

ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

By Saint Aurelius Augustine

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BOOK ONE

[continues]

Chapter 23 — Man Needs No Injunction to Love Himself and His Own Body. Those things which are objects of use are not all, however, to be loved, but those only which are either united with us in a common relation to God, such as a man or an angel, or are so related to us as to need the goodness of God through our instrumentality, such as the body. For assuredly the martyrs did not love the wickedness of their persecutors, although they used it to attain the favor of God. As, then, there are four kinds of things that are to be loved — first, that which is above us; second, ourselves; third, that which is on a level with us; fourth, that which is beneath us — no precepts need be given about the second and fourth of these. For, however far a man may fall away from the truth, he still continues to love himself, and to love his own body. The soul which flies away from the unchangeable Light, the Ruler of all things, does so that it may rule over itself and over its own body; and so it cannot but love both itself and its own body. Moreover, it thinks it has attained something very great if it is able to lord it over its companions, that is, other men. For it is inherent in the sinful soul to desire above all

things, and to claim as due to itself, that which is properly due to God only. Now such love of itself is more correctly called hate. For it is not just that it should desire what is beneath it to be obedient to it while itself will not obey its own superior; and most justly has it been said, He who loves iniquity hates his own soul. And accordingly the soul becomes weak, and endures much suffering about the mortal body. For, of course, it must love the body, and be grieved at its corruption; and the immortality and incorruptibility of the body spring out of the health of the soul. Now the health of the soul is to cling steadfastly to the better part, that is, to the unchangeable God. But when it aspires to lord it even over those who are by nature its equals — that is, its fellow-men — this is a reach of arrogance utterly intolerable. Chapter 24 — No Man Hates His Own Flesh, Not Even Those Who Abuse It. No man, then, hates himself. On this point, indeed, no question was ever raised by any sect. But neither does any man hate his own body. For the apostle says truly, No man ever yet hated his own flesh. Ephesians 5:29 And when some people say that they would rather be without a body altogether, they entirely deceive themselves. For it is not their body, but its corruptions and its heaviness, that they hate. And so it is not no body, but an uncorrupted and very light body, that they want. But they think a body of that kind would be no body at all, because they think such a thing as that must be a spirit. And as to the fact that they seem in some sort to scourge their bodies by abstinence and toil, those who do this in the right spirit do it not that they may get rid of their body, but that they may have it in subjection and ready for every needful work. For they strive by a kind of toilsome exercise of the body itself to root out those lusts that are hurtful to the body, that is, those habits and affections of the soul that lead to the enjoyment of unworthy objects. They are not destroying themselves; they are taking care of their health. Those, on the other hand, who do this in a

perverse spirit, make war upon their own body as if it were a natural enemy. And in this matter they are led astray by a mistaken interpretation of what they read: The flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, and these are contrary the one to the other. Galatians 5:17 For this is said of the carnal habit yet unsubdued, against which the spirit lusts, not to destroy the body, but to eradicate the lust of the body — that is, its evil habit — and thus to make it subject to the spirit, which is what the order of nature demands. For as, after the resurrection, the body, having become wholly subject to the spirit, will live in perfect peace to all eternity; even in this life we must make it an object to have the carnal habit changed for the better, so that its inordinate affections may not war against the soul. And until this shall take place, the flesh lusts against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; the spirit struggling, not in hatred, but for the mastery, because it desires that what it loves should be subject to the higher principle; and the flesh struggling, not in hatred, but because of the bondage of habit which it has derived from its parent stock, and which has grown in upon it by a law of nature till it has become inveterate. The spirit, then, in subduing the flesh, is working as it were to destroy the ill-founded peace of an evil habit, and to bring about the real peace which springs out of a good habit. Nevertheless, not even those who, led astray by false notions, hate their bodies would be prepared to sacrifice one eye, even supposing they could do so without suffering any pain, and that they had as much sight left in one as they formerly had in two, unless some object was to be attained which would overbalance the loss. This and other indications of the same kind are sufficient to show those who candidly seek the truth how well-founded is the statement of the apostle when he says, No man ever yet hated his own flesh. He adds too, but nourishes and cherishes it, even as the Lord the Church. Ephesians 5:29

