

Church History

Lesson 16 - Augustine

1. Introduction - Take and Read

- 1.1. In the summer of 386 a rhetorician Aurelius Augustinus was engaged in great turmoil in a garden in Milan. As he sat wrestling with his thoughts and full of distress, he heard the song of a number of children floating across the garden. The words they sang were “Tolle lege, tolle lege” (“Take and read, take and read.)”
- 1.2. Taking this as a sign, he ventured to pick up a copy of the writings of the Apostle Paul that lay nearby. As he did, his eyes fell on the following words: “Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.” Romans 13:13–14
- 1.3. These words stuck Augustine with such force, that the hesitant man immediately committed himself to Christianity. Thus began the Christian life of the greatest figure in the first millennium of Western Church.
 - 1.3.1. “Take up and read. Take up and read. Take up and read.” These words, probably shouted by a playing child, floated over the fence of the garden in Milan and struck the ears of a dejected professor of rhetoric who sat under a fig tree and cried: “How long, Lord, how long? Will it be tomorrow and always tomorrow? Why does my uncleanness not end this very moment?” The child’s words seemed to him words from heaven. Shortly before, elsewhere in the garden, he had put down a manuscript he was reading. Now he returned to the spot, took up the manuscript, and read the words of Paul: “Not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Responding to these words, Augustine—for that was the name of the rhetorician—made a decision that he had been postponing for a long time: he devoted himself to the service of God. Soon he abandoned his career as a professor, and set on a course that would eventually make him one of the most influential figures in the entire history of Christianity. - Gonzales, location 4128
- 1.4. Today we will take a brief look at the life and thought of this remarkable, very important figure.

2. The life of Augustine

- 2.1. Augustine’s childhood (354-370)
 - 2.1.1. Augustine was born on November 13, 354, in the small town of Tagaste in North Africa (located in modern day Algeria). His mother Monica was a devout Christian who had a huge influence on her son, while his father was a pagan and local Roman public official who converted and was baptized shortly before his death.
 - 2.1.1.1. The great North African was born on 13 November 354, in Tagaste, a little town in the hill country of Numidia, a region we know as Algeria. His father, Patricius, was an easygoing heathen; his mother, Monica, an eager Christian. - Shelley, location 2382

- 2.1.1.2. Augustine was born in Tagaste, a minor commercial city in North Africa. His mother was a Christian and later a saint, pious but superstitious and ambitious for her son. His father, Patricius, was a member of the local ruling class, a pagan but baptized just before his death. Augustine received an elementary Christian education, but was not baptized as a youth. - Ferguson, location 5193
- 2.1.1.3. Augustine was born in A.D. 354, in the little town of Tagaste, in North Africa. His father was a minor Roman official, who followed the traditional pagan religion. But his mother, Monica, was a fervent Christian, whose constant prayer for her husband's conversion was eventually answered. - Gonzales, location 4139
- 2.1.1.4. But Monica did play an important role—sometimes even an overwhelming one—in the life of her only son. - Gonzales, location 4142
- 2.2. Augustine's education and early adulthood (370-375)
 - 2.2.1. Augustine showed great potential as a child, and both of his parents wanted to provide him the best education they could in North Africa.
 - 2.2.2. Augustine began his education at Madura, and then went to Carthage, the leading city of North Africa. Here he was to be educated in rhetoric, which was the best preparation for advancement at the time.
 - 2.2.2.1. Both parents were aware of the child's exceptional gifts, and therefore sought for him the best education possible. To that end they sent him to the nearby town of Madaura, and later to Carthage. - Gonzales, location 4143
 - 2.2.2.2. As all young men of his time preparing for careers as lawyers or public functionaries, Augustine was a student of rhetoric. The purpose of this discipline was learning to speak and to write elegantly and convincingly. Truth was not at issue. That was left for professors of philosophy. - Gonzales, location 4148
 - 2.2.3. During this time, Augustine began to see the importance of philosophy as well, and set out on a search to find truth. Rhetoric and great style, as important as they were, seemed insufficient. Augustine longed to find truth.
 - 2.2.3.1. During his student days Augustine was converted to philosophy in general, but not to any particular philosophy. - Ferguson, location 5196
 - 2.2.3.2. Thus, it was reading Cicero that Augustine came to the conviction that proper speech and style were not sufficient. One must also seek after truth. - Gonzales, location 4151
 - 2.2.4. However, Augustine was also given to pleasure seeking. Soon he had a concubine, who bore him a child, Adeodatus ("gift of God"). These twin paths - philosophy and pleasure - would create a great conflict that would dominate the next decade or more of Augustine's life.
 - 2.2.4.1. Although he did not neglect his studies, he also set out to enjoy the many pleasures that the city offered. Soon he had a concubine who bore him a child. He named the boy Adeodatus—given by God. - Gonzales, location 4146

- 2.2.4.2. Early in this period he acquired a concubine, to whom he was faithful and by whom a son was born, Adeodatus (“gift from God”). After studying at Madaura and Carthage, Augustine taught at Tagaste and then in Carthage. - Ferguson, location 5199
 - 2.2.4.3. He fell in love with a girl who gave him a son, Adeodatus. They lived together for thirteen years, but Augustine always felt that sex was his defiling passion. - Shelley, location 2385
- 2.3. Augustine turns to the philosophy of Manichaeism (375-382)
 - 2.3.1. Augustine tried turning to Scripture to solve this conflict between his philosophical desires and his sinful passions, but he found the old Latin translations crude, and some of the content of the Old Testament appeared barbarous to him. Thus he rejected his mother's faith.
 - 2.3.1.1. ...convinced him intellectually that he should make truth his life's search. The old temptations, however, still assailed him, and like Paul, he felt that two warriors, a higher and a lower, were struggling in him for mastery. In his conflicts he turned to the Bible, but it had no appeal to him. Its style seemed crude and barbarous to him. - Shelley, location 2388
 - 2.3.1.2. Enamored with classical Latin, Augustine was repelled by the grammar and style of the old Latin versions of the Bible. - Ferguson, location 5198
 - 2.3.2. Augustine turned to Manichaeism, a sharply dualistic philosophy which had been founded in Persia in the 3rd century. This philosophy was very similar to Gnosticism, teaching a sharp dualism between light and dark, spirit and flesh. Our problem is material in nature, and thus salvation is found in rejecting the physical, material world in favor of the spiritual, and preparing the soul to return to the realm of light by abstaining from riches, wine, meat, etc. This religion had been founded by Mani, who was the last in a series of prophets that included Buddha, Zoroaster, and Jesus. However, Manichaeism rejected and ridiculed the Scripture as being materialistic and crude.
 - 2.3.2.1. That search led the young student to Manichaeism. This religion was Persian in origin, having been founded by Mani in the third century. - Gonzales, location 4153
 - 2.3.2.2. Like many Christians, Augustine was attracted by the radical dualism and rational piety of Manichaeism, which presented itself as Christianity for intellectuals. - Ferguson, location 5201
 - 2.3.2.3. For a time Augustine tried Manichaeism, a persecuted faith in the Roman Empire, but one peculiarly appealing to a man of passion who felt two tendencies at war within him. Mani, its founder, had taught in Persia, and had met there a martyr's death by crucifixion in 276 or 277. The fundamental belief of the religion pictured the universe as the scene of an eternal conflict of two powers, the one good, the other evil. Man, as we know him, is a mixed product, the spiritual part of his nature consists of the good element, the physical of the evil. His task, therefore, is to free the good in him from the evil; and this can be accomplished by prayer, but

