

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Xxxvi

by St. Augustine

Transcript

58. Shall we, then, also reckon this vain curiosity among the things that are to be but lightly esteemed? Shall anything restore us to hope except thy complete mercy since thou hast begun to change us? Thou knowest to what extent thou hast already changed me, for first of all thou didst heal me of the lust for vindicating myself, so that thou mightest then forgive all my remaining iniquities and heal all my diseases, and "redeem my life from corruption and crown me with loving-kindness and tender mercies, and satisfy my desires with good things." [381] It was thou who didst restrain my pride with thy fear, and bowed my neck to thy "yoke." [382] And now I bear the yoke and it is "light" to me, because thou didst promise it to be so, and hast made it to be so. And so in truth it was, though I knew it not when I feared to take it up.

59. But, O Lord--thou who alone reignest without pride, because thou alone art the true Lord, who hast no Lord--has this third kind of temptation left me, or can it leave me during this life: the desire to be feared and loved of men, with no other view than that I may find in it a joy that is no joy? It is, rather, a wretched life and an unseemly ostentation. It is a special reason why we do not love thee, nor devotedly fear thee. Therefore "thou resistest the proud but givest grace to the humble." [383] Thou thunderest down on the ambitious designs of the world, and "the foundations of the hills" tremble. [384]

And yet certain offices in human society require the officeholder to be loved and feared of men, and through this the adversary of our true blessedness presses hard upon us, scattering everywhere his snares of "well done, well done"; so that while we are eagerly picking them up, we may be caught unawares and split off our joy from thy truth and fix it on the deceits of men. In this way we come to take pleasure in being loved and feared, not for thy sake but in thy stead. By such means as this, the adversary makes men like himself, that he may have them as his own, not in the harmony of love, but in the fellowship of punishment--the one who aspired to exalt his throne in the north, [385] that in the darkness and the cold men might have to serve him, mimicking thee in perverse and distorted ways.

But see, O Lord, we are thy little flock. Possess us, stretch thy wings above us, and let us take refuge under them. Be thou our glory; let us be loved for thy sake, and let thy word be feared in us. Those who desire to be commended by the men whom thou condemnest will not be defended by men when thou judgest, nor will they be delivered when thou dost condemn them. But when--not as a sinner is praised in the wicked desires of his soul nor when the unrighteous man is blessed in his unrighteousness--a man is praised for some gift that thou hast given him, and he is more gratified at the praise for himself than because he possesses the gift for which he is praised, such a one is praised while thou dost condemn him. In such a case the one who praised is truly better than the one who was praised. For the gift of God in

man was pleasing to the one, while the other was better pleased with the gift of man than with the gift of God.

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