joys from without sink easily into emptiness and are spilled out on those things that are visible and temporal, and in their starving thoughts they lick their very shadows. If only they would grow weary with their hunger and would say, "Who will show us any good?" And we would answer, and they would hear, "O Lord, the light of thy countenance shines bright upon us." For we are not that Light that enlightens every man, but we are enlightened by thee, so that we who were formerly in darkness may now be alight in thee. If only they could behold the inner Light Eternal which, now that I had tasted it, I gnashed my teeth because I could not show it to them unless they brought me their heart in their eyes--their roving eyes--and said, "Who will show us any good?" But even there, in the inner chamber of my soul--where I was angry with myself; where I was inwardly pricked, where I had offered my sacrifice, slaying my old man, and hoping in thee with the new resolve of a new life with my trust laid in thee--even there thou hadst begun to grow sweet to

me and to "put gladness in my heart." And thus as I read all this, I cried aloud and felt its inward meaning. Nor did I wish to be increased in worldly goods which are wasted by time, for now I possessed, in thy eternal simplicity, other corn and wine and oil.

11. And with a loud cry from my heart, I read the following verse: "Oh, in peace! Oh, in the Selfsame!"^[284] See how he says it: "I will lay me down and take my rest."^[285] For who shall withstand us when the truth of this saying that is written is made manifest: "Death is swallowed up in victory"^[286]? For surely thou, who dost not change, art the Selfsame, and in thee is rest and oblivion to all distress. There is none other beside thee, nor are we to toil for those many things which are not thee, for only thou, O Lord, makest me to dwell in hope."

These things I read and was enkindled--but still I could not discover what to do with those deaf and dead Manicheans to whom I myself had belonged; for I had been a bitter and blind reviler against these writings, honeyed with the honey of heaven and luminous with thy light. And I was sorely grieved at these enemies of this Scripture.

12. When shall I call to mind all that happened during those holidays? I have not forgotten them; nor will I be silent about the severity of thy scourge, and the amazing quickness of thy mercy. During that time thou didst torture me with a toothache; and when it had become so acute that I was not able to speak, it came into my heart to urge all my friends who were present to pray for me to thee, the God of all health. And I wrote it down on the tablet and gave it to them to read. Presently, as we bowed our knees in supplication, the pain was gone. But what pain? How did it go? I confess that I was terrified, O Lord my God, because from my earliest years I had never experienced such pain. And thy purposes were profoundly impressed upon me; and rejoicing in faith, I praised thy name. But that faith allowed me no rest in respect of my past sins, which were not yet forgiven me through thy baptism.

13. Now that the vintage vacation was ended, I gave notice to the citizens of Milan that they might provide their scholars with another word-merchant. I gave as my reasons my determination to serve thee and also my insufficiency for the task, because of the difficulty in breathing and the pain in my chest.

And by letters I notified thy bishop, the holy man Ambrose, of my former errors and my present resolution. And I asked his advice as to which of thy books it was best for me to read so that I might be the more ready and fit for the reception of so great a grace. He recommended Isaiah the prophet; and I believe it was because Isaiah foreshows more clearly than others the gospel, and the calling of the Gentiles. But because I could not understand the first part and because I imagined the rest to be like it, I laid it aside with the intention of taking it up again later, when better practiced in our Lord\

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/st-augustine/confessions-book-ix-chapter-v/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net