

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Iii

by St. Augustine

Transcript

3. What is it to me that men should hear my confessions as if it were they who were going to cure all my infirmities? People are curious to know the lives of others, but slow to correct their own. Why are they anxious to hear from me what I am, when they are unwilling to hear from thee what they are? And how can they tell when they hear what I say about myself whether I speak the truth, since no man knows what is in a man "save the spirit of man which is in him"[322]? But if they were to hear from thee something concerning themselves, they would not be able to say, "The Lord is lying." For what does it mean to hear from thee about themselves but to know themselves? And who is he that knows himself and says, "This is false," unless he himself is lying? But, because "love believes all things"[323]--at least among those who are bound together in love by its bonds--I confess to thee, O Lord, so that men may also hear; for if I cannot prove to them that I confess the truth, yet those whose ears love opens to me will believe me.

4. But wilt thou, O my inner Physician, make clear to me what profit I am to gain in doing this? For the confessions of my past sins (which thou hast "forgiven and covered"[324] that thou mightest make me blessed in thee, transforming my soul by faith and thy sacrament), when they are read and heard, may stir up the heart so that it will stop dozing along in despair, saying, "I cannot"; but will instead awake in the love of thy mercy and the sweetness of thy grace, by which he that is weak is strong, provided he is made conscious of his own weakness. And it will please those who are good to hear about the past errors of those who are now freed from them. And they will take delight, not because they are errors, but because they were and are so no longer. What profit, then, O Lord my God--to whom my conscience makes her daily confession, far more confident in the hope of thy mercy than in her own innocence--what profit is there, I ask thee, in confessing to men in thy presence, through this book, both what I am now as well as what I have been? For I have seen and spoken of my harvest of things past. But what am I now, at this very moment of making my confessions? Many different people desire to know, both those who know me and those who do not know me. Some have heard about me or from me, but their ear is not close to my heart, where I am whatever it is that I am. They have the desire to hear me confess what I am within, where they can neither extend eye nor ear nor mind. They desire as those willing to believe--but will they understand? For the love by which they are good tells them that I am not lying in my confessions, and the love in them believes me.

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