

Confessions - Book Xiii - Chapter Xxiii

by St. Augustine

Transcript

33. Now this phrase, "he judges all things," means that man has dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over all cattle and wild beasts, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. And he does this by the power of reason in his mind by which he perceives "the things of the Spirit of God."^[625] But, when man was put in this high office, he did not understand what was involved and thus was reduced to the level of the brute beasts, and made like them.^[626]

Therefore in thy Church, O our God, by the grace thou hast given us--since we are thy workmanship, created in good works (not only those who are in spiritual authority but also those who are spiritually subject to them)--thou madest man male and female. Here all are equal in thy spiritual grace where, as far as sex is concerned, there is neither male nor female, just as there is neither Jew nor Greek, nor bond nor free. Spiritual men, therefore, whether those who are in authority or those who are subject to authority, judge spiritually. They do not judge by the light of that spiritual knowledge which shines in the firmament, for it is inappropriate for them to judge by so sublime an authority. Nor does it behoove them to judge concerning thy Book itself, although there are some things in it which are not clear. Instead, we submit our understanding to it and believe with certainty that what is hidden from our sight is still rightly and truly spoken. In this way, even though a man is now spiritual and renewed by the knowledge of God according to the image of him who created him, he must be a doer of the law rather than its judge.^[627] Neither does the spiritual man judge concerning that division between spiritual and carnal men which is known to thy eyes, O God, and which may not, as yet, be made manifest to us by their external works, so that we may know them by their fruits; yet thou, O God, knowest them already and thou hast divided and called them secretly, before the firmament was made. Nor does a man, even though he is spiritual, judge the disordered state of society in this world. For what business of his is it to judge those who are without, since he cannot know which of them may later on come into the sweetness of thy grace, and which of them may continue in the perpetual bitterness of their impiety?

34. Man, then, even if he was made after thy own image, did not receive the power of dominion over the lights of heaven, nor over the secret heaven, nor over the day and the night which thou calledst forth before the creation of the heaven, nor over the gathering together of the waters which is the sea. Instead, he received dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air; and over all cattle, and all the earth; and over all creeping things which creep on the earth.

Indeed, he judges and approves what he finds right and disapproves what he finds amiss, whether in the celebration of those mysteries by which are initiated those whom thy mercy hast sought out in the midst of

many waters; or in that sacrament in which is exhibited the Fish itself[628] which, being raised from the depths, the pious "earth"[629] feeds upon; or, in the signs and symbols of words, which are subject to the authority of thy Book--such signs as burst forth and sound from the mouth, as if it were "flying" under the firmament, interpreting, expounding, discoursing, disputing, blessing, invoking thee, so that the people may answer, "Amen." [630] The reason that all these words have to be pronounced vocally is because of the abyss of this world and the blindness of our flesh in which thoughts cannot be seen directly,[631] but have to be spoken aloud in our ears. Thus, although the flying fowl are multiplied on the earth, they still take their origins from the waters.

The spiritual man also judges by approving what is right and reproving what he finds amiss in the works and morals of the faithful, such as in their almsgiving, which is signified by the phrase, "The earth bringing forth its fruit." And he judges of the "living soul," which is then made to live by the disciplining of her affections in chastity, in fasting, and in holy meditation. And he also judges concerning all those things which are perceived by the bodily senses. For it can be said that he should judge in all matters about which he also has the power of correction.

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