

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Xxx

by St. Augustine

Transcript

41. Obviously thou commandest that I should be continent from "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." [348] Thou commandest me to abstain from fornication, and as for marriage itself, thou hast counseled something better than what thou dost allow. And since thou gavest it, it was done--even before I became a minister of thy sacrament. But there still exist in my memory--of which I have spoken so much--the images of such things as my habits had fixed there. These things rush into my thoughts with no power when I am awake; but in sleep they rush in not only so as to give pleasure, but even to obtain consent and what very closely resembles the deed itself. Indeed, the illusion of the image prevails to such an extent, in both my soul and my flesh, that the illusion persuades me when sleeping to what the reality cannot do when I am awake. Am I not myself at such a time, O Lord my God? And is there so much of a difference between myself awake and myself in the moment when I pass from waking to sleeping, or return from sleeping to waking?

Where, then, is the power of reason which resists such suggestions when I am awake--for even if the things themselves be forced upon it I remain unmoved? Does reason cease when the eyes close? Is it put to sleep with the bodily senses? But in that case how does it come to pass that even in slumber we often resist, and with our conscious purposes in mind, continue most chastely in them, and yield no assent to such allurements? Yet there is at least this much difference: that when it happens otherwise in dreams, when we wake up, we return to peace of conscience. And it is by this difference between sleeping and waking that we discover that it was not we who did it, while we still feel sorry that in some way it was done in us.

42. Is not thy hand, O Almighty God, able to heal all the diseases of my soul and, by thy more and more abundant grace, to quench even the lascivious motions of my sleep? Thou wilt increase thy gifts in me more and more, O Lord, that my soul may follow me to thee, wrenched free from the sticky glue of lust so that it is no longer in rebellion against itself, even in dreams; that it neither commits nor consents to these debasing corruptions which come through sensual images and which result in the pollution of the flesh. For it is no great thing for the Almighty, who is "able to do . . . more than we can ask or think," [349] to bring it about that no such influence--not even one so slight that a nod might restrain it--should afford gratification to the feelings of a chaste person even when sleeping. This could come to pass not only in this life but even at my present age. But what I am still in this way of wickedness I have confessed unto my good Lord, rejoicing with trembling in what thou hast given me and grieving in myself for that in which I am still imperfect. I am trusting that thou wilt perfect thy mercies in me, to the fullness of that peace which both my inner and outward being shall have with thee when death is swallowed up in victory. [350]

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