

Sunday, January 9, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—  
Lesson 17 The Age of Christian Empire: Augustine: The Man, the Myth, the Heretic

### **High Praise for Augustine**

- The entry for Augustine in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, offers high praise for Augustine of Hippo (354-430), calling him the greatest of the Latin fathers. “Augustine exercised an unparalleled influence on Western Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant. The corpus of his writings is huge and relatively complete, thanks to their extensive use in the Middle Ages. His theories of history, Christian society, ethics, and just war shaped Western civilization. . . . Most modern theological movements claiming orthodoxy take their stand in the Augustinian tradition.” (Elwell, 121)
- Matthew A. Price and Michael Collins, authors of *The Story of Christianity*, state that Augustine is one of the most important figures in Christian history. “For 1,000 years Augustine was the most influential teacher in Christendom, and his writings are still valued today by many Christians.” (Price and Collins, 68)
- Philip Schaff depicts Augustine as someone held in such universal esteem that he could exert influence in all directions and gave no offence despite his excesses. According to Schaff, Augustine is both the consummate Catholic and a protestant superhero declaring him to be “the worthy successor of Paul, and precursor of Luther and Calvin.” (Schaff, 1026)
- Schaff also offers high praise for Augustine’s *City of God*, calling it “the most powerful, comprehensive, profound, and fertile production in the refutation of heathenism and vindication of Christianity, which the ancient church has bequeathed to us, and forms a worthy close to her literary contest with Greco-Roman paganism.” (Schaff, 86) In his footnotes, Schaff quotes Milman’s writings on the *City of God*, as being an “. . . elaborate execution, which the genius of man had not as yet contributed to the support of Christianity.” (Schaff, 86)
- Latourette writes, “No other single Christian thinker after Paul was to influence so profoundly the Christianity of Western European peoples. Individuals such as Thomas Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin were to have as great or greater effect on particular branches of the Christianity of the West, but no other after the apostolic age was so deeply to mould all the major forms of the Western wing of the faith.” (Latourette, 174)
- Paul Enns, author of *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, calls Augustine the greatest theologian between Paul and Luther. (Enns, 424)
- Bruce L Shelley, author of *Church History in Plain Language*, devotes an entire chapter in book to Augustine titled, “The Sage of the Ages.” (Shelley, 124)
- All of this proves the nearly universal place of reverence reserved for Augustine in church history or theology books. We want to consider if all this positive attention is justified.

### Who Was Augustine?

- Born in North Africa in 354, he was the son of a pagan Roman official and devout Christian mother. In the latter half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century Rome was already showing signs of decay. Political corruption and barbarian invasions were threatening the empire during the time in which Augustine came of age. (Price and Collins, 68)
- In his youth Augustine showed academic brilliance, and left home to study at Madaura and Carthage until his father's money ran out at age 16, forcing him to return home. Around this time Augustine began a relationship with a young woman that was to last 15 years. (Price and Collins, 68)
- A misguided youth Augustine perused every path possible to find pleasure and truth. When he was 19, he began to explore the Persian philosophy Manichaeism in his search for truth. "This school of thought combined Christian, Gnostic, and pagan elements, emphasizing the warning of light and dark, flesh and spirit. The teaching of Manes and his followers fascinated Augustine, and he chose to remain a disciple for nine years." (Price and Collins, 68)
- In 383, Augustine moved from Carthage to Rome, working as a teacher of rhetoric (Elwell, 122), where after one year he was offered a teaching position in Milan. (Price and Collins, 68) It was Milan that Augustine became reacquainted with his mother's religion. In *Confessions*, he relates how one day he was sitting in a garden and overheard some children calling the Latin for take up and read. He absentmindedly picked up a copy of Paul's letter to the Romans, which was nearby, and read the following verse: "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof (Romans 13:13-14)." Affected by what he read, Augustine sought out Bishop Ambrose of Milan and enjoyed his preaching greatly. (Price and Collins, 69)
- One the eve of Easter 387, Augustine and his son Adeodatus were baptized by Ambrose. In 391, Augustine returned to North Africa where he was elected as Bishop of Hippo four years later. Augustine remained Bishop of Hippo until his death in 430. (Price and Collins, 69)

### What Did Augustine Believe?

- The beliefs of Augustine can be gleaned from his extensive writings. Phillip Schaff surveys the works of Augustine at the end of *History of the Christian Church Volume III*. Schaff offers the following groupings from the written works of Augustine
  - Autobiographical Works

