

Confessions - Book X - Chapter Xxxvii

by St. Augustine

Transcript

60. By these temptations we are daily tried, O Lord; we are tried unceasingly. Our daily "furnace" is the human tongue.[386] And also in this respect thou commandest us to be continent. Give what thou commandest and command what thou wilt. In this matter, thou knowest the groans of my heart and the rivers of my eyes, for I am not able to know for certain how far I am clean of this plague; and I stand in great fear of my "secret faults,"[387] which thy eyes perceive, though mine do not. For in respect of the pleasures of my flesh and of idle curiosity, I see how far I have been able to hold my mind in check when I abstain from them either by voluntary act of the will or because they simply are not at hand; for then I can inquire of myself how much more or less frustrating it is to me not to have them. This is also true about riches, which are sought for in order that they may minister to one of these three "lusts," or two, or the whole complex of them. The mind is able to see clearly if, when it has them, it despises them so that they may be cast aside and it may prove itself.

But if we desire to test our power of doing without praise, must we then live wickedly or lead a life so atrocious and abandoned that everyone who knows us will detest us? What greater madness than this can be either said or conceived? And yet if praise, both by custom and right, is the companion of a good life and of good works, we should as little forgo its companionship as the good life itself. But unless a thing is absent I do not know whether I should be contented or troubled at having to do without it.

61. What is it, then, that I am confessing to thee, O Lord, concerning this sort of temptation? What else, than that I am delighted with praise, but more with the truth itself than with praise. For if I were to have any choice whether, if I were mad or utterly in the wrong, I would prefer to be praised by all men or, if I were steadily and fully confident in the truth, would prefer to be blamed by all, I see which I should choose. Yet I wish I were unwilling that the approval of others should add anything to my joy for any good I have. Yet I admit that it does increase it; and, more than that, dispraise diminishes it. Then, when I am disturbed over this wretchedness of mine, an excuse presents itself to me, the value of which thou knowest, O God, for it renders me uncertain. For since it is not only continence that thou hast enjoined on us--that is, what things to hold back our love from--but righteousness as well--that is, what to bestow our love upon--and hast wished us to love not only thee, but also our neighbor, it often turns out that when I am gratified by intelligent praise I seem to myself to be gratified by the competence or insight of my neighbor; or, on the other hand, I am sorry for the defect in him when I hear him dispraise either what he does not understand or what is good. For I am sometimes grieved at the praise I get, either when those things that displease me in myself are praised in me, or when lesser and trifling goods are valued more highly than they should be. But, again, how do I know whether I feel this way because I am unwilling that he who praises me

should differ from me concerning myself not because I am moved with any consideration for him, but because the good things that please me in myself are more pleasing to me when they also please another? For in a way, I am not praised when my judgment of myself is not praised, since either those things which are displeasing to me are praised, or those things which are less pleasing to me are more praised. Am I not, then, quite uncertain of myself in this respect?

62. Behold, O Truth, it is in thee that I see that I ought not to be moved at my own praises for my own sake, but for the sake of my neighbor\

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