

On Continence

By Saint Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430)

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St. Augustin speaks of his work *On Continence* in *Ep. 231, Ad Darium Comitem*. [See vol. 1. of this edition, p. 584.—P.S.] Possidius, *Ind. c. 10*, mentions it, and it is cited in the *Collectanea* of Bede or Florus, and by Eugypius. Erasmus is therefore wrong in ascribing it to Hugo on the ground of the style, which is not unlike that of the earlier discourses. It is evidently a discourse, and probably for that reason unnoticed in the *Retractations*. The [Manichæan heresy](#) is impugned after the manner of his early works.—(*Abridged from Benedictine ed. vol. vi.*)

1. It is difficult to treat of the [virtue](#) of the [soul](#), which is called Continence, in a manner fully suitable and worthy; but He, whose great gift this [virtue](#) is, will help our littleness under the burden of so great a weight. For He, who bestows it upon His faithful ones when they are continent, Himself gives discourse of it to His ministers when they speak. Lastly, of so great a matter purposing to speak what Himself shall grant, in the first place we say and prove that Continence is the gift of [God](#). We have it written in the Book of Wisdom, that no one can be continent, unless God grant it. But the Lord, concerning that greater and more [glorious](#) Continence itself, whereby there is continence from the marriage bond, says, "Not all can receive this saying, but they to whom it is given." And since marriage [chastity](#) also itself cannot be guarded, unless there be Continence from unlawful intercourse, the Apostle declared both to be the gift of [God](#), when He spoke of both lives, that is, both that of marriage and that without marriage, saying, "I would that all [men](#) were so as myself; but each has his own gift from [God](#); one in this manner, another in that manner."

2. And lest it should seem that necessary Continence was to be hoped for from the Lord only in respect of the [lust](#) of the lower parts of the flesh, it is also sung in the Psalm; "Set, O Lord, a watch to my mouth, and a door of Continence around my lips." But in this [witness](#) of the divine speech, if we understand "mouth" as we ought to understand it, we perceive how great a gift of God Continence there set is. Forsooth it is little to contain the mouth of the body, lest any thing burst forth thence, which is not for the better, through the sound of the voice. For there is, within, the mouth of the heart, where he, who spoke these words, and wrote them for us to speak, desired of the Lord that the watch and door of Continence should be set for him. For many things we say not with the mouth of the body, and cry aloud with the heart: but there goes forth from the mouth of the body no word of any thing, whereof there is silence in the heart. Therefore what flows not forth thence, sounds not abroad: but what flows forth thence, if it be [evil](#), although it move not the tongue, defiles the [soul](#). Therefore Continence must be set there, where the

[conscience](#) even of them who are silent speaks. For it is brought to pass by means of the door of Continenence, that there go not forth thence that, which, even when the lips of the flesh are closed, pollutes the life of him that has the thought.

3. Lastly, to show more plainly the inner mouth, which by these words he meant, after having said, "Set a watch, O Lord, to my mouth, and a door of Continenence around my lips," he added straightway, "Cause not my heart to fall aside into [evil](#) words." The falling aside of the heart, what is it but the consent? For he has not yet spoken, whosoever in his heart has with no falling aside of the heart consented unto suggestions that meet him of each several thing that is seen. But, if he has consented, he has already spoken in his heart, although he has not uttered sound by the mouth; although he has not done with hand or any part whatever of the body, yet has he done what in his thought he has already determined that he is to do: guilty by the divine [laws](#), although hidden to human senses; the word having been spoken in the heart, no deed having been committed through the body. But in no case would he have moved the limb without, in a deed, the beginning of which deed had not gone before within in word. For it is no lie that is written, that "the beginning of every work is a word." Forsooth men do many things with mouth closed, tongue quiet, voice bridled; but yet they do nothing by work of the body, which they have not before spoken in the heart. And through this since there are many [sins](#) in inward sayings which are not in outward deeds, whereas there are none in outward deeds, which do not go before in inward sayings, there will be purity of innocence from both, if the door of Continenence be set around the inward lips.

4. For which [cause](#) our Lord Himself also with His own mouth says, "Cleanse what are within, and what are without will be clean." And, also, in another place, when He was refuting the foolish speeches of the [Jews](#), in that they spoke [evil](#) against His [disciples](#), eating with unwashen hands; "Not what enters into the mouth," said He, "defiles the man: but what comes forth out of the mouth, that defiles the man." Which sentence, if the whole of it be taken of the mouth of the body, is absurd. For neither does vomit defile him, whom food defiles not. Forsooth food enters into the mouth, vomit proceeds forth out of the mouth. But without [doubt](#) the former words relate to the mouth of the flesh, where He says, "Not what enters into the mouth defiles the man," but the latter words to the mouth of the heart, where He says, "But what proceeds forth out of the mouth, this defiles the man." Lastly, when the Apostle Peter sought of Him an explanation of this as of a [parable](#), He answered, "Are ye also yet without understanding? understand ye not, that whatsoever enters into the mouth, goes into the belly, and is cast out into the draught?" Here surely we perceive the mouth of the flesh, into which the food enters. But in what He next adds, in order that we might recognize the mouth of the heart, the slowness of our heart would not follow, did not the Truth deign to walk even with the slow. For He says, "But what things go forth from the mouth, go out of the heart;" as though He should say, When you hear it said "from the mouth," understand "from the heart." I say both, but I set forth one by the other. The inner man has an inner mouth, and this the inner ear discerns: what things go forth from this mouth, go out of the heart, and they defile the man. Then having left the term mouth, which may be understood also of the body, He shows more openly what He is saying. "For from the heart go out," says He, "[evil](#) thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false [witness](#), [blasphemies](#); these

are what defile the man." There is surely no one of those [evils](#), which can be committed also by the members of the body, but that the [evil](#) thoughts go before and defile the man, although something hinder the sinful and [wicked](#) deeds of the body from following. For if, because power is not given, the hand is free from the [murder](#) of a [man](#), is the heart of the murderer forsooth therefore clean from [sin](#)? Or if she be chaste, whom one unchaste wishes to commit [adultery](#) with, has he on that account failed to commit [adultery](#) with her in his heart? Or if the harlot be not found in the brothel, does he, who seeks her, on that account fail to commit fornication in his heart? Or if time and place be wanting to one who wishes to hurt his neighbor by a lie, has he on that account failed already to speak false [witness](#) with his inner mouth? Or if any one fearing men, dare not utter aloud [blasphemy](#) with tongue of flesh, is he on this account guiltless of this crime, who says in his heart, "There is no God." Thus all the other [evil deeds](#) of men, which no motion of the body performs, of which no sense of the body is conscious, have their own secret criminals, who are also polluted by consent alone in thought, that is, by [evil](#) words of the inner mouth. Into which he (the Psalmist) fearing lest his heart should fall aside, asks of the Lord that the door of Contenance be set around the lips of this mouth, to contain the heart, that it fall not aside into [evil](#) words: but contain it, by not suffering thought to proceed to consent: for thus, according to the precept of the Apostle, [sin](#) reigns not in our mortal body, nor do we yield our members as weapons of unrighteousness unto [sin](#). From fulfilling which precept they are surely far removed, who on this account turn not their members to [sin](#), because no power is allowed them; and if this be present, straightway by the motions of their members, as of weapons, they show, who reigns in them within. Wherefore so far as is in themselves, they yield their members weapons of unrighteousness unto [sin](#); because this is what they wish, which for this reason they yield not, because they are not able.