- especially by abstinence from all the enjoyments of evil: riches, lust, wine, meats, luxurious houses, and the like. - Shelley, location 2391
- 2.3.2.4.** Manicheism, like Gnosticism, taught that the true spiritual Jesus had no material body and did not actually die. - Shelley, location 2397
- 2.3.2.5.** Like the Gnostics, the Manicheans held that much of the New Testament is true, but they rejected everything in it that seemed to suggest Christ's real sufferings, and they discarded the Old Testament altogether. - Shelley, location 2398
- 2.3.2.6.** According to Mani, the human predicament is the presence in each of us of two principles. One, which he calls "light," is spiritual. The other, "darkness," is matter. Throughout the universe there are these two principles, both eternal: light and darkness. Somehow—Manicheans explained it through a series of myths—the two have mingled, and the present human condition is the result of that admixture. Salvation then consists in separating the two elements, and in preparing our spirit for its return to the realm of pure light, in which it will be absorbed. Since any new mingling of the principles is evil, true believers must avoid procreation. According to Mani, this doctrine had been revealed in various fashions to a long series of prophets, including Buddha, Zoroaster, Jesus, and Mani himself. - Gonzales, location 4154
- 2.3.3.** Augustine was attracted to Manichaeism because it seemed to have more elegant Latin writings than Christianity, which appealed to the rhetorician in Augustine, and secondly he preferred its account of the dualistic struggle between good and evil to the Christian account of the Supreme God who had no rival.
- 2.3.3.1.** Manicheism seemed to respond to Augustine's difficulties with Christianity, which centered on two issues. The first was that, from the point of view of rhetoric, the Bible was a series of inelegant writings—some even barbaric—in which the rules of good style were seldom followed, and where one found crude episodes of violence, rape, deceit, and the like. The second was the question of the origin of evil. Monica had taught him that there was only one God. But Augustine saw evil both around and in himself, and had to ask what was the source of such evil. If God was supreme and pure goodness, evil could not be a divine creation. And if, on the other hand, all things were created by the divine, God could not be as good and wise as Monica and the church claimed. Manicheism offered answers to these two points. The Bible—particularly the Old Testament—was not in fact the word of the eternal principle of light. Nor was evil a creation of that principle, but of its opposite, the principle of darkness. - Gonzales, location 4166
- 2.3.4.** Augustine did not fully convert to Manichaeism, however, but only became an "auditor". However, he eventually developed great doubts about this religion, but held on to await the arrival of a certain Faustus, whom he was assured would answer all his questions and lay his doubts to rest. When Faustus arrived, though, he proved to be unable to answer Augustine's

queries, which further solidified Augustine's doubts and began to lead him away from Manichaeism.

2.3.4.1. But there were always doubts, and he spent nine years as a "hearer," without seeking to join the ranks of the " - Gonzales, location 4173

2.3.4.2. He became an auditor in the religion, in contrast to the perfect observants, the elect. - Ferguson, location 5203

2.3.4.3. Augustine, however, began to have doubts about Manichaeism and looked forward to the coming of Faustus, who was expected to answer his questions, but failed to do so. - Ferguson, location 5204

2.3.4.4. When the much announced Faustus finally arrived, he turned out to be no better than the other Manichean teachers. - Gonzales, location 4176

2.3.5. At the end of this period, Augustine moved to Rome to take up teaching rhetoric there.

2.3.5.1. He moved from North Africa with his mother to Rome. - Ferguson, location 5206

2.3.5.2. though inwardly doubting the truth of the Manichean philosophy, it was at the suggestion of Manichean friends in 383 that he moved to Rome. - Shelley, location 2401

2.4. Augustine turns to Neoplatonism (382-386)

2.4.1. Augustine next began to turn towards Neoplatonism. This philosophy maintained a sharp distinction between the material and the spiritual, but did not have the same sharp distinction between good and evil as he found in Manichaeism. Rather than two equal eternal sources - one good and one evil - Neoplatonism said everything came from One - the good - but as we moved further from that One we became increasingly evil. This answer was more satisfying to Augustine.

2.4.1.1. In Milan he became a Neoplatonist. Neoplatonism, very popular at the time, was a philosophy with religious overtones. - Gonzales, location 4179

2.4.1.2. Unlike Manichean dualism, Neoplatonism affirmed that there was only one principle, and that all reality was derived from it through a series of emanations—much like the concentric circles that appear on the surface of the water when hit by a pebble. - Gonzales, location 4182

2.4.1.3. Those realities that are closer to the One are superior, and those that are more removed from it are inferior. Evil then does not originate from a different source, but consists simply in moving away from the One. - Gonzales, location 4184

2.4.1.4. This seemed to answer Augustine's vexing questions as to the origin of evil. From this perspective, one could assert that a single being, of infinite goodness, was the source of all things, and at the same time acknowledge the presence of evil in creation. Evil, though real, is not a "thing," but rather a direction away from the goodness of the One. - Gonzales, location 4186

2.4.1.5. He was rescued from his doubts by Neoplatonism: the dualism of Manichaeism was dissolved in the spiritualism of Neoplatonism. He

learned from Plotinus that all beings are good and that there are incorporeal realities. - Ferguson, location 5211

2.4.2. During this time Augustine was appointed as the professor of rhetoric at Milan - a very prestigious post which bode well for his future prospects. In part to secure these prospects, during this time Augustine abandoned his relationship with his concubine (whom according to tradition he could not marry because of her lower class, and who would not help advance his career), and became engaged to a much younger woman. However, his moral struggle intensified as he found himself increasingly unable to control his sexual desires.

2.4.2.1. In 384 Augustine was appointed professor of rhetoric at Milan, in part through the influence of Manichaean friends in Rome. - Ferguson, location 5213

2.4.2.2. Shortly after his arrival in the capital he secured a professorship in the State University in Milan (384) and moved to the northern city. His widowed mother, and some of his African friends, soon joined him. He was now thirty years old, at the summit of a career, with dazzling prospects of success before him. More than ever, however, he was deeply dissatisfied with his life. He callously separated from his mistress, Adeodatus' mother, to become engaged to a young woman of wealth and position; but he could not master his passions. He found himself in "a whirl of vicious lovemaking. - Shelley, location 2403

2.4.3. During this time, Augustine began to listen to the preaching of the city's most famous orator - Bishop Ambrose. At first, he did this mainly out of professional curiosity (and some prodding from his mother Monica). However, Augustine soon became personally interested in the teaching of Ambrose, not just for its style, but for its content. In Ambrose he began to see an understanding of the Christian faith that was much more sophisticated and intellectual, and which was explained in eloquent terms. Thus, both his rhetorical and his philosophical questions were being answered through Ambrose.

2.4.3.1. Monica, who was with him in Milan, insisted that he should hear Ambrose's sermons. As a professor of rhetoric, Augustine agreed to attend the services led by the most famous speaker in Milan. His initial purpose was not to hear what Ambrose had to say, but to see how he said it. - Gonzales, location 4191

2.4.3.2. As much out of professional curiosity as anything, he went to hear the city's most famous public speaker, bishop Ambrose, preach. From him, Augustine heard a much more intellectually respectable interpretation of the Scriptures than he had learned growing up in North Africa. - Ferguson, location 5214

2.4.3.3. While living in Milan, however, Augustine came under the powerful preaching of Bishop Ambrose. He went to church first to study Ambrose's preaching style, but before long the message reached his soul. In Ambrose he discovered that Christianity could be both eloquent and intelligent, and that the troublesome stories in the Old

