

~Other Speakers A-F: St. Augustine:

15. Can it ever, at any time or place, be unrighteous for a man to love God with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his mind; and his neighbor as himself?[74] Similarly, offenses against nature are everywhere and at all times to be held in detestation and should be punished. Such offenses, for example, were those of the Sodomites; and, even if all nations should commit them, they would all be judged guilty of the same crime by the divine law, which has not made men so that they should ever abuse one another in that way. For the fellowship that should be between God and us is violated whenever that nature of which he is the author is polluted by perverted lust. But these offenses against customary morality are to be avoided according to the variety of such customs. Thus, what is agreed upon by convention, and confirmed by custom or the law of any city or nation, may not be violated at the lawless pleasure of any, whether citizen or stranger. For any part that is not consistent with its whole is unseemly. Nevertheless, when God commands anything contrary to the customs or compacts of any nation, even though it were never done by them before, it is to be done; and if it has been interrupted, it is to be restored; and if it has never been established, it is to be established. For it is lawful for a king, in the state over which he reigns, to command that which neither he himself nor anyone before him had commanded. And if it cannot be held to be inimical to the public interest to obey him--and, in truth, it would be inimical if he were not obeyed, since obedience to princes is a general compact of human society--how much more, then, ought we unhesitatingly to obey God, the Governor of all his creatures! For, just as among the authorities in human society, the greater authority is obeyed before the lesser, so also must God be above all.

16. This applies as well to deeds of violence where there is a real desire to harm another, either by humiliating treatment or by injury. Either of these may be done for reasons of revenge, as one enemy against another, or in order to obtain some advantage over another, as in the case of the highwayman and the traveler; else they may be done in order to avoid some other evil, as in the case of one who fears another; or through envy as, for example, an unfortunate man harming a happy one just because he is happy; or they may be done by a prosperous man against someone whom he fears will become equal to himself or whose equality he resents. They may even be done for the mere pleasure in another man's pain, as the spectators of gladiatorial shows or the people who deride and mock at others. These are the major forms of iniquity that spring out of the lust of the flesh, and of the eye, and of power.[75] Sometimes there is just one; sometimes two together; sometimes all of them at once. Thus we live, offending against the Three and the Seven, that harp of ten strings, thy Decalogue, O God most high and most sweet.[76] But now how can offenses of vileness harm thee who canst not be defiled; or how can deeds of violence harm thee who canst not be harmed? Still thou dost punish these sins which men commit against themselves because, even when they sin against thee, they are also committing impiety against their own souls. Iniquity gives itself the lie, either by corrupting or by perverting that nature which thou hast made and ordained. And they do this by an immoderate use of lawful things; or by lustful desire for things forbidden, as "against nature"; or when they are guilty of sin by raging with heart and voice against thee, rebelling against thee, "kicking against the pricks"[77]; or when they cast aside respect for human society and take audacious delight in conspiracies and feuds according to their private likes and dislikes.

This is what happens whenever thou art forsaken, O Fountain of Life, who art the one and true Creator and Ruler of the universe. This is what happens when through self-willed pride a part is loved under the false assumption that it is the whole. Therefore, we must return to thee in humble piety and let thee purge us from our evil ways, and be merciful to those who confess their sins to thee, and hear the groanings of the prisoners and loosen us from those fetters which we have forged for ourselves. This thou wilt do, provided we do not raise up against thee the arrogance of a false freedom--for thus we lose all through craving more, by loving our own good more than thee, the common good of all.