5. And on this account that, which, the parts that beget being bridled by modesty, is most chiefly and properly to be called Contenance, is violated by no transgression, if the higher Contenance, concerning which we have been some time speaking, be preserved in the heart. For this reason the Lord, after He had said, "For from the heart go forth [evil](#) thoughts," then went on to add what it is that belongs to [evil](#) thoughts, "murders, adulteries," and the rest. He spoke not of all; but, having named certain by way of instance, He taught that we are to understand others also. Of which there is no one that can take place, unless an [evil](#) thought have gone before, whereby that is prepared within which is done without, and going forth out of the mouth of the heart already defiles the man, although, through no power being granted, it be not done without by means of the members of the body. When therefore a door of Contenance has been set in the mouth of the heart, whence go out all that defile the man, if nothing such be permitted to go out thence, there follows a purity, wherein now the [conscience](#) may [rejoice](#); although there be not as yet that perfection, wherein Contenance shall not strive with [vice](#). But now, so long as "the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh," it is enough for us not to consent unto the [evils](#) which we feel in us. But, when that consent takes place, then there goes out of the mouth of the heart what defiles the man. But when through Contenance consent is withheld, the [evil](#) of the [lust](#) of the flesh, against which the [lust](#) of the spirit fights, is not suffered to harm.

6. But it is one thing to fight well, which now is, when the strife of death is resisted; another thing not to have an adversary, which will then be, when death, "the last enemy," shall be destroyed. For Continenace also itself, when it curbs and restrains [lusts](#), at once both seeks the good unto the [immortality](#) of which we aim, and rejects the [evil](#) with which in this mortality we contend. Of the one it is forsooth the lover and beholder, but of the other both the enemy and [witness](#): both seeking what becomes, and fleeing what misbecomes. Assuredly Continenace would not labor in curbing [lusts](#), if we had no wishes contrary to what is becoming, if there were no opposition on the part of [evil lust](#) unto our good will. The Apostle cries aloud, "I [know](#)," says he, "that there dwells not in me, that is in my flesh, good. For to will lies near to me, but to accomplish good I find not." For now good can be done, so far as that there be no assent given unto [evil lust](#): but good will be accomplished, when the [evil lust](#) itself shall come to an end. And also the same teacher of the [Gentiles](#) cries aloud, "I take pleasure together with the law of God after the inner man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind."

7. This conflict none experience in themselves, save such as [war](#) on the side of the [virtues](#), and [war](#) down the [vices](#): nor does any thing storm the [evil](#) of [lust](#), save the good of Continenace. But there are, who, being utterly [ignorant](#) of the law of [God](#), account not [evil lusts](#) among their enemies, and through wretched blindness being slaves to them, over and above think themselves also blessed, by satisfying them rather than taming them. But whoso through the Law have come to [know](#) them, ("For through the Law is the [knowledge](#) of [sin](#)," and, "Lust," says he, "I [knew](#) not, unless the Law should say, You shall not [lust](#) after," and yet are overcome by their assault, because they live under the Law, whereby what is [good](#) is commanded, but not also given: they live not under Grace, which gives through the [Holy Spirit](#) what is commanded through the Law: unto these the Law therefore entered, that in them the offense might abound. The prohibition increased the [lust](#), and made it unconquered: that there might be transgression also, which without the Law was not, although there was [sin](#), "For where there is not Law, neither is there transgression." Thus the Law, Grace not helping, forbidding [sin](#), became over and above the strength of [sin](#); whence the Apostle says, "The Law is the strength of [sin](#)." Nor is it to be wondered at, that man's weakness even from the good Law added strength to [evil](#), while it trusts to fulfill the Law itself of its own strength. Forsooth being [ignorant](#) of the righteousness of [God](#), which He gives unto the weak, and wishing to establish his own, of which the weak is void, he was not made subject to the righteousness of [God](#), reprobate and [proud](#). But if the Law, as a schoolmaster, lead unto Grace one made an offender, as though for this purpose more grievously wounded, that he may desire a Physician; against the baneful sweetness, whereby [lust](#) prevailed, the Lord gives a sweetness that works good, that by it Continenace may the more delight, and "our land gives her fruit," whereby the soldier is fed, who by the help of the Lord [wars](#) down [sin](#).

8. Such soldiers the Apostolic trumpet enkindles for battle with that sound, "Therefore let not," says he, "[sin](#) reign in your mortal body to [obey](#) its [lusts](#); nor yield your members weapons of unrighteousness unto [sin](#); but yield yourselves unto [God](#), as living in place of dead, and your members weapons of righteousness unto [God](#). For [sin](#) shall not rule over you. For you are not under the law, but under Grace." And in another place, "Therefore," says he, "brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you shall

live after the flesh, you shall die; but if by the Spirit you shall mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of [God](#), these are sons of [God](#)." This therefore is the business in hand, so long as this our mortal life under Grace lasts, that [sin](#), that is the [lust](#) of [sin](#), (for this he in this place calls by the name of [sin](#),) reign not in this our mortal body. But it is then shown to reign, if [obedience](#) be yielded to its desires. There is therefore in us [lust](#) of [sin](#), which must not be suffered to reign; there are its desires, which we must not [obey](#), lest [obeying](#) it reign over us. Wherefore let not [lust](#) usurp our members, but let Contenance claim them for herself; that they be weapons of righteousness unto [God](#), that they be not weapons of unrighteousness unto [sin](#); for thus [sin](#) shall not rule over us. For we are not under the Law, which indeed commands what is [good](#) yet gives it not: but we are under Grace, which, making us to [love](#) that which the Law commands, is able to rule over the free.

9. And also, when he exhorts us, that we live not after the flesh, lest we die, but that by the Spirit we mortify the deeds of the flesh, that we may live; surely the trumpet which sounds, shows the [war](#) in which we are engaged, and enkindles us to contend keenly, and to do our enemies to death, that we be not done to death by them. But who those enemies are, it has set forth plainly enough. For those are they, whom it willed should be done to death by us, that is to say, the works of the flesh. For so it says, "But if by the Spirit you shall mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live." And in order that we may [know](#) what these are, let us hear the same in like manner writing unto the Galatians, and saying, "But the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, fornications, uncleannesses, luxuries, [idolatry](#), witchcrafts, hatreds, contentions, emulations, wraths, strifes, [heresies](#), envyings, drunkennesses, revellings, and such like; of which I foretell to you, as I have foretold, that they who do such things shall not possess the [kingdom of God](#)." For the very [war](#) there also was he showing, that he should speak of these, and unto the death-doing of these enemies was he calling up the soldiers of Christ by the same heavenly and spiritual trumpet. For he had said above, "But I say, walk in the [Spirit](#), and perform ye not the [lusts](#) of the flesh. For the flesh [lusts](#) against the [Spirit](#), and the Spirit against the flesh. For these are opposed one to the other, that you do not what ye would. But if you are led by the [Spirit](#), you are not under the Law." Therefore being set under Grace, he would have them have that conflict against the works of the flesh. And in order to point out these works of the flesh, he added what I have mentioned above. "But the works of the flesh are manifest, which are, fornications," and the rest, whether what he mentioned, or whether what he admonished were to be understood, chiefly as he added, "and such like." Lastly, in this battle, against what is in a manner the carnal army leading forth as it were another spiritual line, "But the fruit of the Spirit is," says he, "charity, [joy](#), peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, [faith](#), gentleness, continence; against such there is no law." He says not "against these," lest they should be thought to be alone: although even were he to say this, we ought to understand all, whatever goods of the same kind we could think of: but he says, "against such," that is to say, both these and whatsoever are such like. However, in that among the goods of which he made mention, he set Contenance in the last place, (concerning which we have now undertaken to treat, and on account of which we have already said much,) he willed that it should in a special manner cleave to our minds. Forsooth this same is of great avail in this case, wherein the Spirit [lusts](#) against the flesh; forasmuch as in a certain way it crucifies the [lusts](#) of the flesh. Whence,

after the Apostle had thus spoken, he added straightway, "But they who are Jesus Christ's have crucified their own flesh, with the [passions](#) and [lusts](#)." This is the acting of Contenance: thus the works of the flesh are done to death. But they do to death those, whom falling away from Contenance [lust](#) draws into consent to do such works.