- *Confessions*—written around 397 provides a general sketch of his early life and the details surrounding his conversion.
    - *Retractions*—written in 427 at the end of his life offers a chronological ordering of his written works as well as retractions or corrections of earlier theological views on which he had changed his mind.
  - Philosophical, Apologetic, General Theological, Anti-Donatistic, Anti-Arian, Anti-Pelagian Works, Exegetical, and Ethical Works (Schaff, 1005-1016)
- Ecumenical Church Councils:
  - “Augustine, the ablest and the most devout of the fathers, conceived, in the best vein of his age, a philosophical view of this authority of the councils, which strikes a wise and wholesome mean between the extremes of veneration and disparagement . . . He justly subordinates these councils to the Holy Scriptures, which are the highest and perfect rule of faith, and supposes that the decrees of a council may be, not indeed set aside and repealed, yet enlarged and completed by the deeper research of a later day. They embody, for the general need, the results already duly prepared by preceding theological controversies, and given the consciousness of the church, on the subject in question, the clearest and most precise expression possible at the time. But this consciousness itself is subject to development. While the Holy Scriptures present their truth unequivocally and infallible, and allow now room for doubt, the judgment of bishops may be corrected and enriched with new truths from the Word of God, by the wise judgment of other bishops; the judgment of the provincial council by that of a general; and the views of one general council by those of a later.” (Schaff, 342)
- Holiness of Mary:
  - Augustine exempted Mary from actual sin but not from original sin. He taught the sinless birth and life of Mary, but not her immaculate conception. (Schaff, 420-421)
- Worship of Saints:
  - “Augustine infers from the interest which the rich man in hell still had in the fate of his five surviving brothers, that the pious dead in heaven must have even far more interest in the kindred and friends whom they have left behind. He also calls the saints our intercessors, yet under Christ, the proper and highest intercessor, as Peter and the other apostles are shepherds under the great chief Shepherd. . . He attributes miraculous effects, even the raising of the dead, to the intercession of Stephen.” (Schaff, 441)
- Power of Relics:
  - “Augustine believed in the . . . miraculous discovery of the bodies of Gervasius and Protasius, and the healing of the blind man by contact with them, because he himself was

then in Milan, in 386, at the time of his conversion, and was an eye-witness, not indeed of the discovery of the bones—for this he nowhere says—but of the miracles, and of the great stir among the people.” (Schaff, 459)

- “He gave credit likewise to the many miracles cruses which the bones of the first martyr Stephen are said to have performed in various part of Africa in his time.” (Schaff, 459)
- Augustine lamented the trade in relics both real and imagined. A practiced which caused him to question to validity of relics later in his life, according to Schaff. (460)

- Sacraments:

- “Augustine was also the first to frame a distinct doctrine of the operation of the sacraments. In his view the sacraments work grace or condemnation, blessing or curse, adding to the condition of the receiver.” (Schaff, 475)
- Read passage on pages 475-476
- “Augustine considered it in general an excellence of the New Testament over the Old, that the number of sacraments was diminished, but their import enhanced, and calls baptism and the Supper, with reference to the water and the blood which flowed from the side of the Lord, the genuine or chief sacraments, on which the church subsists. But he includes under the wider conception of the sacrament other mysterious and hold usages, which were commended in the Scriptures, naming expressly confirmation, marriage, and ordination. Thus he already recognizes to some extent five Christian sacraments, to which the Roman church has since added penance and extreme unction.” (Schaff, 478)

- Baptism/Damnation of Unbaptized Babies:

- “In Augustine we already find all the germs of the scholastic and Catholic doctrine of baptism . . . According to this view, baptism is the sacrament of regeneration, which is, negatively, the means of the forgiveness of sin, that is, both of original sin and of actual sins committed before baptism (not after it), and positively, the foundation o f the new spiritual life of faith . . . Since in the child there is not actual sin, the effect of baptism in this case is limited to the remission of the guilt of original sin; and since the child cannot yet itself believe, Christian church (represented by the parents and the sponsors) here appears in its behalf.” (Schaff, 483)
- “The practice of infant baptism in the church, with the customary formula, ‘for the remission of sins,’ and such accompany ceremonies as exorcism, presuppose the dominion of sin and of demonical powers even in infancy. Since the child, before the awakening of self-consciousness, had committed no actual sin, the effect of baptism must relation to the forgiveness of original sin and guilt.” (Schaff, 834-835)
- “Augustine . . . constrained by the idea of original sin, and by the supposed necessity of baptism to salvation . . . does not shirk from consigning unbaptized children to damnation itself . . .” (Schaff, 836)