- Testament could be interpreted as allegories. - Shelley, location 2408
- 2.4.3.4.** However, as time went by he found that he was listening to the bishop less as a professional, and more as a seeker. - Gonzales, location 4193
- 2.4.3.5.** Ambrose interpreted allegorically many of the passages that had created difficulties for Augustine. Since allegorical interpretation was perfectly acceptable according to the canons of rhetoric, Augustine could find no fault in this. But it certainly made Scripture appear less crude, and therefore more acceptable. - Gonzales, location 4194
- 2.4.4.** By this time, Augustine had intellectually accepted the truth of Christianity. However, there remained the vexing moral problem. He had no control over his evil desires. During this time Augustine began to learn more about the lives of austere monks - uneducated men who yet could control themselves in a way that eluded Augustine. This convinced Augustine that if he was to be a Christian, he would have to be a wholehearted disciple like the monks. If he was to be a Christian, he would devote himself to an ascetic lifestyle.
- 2.4.4.1.** He could not be a lukewarm Christian. Were he to accept his mother's faith, he would do it wholeheartedly, and he would devote his entire life to it. - Gonzales, location 4197
- 2.4.4.2.** The presbyter Simplicianus took on Augustine as his personal project. Augustine read the commentary on Paul written by Marius Victorinus, who had been converted in 355 from Neoplatonism to Christianity. Augustine underwent an intellectual conversion, but not yet a moral conversion. It took him some time to get his relationship with his concubine straightened out. When his mother finally convinced him to put her away so that a respectable marriage could be arranged, he had another companion within two weeks (his bride-to-be was still under-age). After this failure of sexual self-control, Augustine heard about the austere lives of uneducated monks, who could control themselves in a way that the intellectual Augustine could not. Conversion for him, as for so many in this period, meant a decision for the highest type of Christianity, asceticism. The problem became now not so much one of belief as of action. - Ferguson, location 5216
- 2.4.4.3.** Augustine was convinced that, were he to become a Christian, he must give up his career in rhetoric, as well as all his ambitions and every physical pleasure. It was precisely this last requirement that seemed most difficult. As he later wrote, at that time he used to pray: "Give me chastity and continence; but not too soon. - Gonzales, location 4199
- 2.4.4.4.** The final stimulus to Augustine's conversion seems to have been the personal example of the monks. - Shelley, location 2411
- 2.4.4.5.** At this point a battle raged within himself. It was the struggle between willing and not willing. He had decided to become a Christian. But not too soon. - Gonzales, location 4202

- 2.5.** Augustine's conversion and early Christian life (386-391)
- 2.5.1.** In this state of conflicting desires, Augustine retreated to the garden where he heard the now famous song of the children "Take up and read" - which led him to read the words of Romans 13:13-14 in the scroll: "13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature." This convinced Augustine to abandon his hesitancy and to fully embrace the Christian faith. He quickly retired to a country estate to contemplate his new found faith, and he enrolled for baptism. During this time he also resigned his teaching post, and he eventually decided to return to North Africa with his son, his mother, and several friends, and to begin a monastery there.
- 2.5.1.1.** Augustine's "conversion experience" occurred in 386. While agonizing in the garden of his house over his moral failures, he heard a child in a nearby house repeat in a sing-song voice the refrain, Tolle, lege ("Pick up and read - Ferguson, location 5222
- 2.5.1.2.** There was a book of the letters of Paul on a bench, and Augustine picked it up and read, "Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Romans 13:13 - Ferguson, location 5225
- 2.5.1.3.** It was as if the Lord had spoken directly to Augustine. He retired to a country estate to contemplate Christianity seriously. Augustine then enrolled for baptism, which he received from Ambrose on Easter Sunday, 387. He had found his way back to the faith of his childhood and turned his back on his oratorical career. - Ferguson, location 5228
- 2.5.1.4.** After his conversion, Augustine took the necessary steps to embark on a new life. He requested baptism, which he and Adeodatus received from Ambrose. He resigned from his teaching post. And then, with Monica, Adeodatus and a group of friends, he set out for North Africa, where he planned to spend the rest of his days in monastic retreat. - Gonzales, location 4207
- 2.5.1.5.** Matters came to a head as he walked through his garden in agony. He heard the singsong voice of a child saying, "Take it and read it." He picked up a New Testament. His eyes fell on the words perfectly suited to his mood: "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" (Rom. 13:13-14, kjv). "Instantly," said Augustine, "as I reached the end of this sentence, it was as if the light of peace was poured into my heart, and all the shades of doubt faded away. - Shelley, location 2415

- 2.5.1.6. On the eve of the following Easter, 387, Augustine, with his son, Adeodatus, and his friend, Alypius, was baptized by Ambrose in Milan. - Shelley, location 2420
- 2.5.2. While trying to return to North Africa, Monica became sick and died at Ostia (the port near Rome). This caused Augustine so much grief he spent several months in the area before completing the trip. However, he eventually returned to Tagaste, and began a monastery. Unfortunately, however, his son Adeodatus died in 388, compounding Augustine's grief.
 - 2.5.2.1. The return to Africa was interrupted at the seaport of Ostia, where Monica became ill and died. Augustine was so overcome with grief that it was necessary for him and his companions to remain in Rome for several months. - Gonzales, location 4210
 - 2.5.2.2. Augustine and his mother started back to North Africa, but Monica died at Ostia while they awaited passage. - Ferguson, location 5230
 - 2.5.2.3. A few months later, accompanied by his mother, he set out for North Africa a different man. On the journey, however, near Rome, his mother died. And during the autumn of 388, once again settled in Tagaste, he lost his son, adding to the grief he already felt from the death of his mother. - Shelley, location 2421
- 2.5.3. Augustine set up the monastery. However, he did not follow the extreme rigorism of the desert monks, but rather built a model of a simple life, with no unnecessary comforts, that was devoted to study and meditation.
 - 2.5.3.1. When they finally reached Tagaste, Augustine sold most of the property that he had inherited, gave some of the money to the poor, and with the rest he settled at Cassiciacum with Adeodatus—who died shortly thereafter—and a few friends whose goal was mystical contemplation and philosophical inquiry. Their objective was not the extreme rigorism of the monks of the desert, but rather an orderly life, with no unnecessary comforts, and devoted entirely to devotions, study, and meditation. - Gonzales, location 4212
 - 2.5.3.2. Augustine returned to Tagaste and gathered some friends around him in a monastic community. - Ferguson, location 5234
- 2.6. Augustine the bishop of Hippo (391-430)
 - 2.6.1. Augustine longed to spend the rest of his life in monastic retreat. However, he knew that communities would try to compel him to become their bishop, and so he avoided towns which were missing a bishop. However, in 391 he ventured to the town of Hippo, which had a bishop named Valerius, to convince someone to join his small monastic community. While in the church meeting, however, Valerius and the church clamored for Augustine to become a priest, and eventually the co-bishop. Augustine did not want this, but was prevailed upon by the church. Furthermore, since Valerius' main language was Greek and he spoke Latin haltingly, Augustine soon became the main preacher. By 395 he was co-bishop, and then in 396 (after the death of Valerius) the sole bishop of Hippo.

- 2.6.1.1. But this was not to be, for his fame was spreading, and there were some who had other designs for his life. In 391, he visited the town of Hippo in order to talk to a friend whom he wished to invite to join the small community at Cassiciacum. While at Hippo he attended church, and bishop Valerius, who saw him in the congregation, preached about how God always sent shepherds for the flock, and then asked the congregation to pray for God's guidance in case there was among them someone sent to be their minister. The congregation responded exactly as the bishop had expected, and Augustine, much against his will, was ordained to serve with Valerius in Hippo. Four years later, he was made bishop jointly with Valerius, who feared that another church would steal his catch. - Gonzales, location 4221
- 2.6.1.2. Since at that time it was forbidden for a bishop to leave his church for another, Augustine's consecration to be a bishop jointly with Valerius guaranteed that he would spend the rest of his days at Hippo. - Gonzales, location 4226
- 2.6.1.3. Valerius died a short time later, and left Augustine as bishop of Hippo. - Gonzales, location 4228
- 2.6.1.4. He was ordained presbyter in 391 for the catholic church at Hippo (a city largely Donatist), where he did the preaching because the bishop was Greek and could not handle Latin and Punic fluently. He became a co-bishop in 395 and within a year the sole bishop of the community. - Ferguson, location 5235
- 2.6.1.5. Three years later at Hippo, by popular demand but against his will, Augustine was ordained a priest. Soon, at the request of Bishop Valerius, he was chosen assistant bishop of the church, and a year later, upon the death of Valerius, Augustine succeeded to the leadership of the church in Hippo. He was forty-three years old and for the next thirty-three years, until his death in 430, he stood in the center of the storms of his time. - Shelley, location 2425
- 2.6.2. It was during the long time of his service as bishop of Hippo that Augustine engaged in the controversies of his day and wrote many of his most famous works.