10. But in order that we fall not away from Contenance, we ought to watch specially against those snares of the suggestions of the [devil](#), that we presume not of our own strength. For, "Cursed is every one that sets his hope in man." And who is he, but man? We cannot therefore [truly](#) say that he sets not his hope in man, who sets it in himself. For this also, to "live after man," what is it but to "live after the flesh?" Whoso therefore is tempted by such a suggestion, let him hear, and, if he have any [Christian](#) feeling, let him tremble. Let him hear, I say, "If you shall live after the flesh, you shall die."

11. But some one will say to me that it is one thing to live after man, another thing to live after the flesh; because man forsooth is a rational creature, and there is in him a rational [soul](#), whereby he differs from the beast: but the flesh is the lowest and earthly part of [man](#), and thus to live after it is faulty: and for this reason, he who lives after man, assuredly lives not after the flesh, but rather after that part of [man](#), whereby he is man, that is, after the spirit of the mind whereby he excels the beasts. But this discussion is perhaps of some force in the schools of [philosophers](#): but we, in order to understand the Apostle of [Christ](#), ought to observe in what manner the [Christian](#) books are used to speak; at any rate it is the belief of all of us, to whom to live is Christ, that Man was taken unto Himself by the [Word of God](#), not surely without a rational [soul](#), as certain [heretics](#) will have it; and yet we read, "The [Word](#) was [made flesh](#)." What is to be here understood by "flesh," but Man? "And all flesh shall see the [salvation](#) of [God](#)." What can be understood, but all [men](#)? "Unto You shall all flesh come." What is it, but all [men](#)? "You have given unto Him power over all flesh." What is it, but all [men](#)? "Of the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified." What is it, but no man shall be justified? And this the same Apostle in another place confessing more plainly says, "Man shall not be justified of the works of the Law." The Corinthians also he rebukes, saying, "Are ye not carnal, and walk after man?" After he had called them carnal, he says not, you walk after the flesh, but after man, forasmuch as by this also what would he have understood, but after the flesh? For surely if to walk, that is, to live, after the flesh deserved blame, but after man deserved praise, he would not say by way of rebuke, "ye walk after man." Let man recognize the reproach; let him change his purpose, let him shun destruction. Hear you man: walk not after man, but after Him Who made man. Fall not away from Him Who made you, even unto yourself. For a man said, who yet lived not after man, "Not that we are sufficient to think any thing from ourselves, as though of ourselves: but our sufficiency is of [God](#)." Consider if he lived after man, who spoke these things with [truth](#). Therefore the Apostle, admonishing man not to live after man, restores man to [God](#). But whoso lives not after man, but after [God](#), assuredly lives not even after himself, because himself also is a [man](#). But he is therefore said also to live after the flesh, when he so lives; because also when the flesh alone has been named, man is understood, as we have already shown: just as when the [soul](#) alone has been named, man is understood: whence it is said, "Let every [soul](#) be subject unto the higher powers," that is, every man; and, "Seventy-five [souls](#) went down into [Egypt](#) with Jacob," that is, seventy-five men. Therefore live not after yourself,

O man: you had thence perished, but you were sought. Live not then, I say, after yourself, O man; you had thence perished, but you were found. Accuse not the [nature](#) of the flesh, when you hear it said, "If you shall live after the flesh, you shall die." For thus could it be said, and most [truly](#) could it, If you shall live after yourselves you shall die. For the [devil](#) has not flesh, and yet, because he would live after himself, "he abode not in the [truth](#)." What wonder therefore, if, living after himself, "when he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own," which the Truth spoke [truly](#) of him.

12. When, therefore, you hear it said, "Sin shall not reign over you;" have not confidence of yourself, that [sin](#) reign not over you, but of Him, unto Whom a certain Saint says in [prayer](#), "Direct my paths after Your Word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me." For lest haply, after that we had heard, "[sin](#) shall not reign over you," we should lift up ourselves, and lay this to our own strength, straightway the Apostle saw this, and added, "For you are not under the Law, but under Grace." Therefore, Grace causes that [sin](#) reign not over you. Do not, therefore, have confidence of yourself, lest it thence reign much more over you. And, when we hear it said, "If by the Spirit you shall mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live," let us not lay this so great good unto our own spirit, as though of itself it can do this. For, in order that we should not entertain that carnal sense, the spirit being dead rather than that which puts others to death, straightway he added, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of [God](#), these are sons of [God](#)." Therefore that by our spirit we may mortify the works of the flesh, we are led by the Spirit of [God](#), Who gives Contenance, whereby to curb, tame, overcome [lust](#).

13. In this so great conflict, wherein man under Grace lives, and when, being aided, he fights well, rejoices in the Lord with trembling, there yet are not wanting even to valiant warriors, and mortifiers however unconquered of the works of the flesh, some wounds of [sins](#), for the healing of which they may say daily, "Forgive us our debts:" against the same [vices](#), and against the [devil](#) the prince and king of [vices](#), striving with much greater watchfulness and keenness by the very [prayer](#), that his deadly suggestions avail not anything, whereby he further urges the sinner to excuse rather than accuse his own [sins](#); and thus those wounds not only be not healed, but also, although they were not deadly, yet may be pressed home to grievous and fatal harm. And here therefore there is need of a more cautious Contenance, whereby to restrain the [proud](#) appetite of man; whereby he is self-pleased, and unwilling to be found worthy of blame, and disdains, when he [sins](#), to be convicted that he himself has [sinned](#); not with healthful humility taking upon him to accuse himself, but rather with fatal arrogance seeking to find an excuse. In order to restrain this [pride](#), he, whose words I have already set down above, and, as I could, commended, sought Contenance from the Lord. For, after that he had said, "Set, O Lord, a watch to my mouth, and a door of Contenance around my lips. Make not my heart to fall aside unto [evil](#) words;" explaining more clearly whereof he spoke this, he says, "to make excuses in [sins](#)." For what more [evil](#) than these words, whereby the [evil](#) man denies that he is [evil](#), although convicted of an [evil](#) work, which he cannot deny. And since he cannot hide the deed, or say that it is well done, and still sees that it is clear that it was done by him, he seeks to refer to another what he has done, as though he could remove thence what he has deserved. Being unwilling that himself be guilty, he rather adds to his guilt, and by excusing, not accusing, his own [sins](#), he [knows](#) not that he is putting from him,

not punishment, but pardon. For before human judges, forasmuch as they may be deceived, it seems to profit somewhat for the time, to cleanse as it were what has been done amiss by any deceit whatever; but before [God](#), Who cannot be deceived, we are to use, not a deceitful defense, but a [true](#) confession of [sins](#).