- The Millennium

- The thousand year reign of Christ is figurative and not literal (Wilhelm, 386)
- The following doctrines are clearly taught in Augustine's magnum opus *The City of God*:
  - The Apocrypha (Esdra, Tobit, Judith) and the *Septuagint* are inspired. (Book XIII, Chapter 23; Book XVI, Chapter 15, Book VIII, Chapter 36, Book XVIII, Chapters 42-43)
  - A man is saved from the second death by martyrdom. (Book XX, Chapter 13)
  - The restoration of Israel predicted in Hosea 6:2 was fulfilled in 33 AD. (Book XX, Chapter 9)
  - The resurrection of the saints who sit in judgment in Revelation 20 are Catholic priests and bishops now judging the heathen. (Book XX, Chapter 25, 29)
  - Unsprinkled babies go to Hell if they are not 'elect' babies. (Book XXII, Chapters 19, 25)
- According to the *Evangelical Dictionary of the Theology*, Augustine was completely Catholic on the following points of doctrine:
  - "He held with Cyprian that outside the church there is no salvation, and that bishops of the church hold authority by apostolic succession." (Elwell, 123)
  - "An he held a high doctrine of the sacraments, teaching that they "place the reality before us and actualized it." (Elwell, 123)
  - "He justified the use of coercion against heretics (i.e., Donatists) and schematics in the name of Catholic Christianity." (Elwell, 123)
- Augustine was first and foremost a Roman Catholic. Reformed scholar Warfield concedes the point when he states the in a true sense Augustine was the founder of Roman Catholicism. Warfield writes, "In him are found at once the seed out of which the tree that we know as the Roman Catholic Church was grown." (quoted in Vance, 18)
- Sir Robert Anderson, states, "Nearly all the errors prevalent in Romanism can be traced back to Augustine." (Anderson, 95)
- Lawrence M. Vance, author of *The Other Side of Calvinism*, painstakingly documents the heretical beliefs of Augustine in chapter two of his book:
  - Augustine was the one who gave the doctrine of purgatory its first definite form. (Vance, 21)
  - The first resurrection is the new birth for the believer.
  - The memorial of the Lord's Supper became that of a spiritual presence of Christ body and blood.
  - It was Augustine who first defined the so-called sacraments as a means of grace.
  - Sex was shameful and was sinful except for producing children.

- Regarding the Millennium, Augustine was properly Amillennial, not accepting the literal thousand year reign of Christ, but teaching that the Millennium was the age between the First and Second Advents. (Vance, 22)

### **Augustine the First Calvinist**

- One cannot study Augustine without commenting on his contention with Pelagius over the doctrines of sin and grace.
- Pelagius was a British monk, who led a quiet, austere life and knew nothing of the spiritual turmoil that plagued Augustine's early years. (Enns, 423)
- Pelagius first espoused his views regarding the doctrine of man and salvation in Rome around 400 AD. In 410 he met with Augustine in North Africa with whom he disagreed with sharply. The source of their conflict revolved around the doctrines of original sin and freedom of the will. (Enns, 423)
- "Pelagius taught that man is born neutral with the ability and freedom to choose good or evil; man is not born with original sin. Because God creates each soul individually at birth, each person is born free and neutral as Adam, and each has the capacity for good or evil; in fact, a sinless life is possible. Adam's sin did not affect the human race; it affected only himself. Hence, any person can choose good or evil at any given moment, having the capacity for good as well as evil. Pelagius explain the problem of sin in the world as being due to 'wrong education' or 'bad example.' God's grace was helpful in overcoming evil in life, but it was unnecessary for salvation because man could choose that of his own ability. Because man is not born inherently evil, Pelagius also rejected the necessity of infant baptism for salvation; infant baptism was merely a dedicatory rite." (Enns, 424)
- Augustine responded to Pelagius by articulating the following doctrines:
  - Man's original state prior to the Fall was one of natural perfection in which he enjoyed the image of God in wisdom, holiness, and immortality.
  - Through the Fall man lost his privileged status with God and passed into a state where he was unable not to sin. The will was entirely affected, now being inclined toward evil instead of neutral. Man was no longer free.
  - This fallen sinful nature and disposition as passed on to the entire human race. All humanity was "seminally present" in Adam. Therefore when Adam sinned, each person of the entire human race to the end of time was judge guilty as having individually participated in the first sin.
  - God's grace was absolutely essential in rescuing man from his state of total depravity. Because of the Fall, man's only freedom was to sin; man was now incapable of doing right.
  - To secure salvation, God extends His grace—which Augustine termed "irresistible grace." God's grace does not operate contrary to the nature of man, but "so changes the