Chapter 25 — A Man May Love Something More Than His

Body, But Does Not Therefore Hate His Body. Man, therefore, ought to be taught the due measure of loving, that is, in what measure he may love himself so as to be of service to himself. For that he does love himself, and does desire to do good to himself, nobody but a fool would doubt. He is to be taught, too, in what measure to love his body, so as to care for it wisely and within due limits. For it is equally manifest that he loves his body also, and desires to keep it safe and sound. And yet a man may have something that he loves better than the safety and soundness of his body. For many have been found voluntarily to suffer both pains and amputations of some of their limbs that they might obtain other objects which they valued more highly. But no one is to be told not to desire the safety and health of his body because there is something he desires more. For the miser, though he loves money, buys bread for himself — that is, he gives away money that he is very fond of and desires to heap up — but it is because he values more highly the bodily health which the bread sustains. It is superfluous to argue longer on a point so very plain, but this is just what the error of wicked men often compels us to do. Chapter 26 — The Command to Love God and Our Neighbor Includes a Command to Love Ourselves. Seeing, then, that there is no need of a command that every man should love himself and his own body — seeing, that is, that we love ourselves, and what is beneath us but connected with us, through a law of nature which has never been violated, and which is common to us with the beasts (for even the beasts love themselves and their own bodies) — it only remained necessary to lay injunctions upon us in regard to God above us, and our neighbor beside us. You shall love, He says, the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. Matthew 22:37-40 Thus the end of the

commandment is love, and that twofold, the love of God and the love of our neighbor. Now, if you take yourself in your entirety — that is, soul and body together — and your neighbor in his entirety, soul and body together (for man is made up of soul and body), you will find that none of the classes of things that are to be loved is overlooked in these two commandments. For though, when the love of God comes first, and the measure of our love for Him is prescribed in such terms that it is evident all other things are to find their centre in Him, nothing seems to be said about our love for ourselves; yet when it is said, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, it at once becomes evident that our love for ourselves has not been overlooked.

Chapter 27 — The Order of Love. Now he is a man of just and holy life who forms an unprejudiced estimate of things, and keeps his affections also under strict control, so that he neither loves what he ought not to love, nor fails to love what he ought to love, nor loves that more which ought to be loved less, nor loves that equally which ought to be loved either less or more, nor loves that less or more which ought to be loved equally. No sinner is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for His own sake. And if God is to be loved more than any man, each man ought to love God more than himself. Likewise we ought to love another man better than our own body, because all things are to be loved in reference to God, and another man can have fellowship with us in the enjoyment of God, whereas our body cannot; for the body only lives through the soul, and it is by the soul that we enjoy God. Chapter 28 — How We are to Decide Whom to Aid. Further, all men are to be loved equally. But since you cannot do good to all, you are to pay special regard to those who, by the accidents of time, or place, or circumstance, are brought into closer connection with you. For, suppose that you had a great deal of some commodity, and felt bound to give it away to somebody who

had none, and that it could not be given to more than one person; if two persons presented themselves, neither of whom had either from need or relationship a greater claim upon you than the other, you could do nothing fairer than choose by lot to which you would give what could not be given to both. Just so among men: since you cannot consult for the good of them all, you must take the matter as decided for you by a sort of lot, according as each man happens for the time being to be more closely connected with you. Chapter 29 — We are to Desire and Endeavor that All Men May Love God. Now of all who can with us enjoy God, we love partly those to whom we render services, partly those who render services to us, partly those who both help us in our need and in turn are helped by us, partly those upon whom we confer no advantage and from whom we look for none. We ought to desire, however, that they should all join with us in loving God, and all the assistance that we either give them or accept from them should tend to that one end. For in the theatres, dens of iniquity though they be, if a man is fond of a particular actor, and enjoys his art as a great or even as the very greatest good, he is fond of all who join with him in admiration of his favorite, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of him whom they admire in common; and the more fervent he is in his admiration, the more he works in every way he can to secure new admirers for him, and the more anxious he becomes to show him to others; and if he find any one comparatively indifferent, he does all he can to excite his interest by urging his favorite's merits: if, however, he meet with any one who opposes him, he is exceedingly displeased by such a man's contempt of his favorite, and strives in every way he can to remove it. Now, if this be so, what does it become us to do who live in the fellowship of the love of God, the enjoyment of whom is true happiness of life, to whom all who love Him owe both their own existence and the love they bear Him, concerning