14. And some indeed, who are used to excuse their own [sins](#), complain that they are driven to [sin](#) by [fate](#), as though the stars had decreed this, and heaven had first [sinned](#) by decreeing such, in order that man should after [sin](#) by committing such, and thus had rather impute their [sin](#) to fortune: who think that all things are driven to and fro by chance accidents, and yet contend that this their wisdom and assertion is not of chance rashness, but of ascertained reason. What [madness](#) then is it, to lay to reason their discussions, and to make their actions subject to accidents! Others refer to the [devil](#) the whole of what they do ill: and will not have even a share with him, whereas they may suspect whether he by hidden suggestions has persuaded them to [evil](#), and on the other hand cannot [doubt](#) that they have consented to those suggestions, from whatever source they have come. There are also they who extend their defense of self unto an accusation of [God](#), wretched by the divine judgment, but blasphemers by their own [madness](#). For against Him they bring in from a contrary principle a substance of [evil](#) rebelling, which He could not have resisted, had He not blended with that same that was rebelling a portion of His own Substance and Nature, for it to contaminate and corrupt; and they say that they then [sin](#) when the [nature](#) of [evil](#) prevails over the [nature](#) of [God](#). This is that most unclean [madness](#) of the [Manichæans](#), whose devilish devices the undoubted [truth](#) most easily overthrows; which confesses that the [nature](#) of God is incapable of contamination and corruption. But what [wicked](#) contamination and corruption do they not deserve to have [believed](#) of them, by whom [God](#), Who is [good](#) in the very highest degree, and in a way that admits not of comparison, is [believed](#) to be capable of contamination and corruption?

15. And there are also they who in excuse of their [sins](#) so accuse [God](#), as to say that [sins](#) are pleasing to Him. For, if they were displeasing, say they, surely by His most Almighty power He would by no means suffer them to take place. As though indeed God suffered [sins](#) to be unpunished, even in the case of those whom by remission of [sins](#) He frees from [eternal](#) punishment! No one forsooth receives pardon of more grievous punishment due, unless he has suffered some punishment, be it what it may, although far less than what was due: and the fullness of mercy is so conveyed, as that the [justice](#) also of discipline is not abandoned. For also [sin](#), which seems unavenged, has its own attendant punishment, so that there is no one but by reason of what he has done either suffers pain from bitterness, or suffers not through blindness. As therefore you say, Why does He permit those things, if they are displeasing? so I say, Why does He punish them, if they are pleasing? And thus, as I confess that those things would not take place at all, unless they were permitted by the Almighty, so confess that what are punished by the Just One ought not to be done; in order that, by not doing what He punishes, we may deserve to learn of Him, why He permits to exist what He punishes. For, as it is written, "solid food is for the perfect," wherein they who have made good progress already understand, that it pertained rather unto the Almighty power of [God](#), to allow the [existence](#) of [evils](#) coming from the free choice of the will. So great forsooth is His Almighty goodness, as that even of [evil](#) He can make good, either by pardoning, or by healing, or by fitting and turning unto the

profit of the [pious](#), or even by most [justly](#) taking vengeance. For all these are good, and most worthy a good and Almighty God: and yet they are not made save of [evils](#). What therefore better, what more Almighty, than He, Who, whereas He makes no [evil](#), even of [evils](#) makes well? They who have done ill cry unto Him, "Forgive us our debts;" He hears, He pardons. Their own [evils](#) have hurt the sinners; He helps and heals their sicknesses. The enemies of His people rage; of their rage He makes [martyrs](#). Lastly, also, He condemns those, whom He judges worthy of condemnation; although they suffer their own [evils](#), yet He does what is [good](#). For what is just cannot but be good, and assuredly as [sin](#) is [unjust](#), so the punishment of [sin](#) is just.

16. But God wanted not power to make man such as that he should not be able to [sin](#): but He chose rather to make him such, as that it should lie in his power to [sin](#), if he would; not to [sin](#), if he would not; forbidding the one, enjoining the other; that it might be to him first a good desert not to [sin](#), and after a just reward not to be able to [sin](#). For such also at the last will He makes His Saints, as to be without all power to [sin](#). Such forsooth even now has He His [angels](#), whom in Him we so [love](#), as to have no [fear](#) for any of them, lest by sinning he become a [devil](#). And this we presume not of any just man in this mortal life. But we trust that all will be such in that [immortal](#) life. For Almighty God Who works good even of our [evils](#), what good will He give, when He shall have set us free from all [evils](#)? Much may be said more fully and more subtly on the good use of [evil](#); but this is not what we have undertaken in our present discourse, and we must avoid in it excess of length.

17. Now therefore let us return to that, wherefore we have said what we have. We have need of Contenance, and we [know](#) it to be a divine gift, that our heart fall not away unto [evil](#) words, to make excuses in [sins](#). But what [sin](#) is there but that we have need of Contenance, to restrain it from being committed, since it is this very Contenance which, in case it have been committed, restrains it from being defended by [wicked pride](#)? Universally therefore we have need of Contenance, in order to turn away from [evil](#). But to do good seems to pertain to another [virtue](#), that is, to righteousness. This the sacred Psalm admonishes us, where we read, "Turn away from [evil](#), and do good." But with what end we do this, it adds by and by, saying, "Seek peace, and ensue it." For we shall then have perfect peace, when, our nature cleaving inseparably to its Creator, we shall have nothing of ourselves opposed to ourselves. This our Saviour also Himself would have us to understand, so far as seems to me when He said, "Let your loins be girt, and your lamps burning." What is it, to gird the loins? To restrain [lusts](#), which is the work of continence. But to have lamps burning is to shine and glow with good works, which is the work of righteousness. Nor was He here silent with what end we do these things, adding and saying, "And you like men waiting for their Lord, when He comes from the marriage." But, when He shall have come, He will reward us, who have kept ourselves from those things which [lust](#), and have done those things which charity has bidden us: that we may reign in His perfect and [eternal](#) peace, without any strife of [evil](#), and with the highest delight of good.

18. All we therefore, who [believe](#) in the Living and True [God](#), Whose Nature, being in the highest sense good and incapable of change, neither does any [evil](#), nor suffers any

evil, from Whom is every good, even that which admits of decrease, and Who admits not at all of decrease in His own Good, Which is Himself, when we hear the Apostle saying, "Walk in the Spirit, and perform ye not the lusts of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: For these are opposed one to another, that you do not what ye would." Far be it from us to believe, what the madness of the Manichees believes, that there are here shown two natures or principles contrary one to another at strife, the one nature of good, the other of evil. Altogether these two are both good; both the Spirit is a good, and the flesh a good: and man, who is composed of both, one ruling, the other obeying, is assuredly a good, but a good capable of change, which yet could not be made save by a Good incapable of change, by Whom was created every good, whether small or great; but how small soever, yet made by What is Great; and how great soever, yet no way to be compared with the greatness of the Maker. But in this nature of man, that is good, and well formed and ordered by One That is Good, there is now war, since there is not yet health. Let the sickness be healed, there is peace. But that sickness fault has deserved, not nature has had. And this fault indeed through the laver of regeneration the grace of God has already remitted unto the faithful; but under the hands of the same Physician nature as yet strives with its sickness. But in such a conflict victory will be entire soundness; and that, soundness not for a time, but for ever: wherein not only this sickness is to come to an end, but also none to arise after it. Wherefore the just man addresses his soul and says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His returns: Who becomes propitious to all your iniquities, Who heals all your sicknesses." He becomes propitious to our iniquities, when He pardons sins: He heals sicknesses when He restrains evil desires. He becomes propitious unto iniquities by the grant of forgiveness: He heals sicknesses, by the grant of continence. The one was done in Baptism to persons confessing; the other is done in the strife to persons contending; wherein through His help we are to overcome our disease. Even now the one is done, when we are heard, saying, "Forgive us our debts;" but the other, when we are heard, saying, "Lead us not into temptation. For every one is tempted," says the Apostle James, "being drawn away and enticed by his own lust." And against this fault there is sought the help of medicine from Him, Who can heal all such sicknesses, not by the removal of a nature that is alien from us, but in the renewal of our own nature. Whence also the above-mentioned Apostle says not, "Every one is tempted" by lust, but added, "by his own:" that he who hears this may understand, how he ought to cry, "I said, Lord, have mercy upon me, heal my soul, for I have sinned against You." For it would not have needed healing, had it not corrupted itself by sinning, so that its own flesh should lust against it, that is, itself should be opposed to itself, on that side, wherein in the flesh it was made sick.