3. Augustine and the Major Controversies and Events of His Day

3.1. Augustine and the Manichees

- 3.1.1. Manichaeism was a strong force in the church of Augustine's day. Consequently, he wrote a number of works to refute Manichaeism. Many of these dealt with topics like the authority of Scripture, the origin of evil, and the freedom of the human will (because Manichaeism had a fatalistic view of life). Augustine taught that God had made all things good, but that humans and angels had willed to sin, and this was the origin of evil. Thus, God was the only Sovereign, eternal Being, and evil was the responsibility of human choice.

- 3.1.1.1. Many of Augustine's first writings were attempts to refute the Manichees. Since he had helped lead some friends to that religion, he now felt a particular responsibility to refute the teachings that he had supported earlier. Since those were the main points at issue, most of these early works dealt with the authority of Scripture, the origin of evil, and free will. - Gonzales, location 4232
- 3.1.1.2. Against such views, Augustine became the champion of the freedom of the will. According to him, human freedom is such that it is its own cause. When we act freely, we are not moved by something either outside or inside us, as by a necessity, but rather by our own will. A decision is free inasmuch as it is not the product of nature, but of the will itself. Naturally, this does not mean that circumstances do not influence our decisions. What it does mean is that only that which we decide out of our own will, and not out of circumstance or out of an inner necessity, is properly called free. - Gonzales, location 4236
- 3.1.1.3. The origin of evil, then, is to be found in the bad decisions made by both human and angelic wills—those of the demons, who are fallen angels. Thus, Augustine was able to affirm both the reality of evil and the creation of all things by a good God. - Gonzales, location 4244
- 3.1.1.4. Evil is not a substance, as the Manichees implied when speaking of it as the principle of darkness. It is a decision, a direction, a negation of good. - Gonzales, location 4246
- 3.1.1.5. Related to overcoming Manichaeism, Augustine could affirm, "I will choose this day whom I will serve" (cf. Joshua 24:15). Manichees held a fatalistic view: They were the predetermined elect to see the truth. Augustine opposed them with the older Christian position that affirmed free will in respect to faith. The individual makes his or her own decision as to salvation. - Ferguson, location 5351
- 3.1.2. It should be noted that Augustine appears to have modified some of his positions of the freedom of the human will when he began to struggle against Pelagius and his followers.
- 3.2. Augustine and the Donatists
 - 3.2.1. The Donatists were a schismatic movement that flourished in North Africa following the persecution of Diocletian in the early 300's. The Donatists argued that the church was too lax in forgiving those who had wavered during the persecution. They especially objected to priests and bishops who had wavered during the persecution and then were restored to their positions later. Furthermore, they declared that the sacramental rites performed by such priests were invalid. To be effective, the sacrament not only had to be performed properly - it had to be given by one who was worthy to perform the rite. Finally, the Donatists argued that the church should be a pure company of only the elect, and anyone who did not maintain strict purity should be removed from the church. The Donatists were a major force in North Africa, and in many areas actually outnumbered adherents to the orthodox, catholic church.

- 3.2.1.1. The Donatists (see chapter 10) presented the chief ecclesiological problem of Augustine's episcopacy, occupying his attention especially from 400 to 412. Since the time of Constantine, Donatism had been the majority church in North Africa, which was nearly all nominally Christian. - Ferguson, location 5295
 - 3.2.1.2. By making the holiness of the clergy the hallmark of Christianity, the Donatists stood mid-way between the early view that all Christians are saints and the later view pioneered by Augustine that the holiness of the church is in its sacraments (chapter 7). They asked, "How can a bishop give [in the sacraments] what he does not possess [holiness]?" - Ferguson, location 5298
 - 3.2.1.3. The Donatists' moral rigor, ethnic identification with the native populations of North Africa, and their appeal to the fathers of the North African church (Tertullian and Cyprian), all gave Augustine a hard job. - Ferguson, location 5300
 - 3.2.1.4. North African Christianity was still torn by a passionate conflict between Catholics and a movement called Donatism. The controversy was longstanding and deep-seated. A bishop of Hippo could scarcely avoid speaking to the issue. - Shelley, location 2429
 - 3.2.1.5. Donatist charges centered on the fact that certain Catholic bishops had handed over the Scriptures to be burned during the persecution under Diocletian. Such an act, the Donatists insisted, was a serious sin of apostasy. Since the Catholic pastors were ordained by bishops who had sinned so grievously, the Donatists believed they, rather than the Catholics, constituted the true church of Christ. During Augustine's time the Donatists were still widespread in North Africa, and in some areas they constituted a majority. - Shelley, location 2434
- 3.2.2. Augustines response to the Donatists
- 3.2.2.1. At first Augustine was gentle with the Donatists, simply attempting to refute their ideas verbally and in writing. Against their idea that the sacraments are only valid if the priest offering them is personally holy, Augustine argued that this would always leave Christians in doubt as to the efficacy of their baptism and other rites. This was certainly correct, and the Western church through the centuries has agreed with Augustine. However, his stress on the simple efficacy of the sacraments led to the idea of them working "ex opere operato" (in the working it works), regardless of anything else. The Reformers would have to correct this, pointing out that while the holiness of the person administering the rite does not negate its efficacy, it is only efficient if it is received in faith.
 - 3.2.2.1.1. Augustine's position at first was to be moderate and amicable. He engaged in discussions in hope of converting the Donatists, and he interceded on their behalf when the imperial government sought them out. - Ferguson, location 5302

- 3.2.2.1.2.** Therefore, throughout his career Augustine had to deal with the various issues raised by the Donatists. One of these was the question of whether ordinations conferred by unworthy bishops were valid. To this, Augustine responded that the validity of any rite of the church does not depend on the moral virtue of the person administering it. If it were so, Christians would live in constant doubt as to the validity of their baptism. - Gonzales, location 4249
- 3.2.2.1.3.** On this point, most of the Western church through the centuries has agreed with Augustine, whose views on the church and on the validity of sacraments became normative in the West. - Gonzales, location 4252
- 3.2.2.1.4.** Augustine's position at first was to be moderate and amicable. He engaged in discussions in hope of converting the Donatists, and he interceded on their behalf when the imperial government sought them out. - Ferguson, location 5302
- 3.2.2.1.5.** As long as the person intended to be baptized or ordained and the correct action was done and the proper words were spoken, a change in the person was effected. This understanding was later described by the phrase *ex opere operato*, "It is worked by the work." In other words, from the action performed the work is accomplished. - Ferguson, location 5313
- 3.2.2.1.6.** Augustine thus made ordination a permanent possession of the cleric. Sacraments administered by him continued to have validity regardless of his moral character or faithfulness to the church, because ultimately it was God who was doing the work, not the human administrator. This view made ordination no longer an organ of the community, but an individual possession that could be exercised apart from the congregation. - Ferguson, location 5316
- 3.2.2.1.7.** Augustine also set forth a different understanding of the sacraments. The Donatists argued that the validity of the sacrament depends upon the moral standing of the minister. Augustine said, "No." The sacrament does not belong to the minister but to Christ. The priest's acts are really God's because he has placed the sacraments in the hands of the properly ordained minister. All that is required of the priest is his awareness that he administers God's grace for the whole church. Such a view makes the priest the channel for grace to the members of the church. Thus, Augustine added his considerable influence to his priestly (sacerdotal) view of the church that

reached such unfortunate extremes in medieval Catholicism. - Shelley, location 2441

3.2.2.2. Regarding the purity of the church, Augustine argued that the church will never be completely pure in this age. Arguing from texts like Matthew 13:24-30, Augustine states that the Donatist attempt to always purify the church would result in damaging true believers. Furthermore, the real sin was splitting from the church as the Donatists had done. Therefore, while their baptisms were valid, they did not become effective until the schismatics joined the one true church. Once again, this doctrine was carried to extremes and eventually had to be corrected by the Reformers.