will that man voluntarily chooses that which is good. The will of man is renewed and thus resorted to its true freedom. God can and does so operate on the will that man of his free choice turns to virtue and holiness. In this way the grace of God becomes the source of all good in man.

- This grace was even necessary for the ability to believe the gospel. “Grace imparted to sinful man, not because he believes, but in order that he may believe; for faith itself is the gift of God. (Enn, 424)

### **Pelagian and Augustinian Views of Sin**

<b>Comparisons</b>	<b>Pelagius</b>	<b>Augustine</b>
Effect of fall	Only Adam affected	All humanity affected
Original Sin	No	Yes
Hereditary Sin	No	Yes
Humans at Birth	Born neutral	Born with fallen nature
Man’s Will	Free	Enslaved to sin
Fact of Universal Sin	Due to bad examples	Due to man’s innate sinfulness; man is “not able not to sin”
Turing to God in Salvation	Is possible independent of God’s grace	Only possible through God’s grace (Enns, 425)

- Pelagius was ultimately accused of heresy at the Synod of Jerusalem, and Pelagianism was condemned as heresy in 416 AD at they Synods of Carthage and Mileve. The Council of Ephesus also condemned his teachings in 431 AD. (Enns, 425)
- B.J Gundlach, author of the entry on Augustine in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, is very clear about the implications of Augustine’s thinking regarding predestination. Gundlach, writes, “Therefore our salvation becomes impossible without God’s grace, given to some and withheld from other by an inscrutable act of predestination. . . But for Augustine, grace is not just unmerited, predestinating favor; it is also an infused power unto righteousness, connected intimately with the sacraments.” (Elwell, 123)
- Prominent Calvinists admit that their system is rooted in the teachings of Augustine:
  - Spurgeon—“Calvin got his Calvinism from Augustine.”
  - Boettner—“Augustine had taught the essentials of the system a thousand years before Calvin was born.”
  - Warfield—“The system of doctrine taught by Calvin is just the Augustinianism common to the whole body of the Reformers.” (all quoted in Vance, 17)
- “The main point of Augustine’s doctrine pickup on by Calvin and the other Reformers was his teaching on predestination. Augustine held to the five commonly accepted points of Calvinism, and Custance even insists that they were formulated implicitly by Augustine.” (Vance, 22)

- “He at first held to free will but abandoned it later and pushed depravity into inability, which all the Reformers adopted in their denial of free will. . . Augustine’s statements on free will are still extracted today by both Baptists and Reformed as they seek to prove the Total Depravity of the TULIP system.” (Vance, 22-23)
- “Augustine also taught Unconditional Election like every Calvinist today. . . . Calvin infers that Augustien taught the reprobation of the ‘non-elect,’ and gives this evidence from Augustine’s writings: *The Lord has created those whom he unquestionably foreknew would go to destruction. This has happened because he has so willed it. But why he so willed it is not for our reason to inquire, for we cannot comprehend it.*” (Vance, 23)
- “Regarding the Atonement, Augustine restricted the purpose of redemption to a definite circle of the elect, who constituted the minority of the race. He explained the all men of I Timothy 2:4 as either all manner of men whom God would have to be saved or all who are saved only by the will of God.” (Vance, 24)
- “In his teaching on Irresistible Grace, Augustine was in line with all Calvinists, teaching that a man must be regenerated before he can repent and believe.” (Vance, 24)
- Regarding the last point of the TULIP system, Augustine did hold to the Perseverance of the Saints; however, he thought a saved person could be lost if he didn’t preserve, but that no elect person ever died in an unregenerate state. This means that once saved, a person could lose it but would always get it back before death.” (Vance, 24)
- Augustine said, “Those who fall away, even though they have been baptized and regenerate, show thereby, that they never belonged to the number of the elect.” (quoted in Vance, 24)
- Warfield said that the Reformation “was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine’s doctrine of grace over Augustine’s doctrine of the Church.” (quoted in Vance, 27)



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