19. For the flesh lusts after nothing save through the soul, but the flesh is said to lust against the spirit, when the soul with fleshly lust wrestles against the spirit. This whole are we: and the flesh itself, which on the departure of the soul dies, the lowest part of us is not put away as what we are to flee from, but is laid aside as what we are to receive again, and, after having received it, never again to leave. But "there is sown an animal body, there shall rise again a spiritual body." Then from that time the flesh will not lust after any thing against the spirit, when as itself also shall be called spiritual, forasmuch as not only without any opposition, but also without any need of bodily aliment, it shall be for ever made subject unto the spirit, to be quickened by Christ. Therefore these two

things, which are now opposed the one to the other within us, since we exist in both, let us [pray](#) and endeavor that they may agree. For we ought not to think the one of them an enemy, but the fault, whereby the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit: and this, when healed, will itself cease to exist, and either substance will be safe, and no strife between either. Let us hear the Apostle; "I [know](#)," says he, "that there dwells not in me, that is, in my flesh, any good." This certainly he says; that the fault of the flesh, in a good thing, is not good; and, when this shall have ceased to exist, it will be flesh, but it will not be now corrupted or faulty flesh. And yet that this pertains to our nature the same teacher shows, by saying, first, "I [know](#) that there dwells not in me," in order to expound which, he added, "that is, in my flesh, any good." Therefore he says that his flesh is himself. It is not then itself that is our enemy: and when its faults are resisted, itself is loved, because itself is cared for; "For no one ever [hated](#) his own flesh," as the Apostle himself says. And in another place he says, "So then I myself with the mind serve the Law of [God](#), but with the flesh the Law of [sin](#)." Let them hear that have ears. "So then I myself;" I with the [mind](#), I with the flesh, but "with the mind I serve the Law of [God](#), but with the flesh the law of [sin](#)." How "with the flesh the law of [sin](#)?" was it at all by consenting unto fleshly [lust](#)? Far be it! but by having there motions of desires which he would not have, and yet had. But, by not consenting to them, with the mind he served the Law of [God](#), and kept his members from becoming weapons of [sins](#).

20. There are therefore in us [evil](#) desires, by consenting not unto which we live not ill: there are in us [lusts](#) of [sins](#), by [obeying](#) not which we perfect not [evil](#), but by having them do not as yet perfect good. The Apostle shows both, that neither is [good](#) here perfected, where [evil](#) is so lusted after, nor [evil](#) here perfected, whereas such [lust](#) is not [obeyed](#). The one forsooth he shows, where he says, "To will is present with me, but to perfect good is not;" the other, where he says, "Walk in the [Spirit](#), and perfect not the [lusts](#) of the flesh." For neither in the former place does he say that to do good is not with him, but "to perfect," nor here does he say, Have not "[lusts](#) of the flesh," but "perfect not." Therefore there take place in us [evil lusts](#), when that pleases which is not lawful; but they are not perfected, when [evil lusts](#) are restrained by the mind serving the Law of [God](#). And good takes place, when that, which wrongly pleases, takes not place through the good delight prevailing. But the perfection of good is not fulfilled, so long as by the flesh serving the law of [sin](#), [evil lust](#) entices, and, although it be restrained, is yet moved. For there would be no need for it to be restrained, were it not moved. There will be at some time also the perfection of good, when the destruction of [evil](#): the one will be highest, the other will be no more. And if we think that this is to be hoped for in this mortal state, we are deceived. For it shall be then, when death shall not be; and it shall be there, where shall be life [eternal](#). For in that world, and in that kingdom, there shall be highest good, no [evil](#): when there shall be, and where there shall be, highest [love](#) of wisdom, no labor of continence. Therefore the flesh is not [evil](#), if it be void of [evil](#), that is, of fault, whereby man was rendered faulty, not made ill, but himself making. For on either part, that is, both [soul](#) and body, being made good by the good [God](#), himself made the [evil](#), whereby he was made [evil](#). From the guilt of which [evil](#) being already also set free through forgiveness, that he may not think what he has done to be light, he yet [wars](#) with his own fault through continence. But far be it that there be any faults in such as reign in that peace which shall be hereafter; since in this state of [war](#) there are lessened daily in such as make progress,

not [sins](#) only, but the very [lusts](#) also, with which, by not consenting, we strive, and by consenting unto which we [sin](#).

21. That, therefore, the flesh [lusts](#) against the [Spirit](#), that there dwells not in our flesh good, that the law in our members is opposed to the law of the [mind](#), is not a mingling of two [natures](#) caused of contrary principles, but a division of one against itself caused through desert of [sin](#). We were not so in Adam, before that nature, having listened to and followed its deceiver, had despised and offended its Creator: that is, not the former life of man created, but the latter punishment of man condemned. From which condemnation when set free by Grace, through [Jesus Christ](#), being free they contend with their punishment, having received not as yet full [salvation](#), but already a pledge of [salvation](#): but when not set free, they are both guilty by reason of [sins](#), and involved in punishments. But after this life for the guilty there will remain for ever punishment for their crime: for the free there will no more remain for ever either crime or punishment: but the good substances, spirit and flesh, will continue for ever, which [God](#), Who is [good](#), and incapable of change, created good although capable of change. But they will continue having been changed for the better, never from this time to be changed for the worse: all [evil](#) being utterly destroyed, both what man has [unjustly](#) done, and what he has [justly](#) suffered. And, these two kinds of [evil](#) perishing utterly, whereof the one is of iniquity going before, the other of unhappiness following after, the [will](#) of man will be upright without any depravity. There it will be clear and plain to all, what now many of the faithful [believe](#), few understand, that [evil](#) is not a substance: but that, as a wound in a body, so in a substance, which has made itself faulty, it has begun to exist, when the disease has commenced, and ceases to exist in it, when the healing has been perfected. Therefore, all [evil](#) having arisen from us, and having been destroyed in us, our good also having been increased and perfected unto the height of most [happy](#) incorruption and [immortality](#), of what kind shall either of our substances be? forasmuch as now, in this corruption and mortality, when as yet "the corruptible body weighs down the [soul](#);" and, what the Apostle says, "the body is dead by reason of [sin](#);" yet the same himself bears such [witness](#) unto our flesh, that is, to our lowest and earthly part, as to say, what I made mention of a little above, "No one ever [hated](#) his own flesh." And to add straightway, "but nourishes and cherishes it, as also Christ the [Church](#)."