3.2.2.2.1. Whereas strict Donatists rebaptized Catholics who came to their churches, Catholics did not rebaptize Donatists. Instead, by the laying on of hands they reconciled them to the church. - Ferguson, location 5320

3.2.2.2.2. Augustine saved Roman catholicity by saying that the sacraments administered outside the church, although having a formal validity, became actually effective for salvation only in communion with the church. - Ferguson, location 5323

3.2.2.2.3. The Donatists, by maintaining their schism, appeared to be sinning against brotherly love, and although persons baptized by the Donatists did not have to be rebaptized, they could not be saved as long as they maintained their separation from the Catholic church. - Ferguson, location 5328

3.2.2.2.4. Augustine rejected the Donatist's view of a pure church. Until the day of judgment, he said, the church must be a mixed multitude. Both good and bad people are in it. To support this idea he appealed to Jesus' parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30), overlooking the fact that Jesus was not speaking of the church but of the whole world. - Shelley, location 2438

3.2.2.2.5. NOTE: I think that the comment by Shelley above is incorrect: the text in view is not about the world but about the kingdom of God. Therefore, Augustine was essentially correct regarding the purity of the church.

3.2.2.3. Eventually, Augustine gave up on trying to persuade the Donatists and said that it would be ok for the government to use coercion to force them to come in. This was a major change in position, and furthermore a gross mixing of the civil government with the church which would have disastrous consequences in the later middle ages. However, it should be note that this also led Augustine to develop his theory of just war, which has guided thought on that subject down to our present day.

- 3.2.2.3.1. Initially he was strongly opposed to coercion. But step by step he came to another view. As he saw the Donatist resistance to the government's mounting pressure, he came to accept the use of force in a religious issue. What looks like harsh action, he said, may bring the offender to recognize its justice. - Shelley, location 2448
- 3.2.2.3.2. In the end, finding this method unsuccessful, Augustine moved on to the position that the government should compel them to come in, appealing to Jesus' parable of the wedding feast (Luke 14:23). This failure to distinguish the church from the Christianized state had very unfortunate consequences later, for this passage in Augustine was used to justify the Inquisition. - Ferguson, location 5304
- 3.2.2.3.3. Augustine himself thought the policy was justified, however, because many Donatists came into the church, and their children grew up to be faithful Catholics. - Ferguson, location 5306
- 3.2.2.3.4. It was also in trying to deal with the Donatist issue that Augustine developed his theory of the just war. - Gonzales, location 4254
- 3.2.2.3.5. He thus came to the conclusion that a war may be just, but that in order for it to be so certain conditions must be fulfilled. The first is that the purpose of the war must be just—a war is never just when its purpose is to satisfy territorial ambition, or the mere exercise of power. The second condition is that a just war must be waged by properly instituted authority. - Gonzales, location 4257
- 3.2.2.3.6. Finally, the third rule—and the most important one for Augustine—is that, even in the midst of the violence that is a necessary part of war, the motive of love must be central. - Gonzales, location 4262
- 3.2.2.4. Eventually, the Emperor stepped in to suppress Donatism. This was done in part because many of the Donatists were quite anti-empire and there were a good number of Donatist brigands in North Africa. This was a major blow against Donatism, but it hung on in a reduced form until the coming of Islam.
 - 3.2.2.4.1. A conference in Carthage in 411 assembled 284 bishops from each side. The Donatists were not impressed with Augustine's arguments, and the effort at unity failed. The imperial tribune, however, declared against the Donatists, and an edict in 412 suppressed Donatism, but did not impose the death penalty. The movement declined but did not disappear until the

coming of the Muslims in the seventh century. -
Ferguson, location 5330

3.3. Augustine and the Pelagians

3.3.1. Between 397 and 400 Augustine wrote and published his *Confessions*, essentially a spiritual autobiography, recounting how Augustine had come to faith. The work was the first of its kind in history, and exerted a huge influence almost immediately and ever since. This included a great reception in North Africa and at Rome.

3.3.2. Pelagius was a British monk, who was an educated layman, whose ascetic life won the admiration of many. He settled in Rome around 398, and became a spiritual director for some wealthy families who were coming to faith.

3.3.2.1. Pelagius was born c. 350 in Britain. His father was a physician who had accompanied the bureaucrats there and had married a Celt. Both were Christians and had high ambitions for their son, who was a commanding figure. - Ferguson, location 5407

3.3.2.2. By 390 Pelagius was in Rome, where he had come to study law and where he was baptized. He gained influence as a moral reformer and spiritual director. Although an ascetic in reaction against the looseness of Christian life in Rome, he did not advocate a withdrawal from society. - Ferguson, location 5408

3.3.2.3. Pelagius had a good background in the classics and the earlier Church Fathers, but he was especially well grounded in the Scriptures. There he found such ideas as free will, moral conduct, doing the will of the Father, good works, following the example of Jesus Christ, and a system of rewards and punishment. - Ferguson, location 5411

3.3.3. Pelagius was shocked and dismayed at the lukewarm faith and moral compromises that were prevalent in Rome. He felt that the demands of Scripture were not being pressed upon believers in Rome. There was far too much acceptance of sin as if Christians could not live in full obedience to the law of God.

3.3.3.1. Pelagius was not a theologian, much less a mystic; rather, he was a moralist. - Ferguson, location 5415

3.3.4. In Rome Pelagius also opposed Manichaeism, with its dualistic and fatalistic system, that inevitably seemed to lead to a less rigorous moral life. During these struggles, he read and found great profit in Augustine's anti-Manichaean work *On the Freedom of Choice*.

3.3.5. While in Rome, Pelagius heard a bishop quote a piece of Augustine's *Confessions*: "You command continence; grant what you command, and command what you please." Pelagius thought this was terrible, and destructive to moral responsibility. No wonder the Christians in Rome were so lax if this is the kind of doctrine they were hearing!

- 3.3.6.** Pelagius began to teach a series of doctrines that stressed human responsibility for sin, and that people could obey God's law. Sin was not found in the nature, and was not inherited from Adam. Sin and evil is found in the human will and individual choices, and every human can choose to fully obey God if they want to. Adam's fall had not in any way affected the human will or nature, therefore each of us had the same chance to obey God fully that Adam had in the Garden. Neither Adam's sin, nor the punishment for it, were transmitted to his descendants. (In fact, physical death was not punishment for sin, but the natural state of humanity.) Consequently, while God's grace may initiate, it is the human will that is decisive in every way.
- 3.3.6.1.** The monk denied that human sin is inherited from Adam. Man, he said, is free to act righteously or sinfully. Moreover, death is not a consequence of Adam's disobedience. Adam, indeed, introduced sin into the world, but only by his corrupting example. There is no direct connection between his sin and the moral condition of mankind. Almost all the human race have sinned; but it is possible not to sin. and some people have in fact lived without sin. God predestinates no one, except in the sense that he foresees who will believe and who will reject his gracious influences. His forgiveness comes to all who exercise "faith alone"; but, once forgiven, man has power of himself to live pleasing to God. Thus, Pelagius found no real need for the special enabling power of the Holy Spirit. His idea of the Christian life was practically the Stoic conception of ascetic self-control. - Shelley, location 2460
- 3.3.6.2.** Pelagius was a British monk who came to North Africa from Rome. A disciple who accompanied him, Coelestius, had hopes of securing ordination as a priest in Carthage, but he found little support in lands dominated by Augustine. As soon as Coelestius' views appeared in Carthage, they were repudiated. - Shelley, location 2454
- 3.3.6.3.** It was, however, against the Pelagians that Augustine wrote his most important theological works. Pelagius was a monk from Britain who had become famous for his piety and austerity. He saw the Christian life as a constant effort through which one's sins could be overcome and salvation attained. Pelagius agreed with Augustine that God has made us free, and that the source of evil is in the will. As he saw matters, this meant that human beings always have the ability to overcome their sin. Otherwise, sin would be excusable. - Gonzales, location 4264
- 3.3.7.** When Rome was sacked, Pelagius and some of his followers made their way to North Africa, and came to Carthage. By 411, Pelagius had left and gone to the Holy Land, but he left a lawyer named Caelestius behind. Caelestius applied for admission to ordination but was refused for teaching things such as Adam would have died whether or not he had sinned, that Adam's sin was not passed on to his posterity, that both the law and the Gospel are valid paths to salvation, that Old Testament saints had lived sinless lives, and that newborn infants are like Adam before the fall, with no sinful nature. Caelestius

soon left Carthage to go to Ephesus to seek ordination there, but he left a growing group of followers behind in Carthage.