whom we have no fear that any one who comes to know Him will be disappointed in Him, and who desires our love, not for any gain to Himself, but that those who love Him may obtain an eternal reward, even Himself whom they love? And hence it is that we love even our enemies. For we do not fear them, seeing they cannot take away from us what we love; but we pity them rather, because the more they hate us the more are they separated from Him whom we love. For if they would turn to Him, they must of necessity love Him as the supreme good, and love us too as partakers with them in so great a blessing. Chapter 30 — Whether Angels are to Be Reckoned Our Neighbors. There arises further in this connection a question about angels. For they are happy in the enjoyment of Him whom we long to enjoy; and the more we enjoy Him in this life as through a glass darkly, the more easy do we find it to bear our pilgrimage, and the more eagerly do we long for its termination. But it is not irrational to ask whether in those two commandments is included the love of angels also. For that He who commanded us to love our neighbor made no exception, as far as men are concerned, is shown both by our Lord Himself in the Gospel, and by the Apostle Paul. For when the man to whom our Lord delivered those two commandments, and to whom He said that on these hang all the law and the prophets, asked Him, And who is my neighbor? He told him of a certain man who, going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, fell among thieves, and was severely wounded by them, and left naked and half dead. And He showed him that nobody was neighbor to this man except him who took pity upon him and came forward to relieve and care for him. And the man who had asked the question admitted the truth of this when he was himself interrogated in turn. To whom our Lord says, Go and do likewise; teaching us that he is our neighbor whom it is our duty to help in his need, or whom it would be our duty to help if he were in need. Whence it follows, that he whose

duty it would be in turn to help us is our neighbor. For the name neighbor is a relative one, and no one can be neighbor except to a neighbor. And, again, who does not see that no exception is made of any one as a person to whom the offices of mercy may be denied when our Lord extends the rule even to our enemies? Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you. Matthew 5:44 And so also the Apostle Paul teaches when he says: For this, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love works no ill to his neighbor. Romans 13:9-10 Whoever then supposes that the apostle did not embrace every man in this precept, is compelled to admit, what is at once most absurd and most pernicious, that the apostle thought it no sin, if a man were not a Christian or were an enemy, to commit adultery with his wife, or to kill him, or to covet his goods. And as nobody but a fool would say this, it is clear that every man is to be considered our neighbor, because we are to work no ill to any man. But now, if every one to whom we ought to show, or who ought to show to us, the offices of mercy is by right called a neighbor, it is manifest that the command to love our neighbor embraces the holy angels also, seeing that so great offices of mercy have been performed by them on our behalf, as may easily be shown by turning the attention to many passages of Holy Scripture. And on this ground even God Himself, our Lord, desired to be called our neighbor. For our Lord Jesus Christ points to Himself under the figure of the man who brought aid to him who was lying half dead on the road, wounded and abandoned by the robbers. And the Psalmist says in his prayer, I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother. But as the Divine nature is of higher excellence than, and far removed above, our nature, the command to love God is

distinct from that to love our neighbor. For He shows us pity on account of His own goodness, but we show pity to one another on account of His — that is, He pities us that we may fully enjoy Himself; we pity one another that we may fully enjoy Him. Chapter 31 — God Uses Rather Than Enjoys Us. And on this ground, when we say that we enjoy only that which we love for its own sake, and that nothing is a true object of enjoyment except that which makes us happy, and that all other things are for use, there seems still to be something that requires explanation. For God loves us, and Holy Scripture frequently sets before us the love He has towards us. In what way then does He love us? As objects of use or as objects of enjoyment? If He enjoys us, He must be in need of good from us, and no sane man will say that; for all the good we enjoy is either Himself, or what comes from Himself. And no one can be ignorant or in doubt as to the fact that the light stands in no need of the glitter of the things it has itself lit up. The Psalmist says most plainly, I said to the Lord, You are my God, for You need not my goodness. He does not enjoy us then, but makes use of us. For if He neither enjoys nor uses us, I am at a loss to discover in what way He can love us. Chapter 32 — In What Way God Uses Man. But neither does He use after our fashion of using. For when we use objects, we do so with a view to the full enjoyment of the goodness of God. God, however, in His use of us, has reference to His own goodness. For it is because He is good we exist; and so far as we truly exist we are good. And, further, because He is also just, we cannot with impunity be evil; and so far as we are evil, so far is our existence less complete. Now He is the first and supreme existence, who is altogether unchangeable, and who could say in the fullest sense of the words, I AM That I AM, and You shall say to them, I AM has sent me unto you; Exodus 3:14 so that all other things that exist, both owe their existence entirely to Him, and are good only so far as He has given it to them to be so. That