22. I say not, therefore, with what [error](#), but with what utter [madness](#), do the Manichees attribute our flesh to some, I [know](#) not what, fabled "race of darkness," which they will have had its own nature without any beginning ever [evil](#): whereas the [true](#) teacher exhorts men to [love](#) their own wives by the pattern of their own flesh, and exhorts them unto this very thing by the pattern also of Christ and the [Church](#). Lastly, we must call to mind the whole place itself of the Epistle of the Apostle, relating greatly unto the matter in hand. "Husbands," says he, "[love](#) your wives, as Christ also loved the [Church](#), and delivered Himself up for it, that He might sanctify it, cleansing it by the laver of the water in the word: that He might set forth unto Himself a [glorious](#) Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it may be [holy](#) and unspotted. So," says he, "husbands also ought to [love](#) their own wives, as their own bodies. Whoso loves his own wife, loves himself." Then he added, what we have already made mention of, "For no man ever [hated](#) his own flesh, but nourishes it, and cherishes it; as also Christ the [Church](#)." What says the

[madness](#) of most impure impiety in answer to these things? What say ye in answer to these things, you Manichees; ye who wish to bring in upon us, as if out of the Epistles of the Apostles, two [natures](#) without beginning, one of good, the other of [evil](#): and will not listen to the Epistles of the Apostles, that they may correct you from that sacrilegious perverseness? As ye read, "The flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit," and, "There dwells not in my flesh any good;" so read ye, "No one ever [hated](#) his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as also Christ the [Church](#)." As ye read, "I see another law in my members, opposed to the law of my mind;" so read ye, "As Christ loved the [Church](#), so also ought men to [love](#) their own wives, as their own bodies." Be not ye crafty in the former witnesses of [Holy Scripture](#), and deaf in this latter, and you shall be correct in both. For, if you receive the latter as right is, you will endeavor to understand the former also as [truth](#) is.

23. The Apostle has made [known](#) to us certain three unions, Christ and the [Church](#), husband and wife, spirit and flesh. Of these the former consult for the good of the latter, the latter wait upon the former. All the things are good, when, in them, certain set over by way of pre-eminence, certain made subject in a becoming manner, observe the beauty of order. Husband and wife receive command and pattern how they ought to be one with another. The command is, "Let wives be subject unto their own husbands, as unto the Lord; because the husband is the head of the wife;" and, "Husbands, [love](#) your wives." But there is given a pattern, unto wives from the [Church](#), unto husbands from Christ: "As the [Church](#)," says he, "is subject unto Christ, so also wives unto their own husbands in all things." In like manner also, having given command to husbands to [love](#) their own wives, he added a pattern, "As Christ loved the [Church](#)." But husbands he exhorted to it from a lower matter also, that is, from their own body: not only from a higher, that is, from their Lord. For he not only says, "Husbands, [love](#) your wives, as Christ also loved the [Church](#)," which is from an higher: but he said also, "Husbands ought to [love](#) their own wives, as their own bodies," which is from a lower: because both higher and lower are all good. And yet the [woman](#) received not pattern from the body, or flesh, to be so subject to the husband as the flesh to the spirit; but either the Apostle would have understood by consequence, what he omitted to state: or haply because the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit in the mortal and sick estate of this life, therefore he would not set the [woman](#) a pattern of subjection from it. But the men he would for this reason, because, although the spirit [lusts](#) against the flesh, even in this it consults for the good of the flesh: not like as the flesh lusting against the spirit, by such opposition consults neither for the good of the spirit, nor for its own. Yet the good spirit would not consult for its good, whether by nourishing and cherishing its nature by forethought, or by resisting its faults by continence, were it not that each substance shows God to be the Creator of each, even by the seemliness of this its order. What is it, therefore, that with [true madness](#) ye both boast yourselves to be [Christians](#), and with so great, perverseness contend against the [Christian](#) Scriptures, with eyes closed, or rather put out, asserting both that Christ has appeared unto mortals in false flesh, and that the Church in the [soul](#) pertains to [Christ](#), in the body to the [devil](#), and that the male and female sex are works of the [devil](#), not of [God](#), and that the flesh is joined unto the spirit, as an [evil](#) substance unto a good substance?

24. If what we have made mention of out of the Apostolic Epistles seem to you to fall short of an answer, hear yet others, if you have ears. What says the utterly mad [Manichæan](#) of the Flesh of Christ? That it was not [true](#), but false. What says the blessed Apostle to this? "Remember that Christ Jesus rose again from the dead of the seed of [David](#), according to my [Gospel](#)." And Christ Jesus Himself says, "Handle and see, that a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me to have." How is there [truth](#) in their doctrine, which asserts that in the Flesh of Christ there was [falsehood](#)? How was there in Christ no [evil](#), in Whom was so great a lie? Because forsooth to men over-clean [true](#) flesh is an [evil](#), and false flesh instead of [true](#) is not an [evil](#): it is an [evil](#), [true](#) flesh of one born of the seed of [David](#), and it is no [evil](#), false tongue of one saying, "Handle, and see, that a spirit has not flesh and bones, as you see me to have." Of the Church what says the deceiver of men with deadly [error](#)? That on the side of [souls](#) it pertains unto Christ, on the side of bodies unto the [devil](#)? What to this says the Teacher of the [Gentiles](#) in [faith](#) and [truth](#)? "Do you not [know](#)," says he, "that your bodies are members of Christ?" Of the sex of male and female what says the son of perdition? That either sex is not of [God](#), but of the [devil](#). What to this says the Vessel of Election? "As," says he, "the [woman](#) from out the man, so also the man through the [woman](#): but all things of [God](#)." Of the flesh what says the unclean spirit through the [Manichæan](#)? That it is an [evil](#) substance, and not the creation of [God](#), but of an enemy. What to this says the [Holy Spirit](#) through [Paul](#)? "For as the body is one," says he, "and has many members, but all the members of the body, being many, are one body: so also is [Christ](#)." And a little after; "[God](#) has set," says he, "the members, each one of them in the body, as He willed." Also a little after; "[God](#)," says he, "has tempered the body, giving greater [honor](#) unto that to which it was wanting, that there should be no schisms in the body, but that the members have the self-same care one for another: and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it: or one member be [glorified](#), all the members [rejoice](#) with it." How is the flesh [evil](#), when the [souls](#) themselves are admonished to imitate the peace of its members? How is it the creation of the enemy, when the [souls](#) themselves, which rule the bodies, take pattern from the members of the body, not to have schisms of enmities among themselves, in order that, what God has granted unto the body by nature, this themselves also may [love](#) to have by [grace](#)? With good [cause](#), writing to the Romans, "I beseech you," says he, "brethren, by the mercy of [God](#), that you present your bodies a [sacrifice](#), living, [holy](#), pleasing to [God](#)." Without reason we contend that darkness is not light, nor light darkness, if we present a [sacrifice](#), living, [holy](#), pleasing to [God](#), of the bodies of the "nation of darkness."