3.3.7.1. Pelagius left Rome in 410 with other refugees from the Visigoths, and his ideas provoked sharp reaction in North Africa by the bold and extreme way Celestius presented them. In c. 411 the church in Carthage rejected Celestius for ordination and condemned him for his teachings. - Ferguson, location 5422

3.3.7.2. Two points were particularly singled out: his teaching that the sin of Adam and Eve injured themselves alone; and his teaching that a newborn child is in the same state as Adam before the fall (so an infant without baptism has eternal life, but Celestius and Pelagius accepted the church's practice of infant baptism for the forgiveness of sins, but not for transmitted sin). - Ferguson, location 5424

3.3.7.3. Other teachings of Celestius that were controverted are these: Adam was made mortal and would have died even if he had not sinned; the law as well as the gospel leads to the kingdom of heaven; before the coming of Jesus Christ there were people who lived without sin; and the whole race does not die because of the sin of Adam and Eve or rise because of the resurrection of Christ. - Ferguson, location 5427

3.3.7.4. The implication of these teachings was that a person can live without sin and observe all the commands of God. - Ferguson, location 5429

3.3.8. In 413 Augustine and Pelagius exchanged brief letters of formal courtesy. However, in 415 Augustine sent a Spanish presbyter named Osirius to Jerusalem to meet with Jerome and make sure Pelagius' doctrines were not spreading during his stay there in Jerusalem. Jerome, ever the combatant, raised (and overstated) charges against Pelagius, and a synod was called. Pelagius made a few statements that man could not be saved apart from God's help, and was canonically acquitted of heresy. When news of this reached North Africa and Rome, counter synods were called which then condemned Pelagius and his teachings. Augustine thought this would be the end of the affair.

3.3.8.1. At a conference in Jerusalem, Pelagius successfully defended himself, but Jerome, with encouragement from Augustine, began writing his Dialogue against the Pelagians. - Ferguson, location 5431

3.3.8.2. The Eastern theologians, however, were disposed to give more attention to free will and human deeds, and a council at Diospolis (Lydda) in 415 declared Pelagius and Celestius orthodox. - Ferguson, location 5432

3.3.8.3. The North Africans were of a different mind, and a council at Carthage in 416 called on the bishop of Rome to condemn Pelagius. Innocent I in 417 confirmed their condemnation. In response, Pelagius wrote his Libellus fidei ("Book of Faith") to Innocent I. The brand-new bishop of Rome, Zosimus, a Greek more favorable to Pelagius, reinstated him in 417. - Ferguson, location 5434

3.3.9. However, the Pope soon died, and the new Pope seemed to come under the sway of Caelestius, and it seemed as if he might change the former verdict against Pelagius. However, on April 30, 418, the emperor suddenly intervened and expelled all Pelagians from Rome as a threat to peace. The new Pope had to agree, and then died shortly thereafter.

3.3.9.1. The North Africans were of a different mind, and a council at Carthage in 416 called on the bishop of Rome to condemn Pelagius. Innocent I in 417 confirmed their condemnation. In response, Pelagius wrote his *Libellus fidei* ("Book of Faith") to Innocent I. The brand-new bishop of Rome, Zosimus, a Greek more favorable to Pelagius, reinstated him in 417. - Ferguson, location 5434

3.3.9.2. The angered North African bishops at a council in Carthage in 418 approved nine canons dealing with Pelagianism. - Ferguson, location 5437

3.3.9.3. At this point the state intervened, and the emperor Honorius in 418 banished Pelagius and his followers. Zosimus followed suit, excommunicating Pelagius and Celestius. Pelagius soon passed from the scene. - Ferguson, location 5446

3.3.10. The Pelagian cause was then taken up by the brilliant bishop of Eclanum, named Julian. He was probably Augustine's most formidable theological, philosophical, and rhetorical foe. In fact, Julian often turns to Augustine's own writings to refute Augustine's teachings on the effects of the fall, the nature of the will, and the need for grace in salvation. And to be fair, it does appear that Augustine's thought on sin and the human will, and on the relationship between Divine foreknowledge and predestination did undergo a change. It certainly appears, that as so often in church history, it is when error surfaces that the truth is more clearly defined.

3.3.11. Of course, part of Augustine's strong reaction to the teachings of Pelagius are based on his own personal experience as related in the *Confessions*. Augustine had seen that his problem was far deeper than discreet sinful choices; his very nature was poisoned. As he considered his own life (and that of others), it was clear to Augustine that children are not born in a pristine, neutral state. We are born with a poisoned nature that radically disorders our affections away from God and to ourselves and other things. The problem is so deep and so bad that only God's grace can rescue us. Furthermore, the effects of Adam's sin are evident all around us, as we observe that children are born with many physical and mental maladies, which would be unthinkable if we were not affected by Adam's fall. According to Augustine, mankind at various stages in history had four distinct relationships with sin:

(a) able to sin, able not to sin (*posse peccare, posse non peccare*) - Adam before the Fall

(b) not able not to sin (*non posse non peccare*) - natural man after the Fall

(c) able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) - regenerate man after conversion

(d) unable to sin (*non posse peccare*) - glorified man in heaven

- 3.3.11.1.** But Augustine remembered his experience of the time when he both willed and did not will to become a Christian. This meant that human will was not as simple as Pelagius made it. There are times when the will is powerless against the hold sin has on it. The will is not always its own master, for it is clear that the will to will does not always have its way. - Gonzales, location 4268
- 3.3.11.2.** According to Augustine, the power of sin is such that it takes hold of our will, and as long as we are under its sway we cannot move our will to be rid of it. The most we can accomplish is that struggle between willing and not willing, which does little more than show the powerlessness of our will against itself. The sinner can will nothing but sin. This does not mean, however, that freedom has disappeared. The sinner is still free to choose among various alternatives. But all these are sin, and the one alternative that is not open is to cease sinning. - Gonzales, location 4271
- 3.3.11.3.** In Augustine's words, before the Fall we were free both to sin and not to sin. But between the Fall and redemption the only freedom left to us is freedom to sin. When we are redeemed, the grace of God works in us, leading our will from the miserable state in which it found itself to a new state in which freedom is restored, so that we are now free both to sin and not to sin. Finally, in the heavenly home, we shall still be free, but only free not to sin. - Gonzales, location 4275
- 3.3.12.** Furthermore, since mankind can not save Himself, God must save us purely because of His own grace. God does not save because of something he sees in us, for all we have to offer is sin. Rather, God Himself chooses to save, and there is nothing in the elect that commends them to God. Predestination is not based on God's foreknowledge of who will believe, for apart from God's predestinating grace none would believe. Predestination is based on God's own Sovereign will and choice. For Augustine, this came to be the only way to explain how anyone, born in sin, could turn and embrace the Gospel.
- 3.3.12.1.** Back to the moment of conversion, how can we make the decision to accept grace? According to Augustine, only by the power of grace itself, for before that moment we are not free not to sin, and therefore we are not free to decide to accept grace. The initiative in conversion is not human, but divine. Furthermore, grace is irresistible, and God gives it to those who have been predestined to it. - Gonzales, location 4279
- 3.3.12.2.** In contrast, Pelagius claimed that each of us comes to the world with complete freedom to sin, or not to sin. There is no such thing as original sin, nor a corruption of human nature that forces us to sin. Children have no sin until they, on their own free will, decide to sin. - Gonzales, location 4282

3.3.12.3. Augustine began to oppose Pelagius and his associates about 412, and he wrote on the subject up to his death in 430. He went through three stages in his thinking in regard to human free will...