use, then, which God is said to make of us has no reference to His own advantage, but to ours only; and, so far as He is concerned, has reference only to His goodness. When we take pity upon a man and care for him, it is for his advantage we do so; but somehow or other our own advantage follows by a sort of natural consequence, for God does not leave the mercy we show to him who needs it to go without reward. Now this is our highest reward, that we should fully enjoy Him, and that all who enjoy Him should enjoy one another in Him. Chapter 33 — In What Way Man Should Be Enjoyed. For if we find our happiness complete in one another, we stop short upon the road, and place our hope of happiness in man or angel. Now the proud man and the proud angel arrogate this to themselves, and are glad to have the hope of others fixed upon them. But, on the contrary, the holy man and the holy angel, even when we are weary and anxious to stay with them and rest in them, set themselves to recruit our energies with the provision which they have received of God for us or for themselves; and then urge us thus refreshed to go on our way towards Him, in the enjoyment of whom we find our common happiness. For even the apostle exclaims, Was Paul crucified for you? Or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? 1 Corinthians 1:13 and again: Neither is he that plants anything, neither he that waters; but God that gives the increase. 1 Corinthians 3:7 And the angel admonishes the man who is about to worship him, that he should rather worship Him who is his Master, and under whom he himself is a fellow-servant. Revelation 19:10 But when you have joy of a man in God, it is God rather than man that you enjoy. For you enjoy Him by whom you are made happy, and you rejoice to have come to Him in whose presence you place your hope of joy. And accordingly, Paul says to Philemon, Yea, brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord. For if he had not added in the Lord, but had only said, Let me have joy of you, he would have implied that he fixed his

hope of happiness upon him, although even in the immediate context to enjoy is used in the sense of to use with delight. For when the thing that we love is near us, it is a matter of course that it should bring delight with it. And if you pass beyond this delight, and make it a means to that which you are permanently to rest in, you are using it, and it is an abuse of language to say that you enjoy it. But if you cling to it, and rest in it, finding your happiness complete in it, then you may be truly and properly said to enjoy it. And this we must never do except in the case of the Blessed Trinity, who is the Supreme and Unchangeable Good. Chapter 34 — Christ the First Way to God. And mark that even when He who is Himself the Truth and the Word, by whom all things were made, had been made flesh that He might dwell among us, the apostle yet says: Yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more. 2 Corinthians 5:16 For Christ, desiring not only to give the possession to those who had completed the journey, but also to be Himself the way to those who were just setting out, determined to take a fleshly body. Whence also that expression, The Lord created me in the beginning of His way, Proverbs 8:22 that is, that those who wished to come might begin their journey in Him. The apostle, therefore, although still on the way, and following after God who called him to the reward of His heavenly calling, yet forgetting those things which were behind, and pressing on towards those things which were before, Philippians 3:13 had already passed over the beginning of the way, and had now no further need of it; yet by this way all must commence their journey who desire to attain to the truth, and to rest in eternal life. For He says: I am the way, and the truth, and the life; John 14:6 that is, by me men come, to me they come, in me they rest. For when we come to Him, we come to the Father also, because through an equal an equal is known; and the Holy Spirit binds, and as it were seals us, so that we are able to

rest permanently in the supreme and unchangeable Good. And hence we may learn how essential it is that nothing should detain us on the way, when not even our Lord Himself, so far as He has condescended to be our way, is willing to detain us, but wishes us rather to press on; and, instead of weakly clinging to temporal things, even though these have been put on and worn by Him for our salvation, to pass over them quickly, and to struggle to attain unto Himself, who has freed our nature from the bondage of temporal things, and has set it down at the right hand of His Father. Chapter 35 — The Fulfillment and End of Scripture is the Love of God and Our Neighbor. Of all, then, that has been said since we entered upon the discussion about things, this is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves. For there is no need of a command that each man should love himself. The whole temporal dispensation for our salvation, therefore, was framed by the providence of God that we might know this truth and be able to act upon it; and we ought to use that dispensation, not with such love and delight as if it were a good to rest in, but with a transient feeling rather, such as we have towards the road, or carriages, or other things that are merely means. Perhaps some other comparison can be found that will more suitably express the idea that we are to love the things by which we are borne only for the sake of that towards which we are borne. Chapter 36 — That Interpretation of Scripture Which Builds Us Up in Love is Not Perniciously Deceptive Nor Mendacious, Even Though It Be Faulty. The Interpreter, However, Should Be Corrected. Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet

understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for the building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from the charge of deception. For there is involved in deception the intention to say what is false; and we find plenty of people who intend to deceive, but nobody who wishes to be deceived. Since, then, the man who knows practises deceit, and the ignorant man is practised upon, it is quite clear that in any particular case the man who is deceived is a better man than he who deceives, seeing that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice. Now every man who lies commits an injustice; and if any man thinks that a lie is ever useful, he must think that injustice is sometimes useful. For no liar keeps faith in the matter about which he lies. He wishes, of course, that the man to whom he lies should place confidence in him; and yet he betrays his confidence by lying to him. Now every man who breaks faith is unjust. Either, then, injustice is sometimes useful (which is impossible), or a lie is never useful. Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended, goes astray, but not through any falsehood in Scripture. Nevertheless, as I was going to say, if his mistaken interpretation tends to build up love, which is the end of the commandment, he goes astray in much the same way as a man who by mistake quits the high road, but yet reaches through the fields the same place to which the road leads. He is to be corrected, however, and to be shown how much better it is not to quit the straight road, lest, if he get into a habit of going astray, he may sometimes take cross roads, or even go in the wrong direction altogether. Chapter 37 — Dangers of Mistaken Interpretation. For if he takes up rashly a meaning which the author whom he is reading did not intend, he often falls

in with other statements which he cannot harmonize with this meaning. And if he admits that these statements are true and certain, then it follows that the meaning he had put upon the former passage cannot be the true one: and so it comes to pass, one can hardly tell how, that, out of love for his own opinion, he begins to feel more angry with Scripture than he is with himself. And if he should once permit that evil to creep in, it will utterly destroy him. For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7 Now faith will totter if the authority of Scripture begin to shake. And then, if faith totter, love itself will grow cold. For if a man has fallen from faith, he must necessarily also fall from love; for he cannot love what he does not believe to exist. But if he both believes and loves, then through good works, and through diligent attention to the precepts of morality, he comes to hope also that he shall attain the object of his love. And so these are the three things to which all knowledge and all prophecy are subservient: faith, hope, love. Chapter 38 — Love Never Fails. But sight shall displace faith; and hope shall be swallowed up in that perfect bliss to which we shall come: love, on the other hand, shall wax greater when these others fail. For if we love by faith that which as yet we see not, how much more shall we love it when we begin to see! And if we love by hope that which as yet we have not reached, how much more shall we love it when we reach it! For there is this great difference between things temporal and things eternal, that a temporal object is valued more before we possess it, and begins to prove worthless the moment we attain it, because it does not satisfy the soul, which has its only true and sure resting-place in eternity: an eternal object, on the other hand, is loved with greater ardor when it is in possession than while it is still an object of desire, for no one in his longing for it can set a higher value on it than really belongs to it, so as to think it comparatively worthless when he finds it of less value than he thought; on

the contrary, however high the value any man may set upon it when he is on his way to possess it, he will find it, when it comes into his possession, of higher value still. Chapter 39 — He Who is Mature in Faith, Hope and Love, Needs Scripture No Longer. And thus a man who is resting upon faith, hope and love, and who keeps a firm hold upon these, does not need the Scriptures except for the purpose of instructing others. Accordingly, many live without copies of the Scriptures, even in solitude, on the strength of these three graces. So that in their case, I think, the saying is already fulfilled: Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. 1 Corinthians 13:8 Yet by means of these instruments (as they may be called), so great an edifice of faith and love has been built up in them, that, holding to what is perfect, they do not seek for what is only in part perfect — of course, I mean, so far as is possible in this life; for, in comparison with the future life, the life of no just and holy man is perfect here. Therefore the apostle says: Now abides faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity: 1 Corinthians 13:13 because, when a man shall have reached the eternal world, while the other two graces will fail, love will remain greater and more assured. Chapter 40 — What Manner of Reader Scripture Demands. And, therefore, if a man fully understands that the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned, 1 Timothy 1:5 and is bent upon making all his understanding of Scripture to bear upon these three graces, he may come to the interpretation of these books with an easy mind. For while the apostle says love, he adds out of a pure heart, to provide against anything being loved but that which is worthy of love. And he joins with this a good conscience, in reference to hope; for, if a man has the burden of a bad conscience, he despairs of ever reaching that which he believes in and loves. And in the third place

he says: and of faith unfeigned. For if our faith is free from all hypocrisy, then we both abstain from loving what is unworthy of our love, and by living uprightly we are able to indulge the hope that our hope shall not be in vain. For these reasons I have been anxious to speak about the objects of faith, as far as I thought it necessary for my present purpose; for much has already been said on this subject in other volumes, either by others or by myself. And so let this be the end of the present book. In the next I shall discuss, as far as God shall give me light, the subject of signs.