25. But, say they, how is the flesh by a certain likeness compared unto the Church? What! does the Church [lust](#) against Christ? whereas the same Apostle said, "The Church is subject unto Christ." Clearly the [Church](#) is subject unto Christ; because the spirit therefore [lusts](#) against the flesh, that on every side the Church may be made subject to Christ; but the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit, because not as yet has the Church received that peace which was promised perfect. And for this reason the [Church](#) is made subject unto Christ for the pledge of [salvation](#), and the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit from the weakness of sickness. For neither were those other than members of the [Church](#), unto whom he thus spoke, "Walk in the spirit, and fulfill not the [lusts](#) of the flesh. For the flesh [lusts](#) against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed the one to the

other; that you do not what we would." These things were assuredly spoken unto the [Church](#), which if it were not made subject unto Christ, the spirit would not in it [lust](#) against the flesh through continence. By reason of which they were indeed able not to perfect the [lusts](#) of the flesh, but through the flesh lusting against the Spirit they were not able to do the things which they would, that is, not even to have the very [lusts](#) of the flesh. Lastly, why should we not confess that in spiritual men the [Church](#) is subject unto Christ, but in carnal men yet [lusts](#) against Christ? Did not they [lust](#) against Christ unto whom it was said, "Is Christ divided?" and, "I could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal. I have given unto you milk to drink as unto babes in [Christ](#), not meat, for you were not as yet able; but not even now are you able: for you are still carnal. For whereas there is among you emulation, and strife, are you not carnal?" Against whom does emulation and strife [lust](#), but against Christ? For these [lusts](#) of the flesh Christ heals in His own, but loves in none. Whence the [holy Church](#), so long as it has such members, is not yet without spot or wrinkle. To these are added those other [sins](#) also, for which the daily cry of the whole [Church](#) is, "Forgive us our debts:" and, that we should not think spiritual [persons](#) exempt from these, not any one soever of carnal [persons](#), nor any one soever of spiritual [persons](#) themselves, but he, who lay on the breast of the Lord, and whom He loved before others, says, "If we shall say that we have not [sin](#), we deceive ourselves, and the [truth](#) is not in us." But in every [sin](#), more in what is greater, less in what is less, there is an act of [lust](#) against righteousness. And of Christ it is written: "Who was made unto us by [God](#), Wisdom, and Righteousness, and Sanctification, and Redemption." In every [sin](#) therefore without [doubt](#) there is an act of [lust](#) against [Christ](#). But when He, Who "heals all our sicknesses," shall have led His Church unto the promised healing of sickness, then in none of its members shall there be any, even the very least spot or wrinkle. Then in no way shall the flesh [lust](#) against the spirit, and therefore there shall be no [cause](#) why the spirit also [lust](#) against the flesh. Then all this conflict shall come to an end, then there shall be the highest concord of both substances; then to such a degree shall no one there be carnal, that even the flesh itself shall be spiritual. What therefore each one living after Christ does with his flesh, whereas he both [lusts](#) against its [evil lust](#), which he restrains, hereafter to be healed, which he holds, not yet healed; and yet nourishes and cherishes its good nature, since "no one ever [hated](#) his own flesh," this also Christ does with the [Church](#), so far as it is lawful to compare lesser with greater matters. For He both represses it with rebukes, that it burst not being puffed up with impunity; and raises it up with consolations, that it sink not being weighed down with infirmity. Hence is that of the Apostle, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged; but when we are judged, we are rebuked of the Lord, that we be not condemned with this world." And that in the Psalm, "After the multitude of my griefs in my heart, Your consolations have gladdened my [soul](#)." We are therefore then to hope for perfect soundness of our flesh without any opposition, when there shall be sure security of the Church of Christ without any [fear](#).

26. Thus much will suffice to have treated on behalf of [true](#) Contenance against the Manichees deceitfully continent, lest the fruitful and [glorious](#) labor of Contenance, when it restrains and curbs the lowest part of us, that is, the body, from immoderate and unlawful pleasures, be [believed](#) not healthfully to chasten, but hostilely to [persecute](#). Forsooth the body is indeed different from the [nature](#) of the [soul](#), yet is it not alien from

the [nature](#) of man: for the [soul](#) is not made up of body, but yet man is made up of [soul](#) and body: and assuredly, whom God frees, He frees the whole man. Whence our Saviour Himself also took upon Him the whole man, having deigned to free in us all that He made. They who hold contrary to this [truth](#), what does it profit them to restrain [lusts](#)? if, that is, they restrain any. What in them can be made clean through Contenance, whose such Contenance is unclean? and which ought not to be called Contenance. Forsooth to hold what they hold is the poison of the [devil](#); but Contenance is the gift of [God](#). But as not every one who suffers any thing, or with the greatest endurance suffers any pain whatever, possesses that [virtue](#), which in like manner is the gift of [God](#), and is called Patience; for many endure many torments, in order not to betray either such as are wickedly privy with them in their crimes, or themselves; many in order to satiate glowing [lusts](#), and to obtain, or not to abandon those things, whereunto they are bound by chain of [evil love](#); many on behalf of different and destructive [errors](#), whereby they are strongly held: of all of whom far be it from us to say that they have [true](#) patience: thus not every one, who contains in any thing, or who marvellously restrains even the very [lusts](#) of the flesh, or [mind](#), is to be said to possess that continence, of the profit and beauty of which we are treating. For certain, what may seem marvellous to say, through incontinence contain themselves: as if a [woman](#) were to contain herself from her husband, because she has [sworn](#) this to an adulterer. Certain through [injustice](#), as if spouse yield not to spouse the due of sexual intercourse, because he or she is already able to overcome such appetite of the body. Also certain contain deceived by false [faith](#), and hoping what is vain, and following after what is vain: among whom are all [heretics](#), and whosoever under the name of religion are deceived by any [error](#): whose continence would be [true](#), if their [faith](#) also were [true](#): but, whereas that is not to be called [faith](#), on this account, because it is false; without [doubt](#) that also is unworthy the name of continence. For what? are we prepared to call continence, which we must [truly](#) say is the gift of [God](#), [sin](#)? Far be from our hearts so hateful [madness](#). But the blessed Apostle says "Every thing that is not of [faith](#) is [sin](#)." What therefore has not [faith](#), is not to be called continence.

27. There are also they who, in doing open service to [evil demons](#), contain from pleasures of the body, that, through their means, they may satisfy unlawful pleasures, the [violence](#) and glow whereof they contain not. Whence also, (to name one case, and pass over the rest in silence by reason of the length of the discourse,) certain come not near even unto their own wives, while, as though clean, they essay through magic arts to gain access unto the wives of others. O marvellous continence, nay rather, singular [wickedness](#) and uncleanness! For, if it were [true](#) continence, the [lust](#) of the flesh ought rather to contain from [adultery](#), than, in order to commit [adultery](#), from marriage. Forsooth marriage continence is wont to ease this [lust](#) of the flesh, and to check its curb but thus far, that neither in marriage itself it run riot by immoderate license, but that a measure be observed, either such as is due to the weakness of the spouse, unto whom the Apostle enjoins not this, as of command, but yields it as of permission; or such as is suited for the begetting of sons, which was formerly the one alone occasion of sexual intercourse to both [holy](#) fathers and mothers. But continence doing this, that is, moderating, and in a certain way limiting in married [persons](#) the [lust](#) of the flesh, and ordering in a certain way within fixed limits its unquiet and inordinate motion, uses well the [evil](#) of [man](#), whom it

makes and wills to make perfect good: as God uses even [evil](#) men, for their sake whom He perfects in goodness.