1. Related to overcoming Manichaeism, Augustine could affirm, "I will choose this day whom I will serve" (cf. Joshua 24:15). Manichees held a fatalistic view: They were the predetermined elect to see the truth. Augustine opposed them with the older Christian position that affirmed free will in respect to faith. The individual makes his or her own decision as to salvation....
2. Next, Augustine could say, "It is the same God who works all things in all" (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:6), but nowhere is it said that it is God who believes all in all. "That we believe well is our affair; that we do well is his affair." Faith is a human response, but sanctification belongs to the Holy Spirit...
3. Around 396 Augustine moved to a predestination position: Faith too is given by God. God "is at work in you, enabling you to will and to work" (cf. Philippians 2:13). This found expression in a statement in the Confessions to which Pelagius took great exception, "Give what you command, and command what you will" (reported by Augustine, Predestination of the Saints 2.53). Thus Augustine internalized and individualized the Hebrew doctrine of the chosen people. Before one comes to God, there must be a predisposition to do so, and God gives this. - Ferguson, location 5349-5357

3.3.13. Eventually the decisions against Pelagianism were ratified at the council of Ephesus in 431. However, these teachings were continued by Julian and others, and were also revived at many times in church history in milder forms. These forms, often called semi-Pelagianism, tended to stress human ability rather than divine sovereignty and grace.

3.3.13.1. But Augustine launched a strenuous literary attack on Pelagianism. By 419 the Pelagians were banished by the Emperor Honorius, and in 431 they were condemned by the General Council of the Church meeting at Ephesus. - Shelley, location 2458

3.3.13.2. The Council of Ephesus in 431 in its letter to Pope Celestine confirmed the depositions of "Celestius, Pelagius, Julian" and other Pelagians, so while Alexandria was getting what it wanted in regard to Nestorius, Rome was getting what it wanted in regard to Pelagius. - Ferguson, location 5450

3.3.13.3. The first stages of the Pelagian controversy were over, but the issue was not settled. Pelagianism was rejected, but many were not satisfied with the later formulations of Augustine. Nor did the Semipelagians carry the day, for the Augustinians had their responses to Augustine's critics (next chapter). More immediately, other problems demanded attention: The barbarians were at the gates. - Ferguson, location 5505

- 3.3.13.4.** Many contested Augustine’s view that the beginning of faith was in God’s action rather than in a human decision. These opponents of Augustine’s doctrine of predestination have been called, somewhat inexactly, “Semi-Pelagians.” Through a process that took almost a century, Augustine was reinterpreted, so that theologians came to call themselves “Augustinian” while rejecting his views on irresistible grace and predestination. In 529, the Synod of Orange upheld Augustine’s doctrine of the primacy of grace in the process of salvation, but left aside the more radical consequences of that doctrine. - Gonzales, location 4288
- 3.3.14.** In fact, although the Roman Catholic church of the later middle ages was officially Augustinian, in practice it was fairly Pelagian. It was against this sense of moralism and works salvation that the Reformation objected.
- 3.3.15.** For this reason, some have quipped that the Reformation was Augustine’s doctrine of salvation revolting against his doctrine of the church!
- 3.4.** The Fall of Rome and *The City of God*
- 3.4.1.** In 410 the entire world was shocked as Rome, the eternal city, fell and was sacked by the Visigoths under Alaric. This sent shock waves through the Empire, and had two major effects. First, some pagans blamed the fall upon Christianity, for the older gods must have abandoned Rome as she had abandoned them for Christ. Second, Christians wondered how the faith would survive if Rome had fallen. To address these concerns Augustine spent the better part of the next twenty years writing his massive and influential *The City of God*.
- 3.4.1.1.** Augustine is best known, after the Confessions, for his City of God, the climax of Latin Christian apologetics and the blueprint for the Middle Ages. Written between 413 and 426, the City of God was a response to the sack of Rome in 410 by Alaric, leader of the Goths (chapter 15). - Ferguson, location 5258
- 3.4.1.2.** Although Rome was no longer the capital of the empire, the city was important to all as the symbol of the empire. Pagans were saying that what happened to Rome was a punishment by the gods of the Republic for forsaking their worship. - Ferguson, location 5260
- 3.4.1.3.** In the City of God the question of providence in relation to the Roman Empire proved too narrow a frame of reference for Augustine, who undertook to study the providential action of God with regard to the whole of human history. Books 1–10 are the negative, apologetic part, an attack on paganism, dealing with such questions as: Was Christianity responsible for the fall of Rome? What spiritual power presided over the rise of Rome? Has any pagan system a serious claim against Christianity, the true spiritual religion? - Ferguson, location 5263
- 3.4.1.4.** Books 11–22 in the City of God are the positive, philosophy of history part, explaining the origin, progress, and end of the two cities. “City” is broadened to mean “society.” There are two cities: of the just (of God, the celestial city) and of the wicked (of the devil, the terrestrial city). Through their love, human beings adhere to

either the one or the other, to God or to self. The two cities are confused always and everywhere in this world and are in constant strife. God by providence prepares for the victory of the celestial city to be consummated in the fullness of time. God's judgment consists in giving people what they love most, life with him or separation from him. - Ferguson, location 5269

- 3.4.1.5.** The other work worthy of special mention is *The City of God*. The immediate motive impelling Augustine to write it was the fall of Rome in A.D. 410. - Gonzales, location 4297
- 3.4.1.6.** It was to respond to such allegations that Augustine wrote *The City of God*, a vast encyclopedic history in which he claims that there are two cities, each built on love as a foundation. The city of God is built on love of God. The earthly city is built on love of self. In human history, these two cities always appear mingled with each other. But in spite of this there is between the two of them an irreconcilable opposition, a war to death. In the end, only the city of God will remain. Meanwhile, human history is filled with kingdoms and nations, all built on love of self, which are no more than passing expressions of the earthly city. - Gonzales, location 4299
- 3.4.1.7.** Someone should offer an explanation for the ravaging of Rome. Then and there Aurelius Augustinus, the Bishop of Hippo, decided to pursue the questions: Why had Rome fallen? Would the ruin of the Eternal City mean the collapse of Christianity? Was the end of the world at hand? - Shelley, location 2376
- 3.4.2.** In *The City of God* Augustine gives a theory of history to show that the fall of Rome was not to be blamed upon the Christians. In fact, history is actually the grand interplay of the Earthly City (the human kingdoms and cultures of this world) and the City of God (God's Kingdom, which is spread throughout those Earthly Kingdoms, and is found particularly in the Church.)
- 3.4.3.** This massive work served to show that all earthly kingdoms rise and fall, and thus that the fall of Rome is not because of Christians. Furthermore, Christians should not lose heart, for though Earthly Cities rise and fall, the City of God endures forever.
- 3.4.4.** This book provided much of the foundational thought and structure that sustained the West through the dark years following the complete collapse of the Western part of the Empire after 476. In essence, much of the rebuilding of civilization in the Middle Ages was patterned after Augustine's thought, especially as it is found in *The City of God*.
- 3.4.5.** Augustine's concept of the two cities has been interpreted any number of ways, including those who placed the church/City of God above the earthly city even in the political realm. However, in the end it was seen that the two cities were really both ruled by God and for distinct reasons and purposes. This led to the idea of the separation of church and state, which was virtually unknown in human history before that time. The seed for this concept is traceable back to Augustine's teaching in *The City of God*.
 - 3.4.5.1.** Soon, he turned to the deeper questions of the relations between earthly cities, like Rome, which have their day, rising and falling like everything in time, and the Heavenly City or City of God, which is

everlasting. This question occupied him for sixteen years, almost to the end of his life, and resulted in his great work, *The City of God*, which directly or indirectly influenced the thought of Christians on what they owed to God and what to Caesar through the succeeding fifteen centuries. - Shelley, location 2490

3.5. Augustine on the Doctrine of the Trinity

3.5.1. From around 399-419 Augustine was also writing and revising a major work entitled *On the Trinity*. In this work he tries to examine and give a formulation to the doctrine of the Trinity.