28. Far be it therefore that we say of continence, of which Scripture says. "And this very thing was wisdom, to [know](#) whose gift it was," that even they possess it, who, by containing, either serve [errors](#), or overcome any lesser desires for this purpose, that they may fulfill others, by the greatness of which they are overcome. But that continence which is [true](#), coming from above, wills not to repress some [evils](#) by other [evils](#), but to heal all [evils](#) by goods. And, briefly to comprehend its mode of action, it is the place of continence to keep watch to restrain and heal all delights whatsoever of [lust](#), which are opposed to the delight of wisdom. Whence without [doubt](#) they set it within too narrow bounds, who limit it to restraining the [lusts](#) of the body alone: certainly they speak better, who say that it pertains to Continence to rule in general [lust](#) or desire. Which desire is set down as a fault, nor is it only of the body, but also of the [soul](#). For, if the desire of the body be in fornications and drunkennesses; hard enmities, strifes, emulations, lastly, hatreds, their exercise in the pleasure of the body, and not rather in the motion and troubled states of the [soul](#)? Yet the Apostle called all these "works of the flesh," whether what pertained to the [soul](#), or what pertained properly to the flesh, calling forsooth the man himself by the name of the flesh. Forsooth they are the works of [man](#), whatsoever are not called works of [God](#); forasmuch as man, who does these, lives after himself, not after [God](#), so far as he does these. But there are other works of [man](#), which are rather to be called works of [God](#). "For it is [God](#)," says the Apostle, "Who works in you both to will and to do, according to His good pleasure." Whence also is that, "For as many as are led by the spirit of [God](#), these are sons of [God](#)."

29. Thus the spirit of [man](#), cleaving unto the Spirit of [God](#), [lusts](#) against the flesh, that is, against itself: but for itself, in order that those motions, whether in the flesh or in the [soul](#), after man, not after [God](#), which as yet exist through the sickness man has gotten, may be restrained by continence, that so health may be gotten; and man, not living after man, may now be able to say, "But I live, now not I, but there lives in me Christ." For where not I, there more happily I: and, when any [evil](#) motion after man arises, unto which he, who with the mind serves the Law of [God](#), consents not, let him say that also, "Now it is not I that do this." To such forsooth are said those words, which we, as partners and sharers with them, ought to listen to. "If you have risen together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the Right Hand of God: mind the things that are above, not what are upon earth. For you are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God: when Christ your life shall have appeared, then ye also shall appear with Him in [glory](#)." Let us understand unto whom he is speaking, yea, rather, let us listen with more attention. For what more plain than this? what more clear? He is certainly speaking unto those, who had risen again with Christ, not yet surely in the flesh, but in the mind: whom he calls dead, and on this account the more living: for "your life," says he, "is hid with Christ in [God](#)." Of such dead the speech is: "But I live, now not I, but there lives in me Christ." They therefore, whose life was hidden in [God](#), are admonished and exhorted to mortify their members, which are upon the earth. For this follows, "Mortify, therefore, your members, which are upon the earth." And, lest any through excess of dullness should think that such are to mortify the members of the body that are seen, straightway

opening what it is he says, "Fornication," says he, "uncleanness, passion, [evil lust](#), and [covetousness](#), which is [idolatry](#)." But is it so to be [believed](#), that they, who were already dead, and their life hidden with Christ in [God](#), were still committing fornication, were still living in unclean habits and works, were still slaves to [passions](#) of [evil lust](#) and [covetousness](#)? What madman would thus think of such? What, therefore, would he that they mortify, save the motions themselves still living in a certain intrusion of their own, without the consent of our [mind](#), without the action of the members of the body? And how are they mortified by the work of continence, save when we consent not to them with the [mind](#), nor are the members of the body yielded to them as weapons; and, what is greater, and to be looked to with yet greater watchfulness of continence, our very thought itself, although in a certain way it be touched by their suggestion, and as it were, whisper, yet turns away from these, that it receive not delight from them, and turns to more delightful thoughts of things above: on this account naming them in discourse, that men abide not in them, but flee from them. And this is brought to pass, if we listen effectually, with His help, Who, through His Apostle gives this command, "Seek things that are above, where Christ is sitting at the Right Hand of [God](#). Mind the things that are above, not what are on earth."

30. But, after that he had made mention of these [evils](#), he added and said, "On account of which comes the [wrath](#) of God on the sons of unbelief." Surely it was a wholesome alarm that [believers](#) might not think that they could be saved on account of their [faith](#) alone, even although they should live in these [evils](#): the Apostle James with most clear speech crying out against that notion, and saying, "If any say that he have [faith](#), and have not works, shall his [faith](#) be able to save him?" Whence also here the Teacher of the [Gentiles](#) said, that on account of these [evils](#) the [wrath](#) of God comes on the sons of unbelief. But when he says, "Wherein ye also walked sometime, when you were living therein;" he shows sufficiently that now they were not living therein. Forsooth unto these they had died, that their life might be hidden in God with Christ. When then they were now not living in them, they were now bidden to mortify such. Forsooth, themselves not living in the same, the things were living, as I have already shown a little above, and were called their members, that is to say, those faults which dwelt in their members; by a way of speech, that which is contained through that which contains; as it is said, The whole Forum talks of it, when men talk who are in the Forum. In this very way of speech it is sung in the Psalm, "Let all the earth worship You:" that is, all [men](#) who are in the earth.

31. "But now do ye also," says he, "put down all;" and he makes mention of several more [evils](#) of that sort. But what is it, that it is not enough for him to say, "Do ye put down all," but that he added the conjunction and said, "ye also?" save that lest they should not think that they did those [evils](#) and lived in them with impunity on this account, because their [faith](#) set them free from [wrath](#), which comes upon the sons of unbelief, doing these things, and living in them without [faith](#). Do ye also, says he, put down those [evils](#), on account of which comes the [wrath](#) of God on the children of unbelief; nor promise yourselves impunity of them on account of merit of [faith](#). But he would not say, "put ye down," unto those who had already laid down so far as that they consented not to such faults, nor were yielding their members to them as weapons of [sin](#), save that the life of Saints stands in this past deed, and is still engaged in this work, so long as we are mortal.

For, so long as the Spirit [lusts](#) against the flesh, this business proceeds with great earnestness, resistance is offered unto [evil](#) delights, unclean [lusts](#), carnal and shameful motions, by the sweetness of [holiness](#), by the [love](#) of [chastity](#), by spiritual vigor, and by the beauty of continence; thus they are laid down by them who are dead to them, and who live not in them by consenting. Thus, I say, they are put down, while they are weighed down by continued continence, that they rise not again. Whosoever, as though secure, shall cease from this laying aside of them, straightway they will assault the Citadel of the [mind](#), and will themselves put it down thence, and will reduce it into slavery to them, captive after a base and unseemly fashion. Then [sin](#) will reign in the mortal body of man to [obey](#) its desires; then will it yield its members weapons of unrighteousness unto [sin](#): and the last state of that man shall be worse than the former. For it is much more tolerable not to have begun a contest of this kind, than after one has begun to have left the conflict, and to have become in place of a good warrior, or even in place of a conqueror, a captive. Whence the Lord says not, whoso shall begin, but "Whoso shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved."

32. But whether keenly contending, that we be not overcome, or overcoming various times, or even with unhoped and unlooked for ease, let us give the [glory](#) unto Him Who gives continence unto us. Let us remember that a certain just man said, "I shall never be moved:" and that it was showed him how rashly he had said this, attributing as though to his own strength, what was given to him from above. But this we have learned from his own confession: for soon after he added, "Lord, in Your will You have given strength to my beauty; but You have turned away Your Face, and I was troubled." Through a remedial Providence he was for a short time deserted by his Ruler, in order that he might not himself through deadly [pride](#) desert his Ruler. Therefore, whether here, where we engage with our faults in order to subdue and make them less, or there, as it shall be in the end, where we shall be void of every enemy, because of all infection, it is for our health that we are thus dealt with, in order that, "whoso [glories](#), he may [glory](#) in the Lord."