3.5.1.1. *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*, written 399–419) is Augustine's major doctrinal work, in which he gave definitive Western formulation to the doctrine of the Trinity. - Ferguson, location 5287

3.5.2. Unlike the Cappadocian Fathers we discussed earlier, Augustine does not begin with questions of the relationship of the one and the three, but rather with the biblical idea that God is love. Based on this, Augustine sees that the Trinity is not external to the Being of God, for if God is love, and is self-sufficient, He must of necessity be a multiplicity of Persons so that there can be Someone to love.

3.5.2.1. Developing the biblical revelation that "God is love," Augustine hypostasizes love as the eternal relation (the Holy Spirit) between the Father (the Lover) and the Son (the Beloved). - Ferguson, location 5291

3.5.3. As He develops this, Augustine sees the Father as the Lover, the Son as the Beloved, and the Spirit as the Bone of love proceeding from the Father and the Son to one another.

3.5.4. However, this formulation eventually served to create a rift between the Eastern formulation (where the Spirit proceeds from the Father, and sometimes from the Father through the Son) and the Western formulation (where the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.)

3.5.4.1. Augustine moved beyond Eastern formulations in a significant way by giving special content to the Third Person, and by laying the basis for seeing the procession of the Holy Spirit as coming from the Father and the Son, not simply from the Father through the Son (as in Eastern formulas). - Ferguson, location 5292

3.5.5. I would also add that although there are advantages to Augustine's formulation, it also had the effect of somewhat "de-personalizing" the Person of the Spirit in the West.

3.5.6. This rift between the Eastern and Western doctrine of the Trinity would eventually blossom into a full, formal split between the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches in 1054 - a split which continues to this day.

4. The End of Augustine's Life

4.1. When Augustine died in 430, the Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo. It thus appeared that many of his works would be destroyed by the Vandals, and his life and thought would fall from the pages of history.

4.2. However, in the providence of God, his works not only survived, but he became the most important theologian in the Western Church.

- 4.2.1. The older Augustine became, the more difficult his life became. In his seventy-sixth year, the barbarian Vandals had crossed the Straits of Gibraltar and were sweeping east toward Hippo. In his closing days he had the penitential psalms copied on parchment and fixed to the wall of his room, so he could read them in bed. The dying man believed the end of the world to be at hand. On 28 August 430 Augustine found peace at last in Christ. - Shelley, location 2506
- 4.2.2. Augustine was the last of the great leaders of the Imperial Church in the West. When he died, the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo, announcing a new age. Therefore, Augustine's work was, in a way, the last glimmer of a dying age. - Gonzales, location 4307
- 4.2.3. When Augustine died, the Vandals were besieging the city of Hippo. Shortly thereafter, they were masters of the northern coast of Africa, except Egypt. A few years earlier, in A.D. 410, Rome had been taken and sacked by Alaric and his Goths. Even earlier, at the battle of Adrianople in 378, an emperor had been defeated and killed by the Goths, whose troops had reached the very walls of Constantinople. The ancient Empire, or rather its western half, was crumbling. - Gonzales, location 4319

5. The Unparalleled Influence of Augustine

- 5.1. There is no question that Augustine is the most towering figure in the history of the Western Church. It is virtually impossible to overstate the influence he exerted on the Western Church all the way down to the present day. It is not much of an exaggeration to say almost all of the theological developments in the West since his time are in reaction one way or another to some aspect of Augustine's thought and writings.
 - 5.1.1. Augustine is a towering figure in church history. He serves as the climax of patristic thought in Latin and was the dominant influence on the Latin Middle Ages—so much so as to be called the “Architect of the Middle Ages.” Augustine has continued to be a major influence in theology for both Catholics (especially in his views on the church and the sacraments) and Protestants (especially in regard to grace and salvation). - Ferguson, location 5175
 - 5.1.2. Augustine's answer to these questions not only provided light for the dark days just ahead, but a philosophy for the foundations of Christendom. To this day Christians feel the impact of his mind and soul. Roman Catholicism draws upon Augustine's doctrine of the church and Protestants upon his views of sin and grace. - Shelley, location 2378
 - 5.1.3. Throughout the Middle Ages, no theologian was quoted more often than he was, and he thus became one of the great doctors of the Roman Catholic Church. But he was also the favorite theologian of the great Protestant reformers of the sixteenth century. Thus, Augustine, variously interpreted, has become the most influential theologian in the entire Western church, both Protestant and Catholic. - Gonzales, location 4310
- 5.2. As with every great person, the influence of Augustine has had both positive and negative impacts upon the later history of the church. However, Augustine's stature and influence was so great that these positive and negative influences are magnified.

- 5.3.** Due to the nature of the controversies of his day, and also to his own character and growth, Augustines opinions have sometimes created problems.
 - 5.3.1.** Augustine's doctrine on the objective nature of the sacraments, while true, led to the excesses of the ex opere operato doctrine of the Roman Catholic church. This tended to reduce the critical nature of faith on the part of the recipient for the sacraments to be of any value.
 - 5.3.2.** Furthermore, Augustine's doctrine of the church, while rightly combating the false ideas of the Donatist's tended to lead the church to both accepting too much sin and mixture in its midst, and also to the idea that salvation and grace were found only within the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, rather than within the church which remained faithful to the Gospel.
 - 5.3.3.** Some of Augustine's thought also led to a confusion of the church and the Empire, and to having the church assume civil power.
 - 5.3.4.** In extreme forms, Augustine's doctrine of predestination and human inability has sometimes led to an almost fatalistic view of life which leads to complacency in the Christian life.
- 5.4.** However, Augustine has had a great amount of positive influence on the Church and even wider Western civilization.
 - 5.4.1.** Augustine rightly stressed the importance of the grace of God and of faith. It was while reading Augustine that Luther began to understand the Gospel which led to the Reformation.
 - 5.4.2.** Augustine laid the foundation that allowed the church in the West to survive the collapse of the Western part of the Empire. In fact, it is doubtful that the West would have survived the Dark Ages to re-emerge as it did apart from the thought and influence of Augustine. He was literally almost the life support system of the West after the catastrophic effects of the collapse of the Empire.
 - 5.4.3.** Augustine developed many concepts that have become the foundation of western society, including our understanding of human personality and thought, the subconscious, the difference between the kingdom of God and the temporal kingdoms of man, the importance of the individual, the nature of evil, etc.
- 5.5.** Much more could be said, but I will close with an article written by Gerald Bray on the importance of Augustine in our own day.

8 Things We Can Learn from Augustine

This is a guest post by Gerald Bray, author of [Augustine on the Christian Life: Transformed by the Power of God](#).

Does Augustine Still Matter?

What does Augustine mean to us now? What is there about his life and work that still speaks to the Christian life today, and to what extent are his thoughts original to him? Was he merely repeating what had gone before, or did he strike out on new pathways that have remained serviceable for the modern church?

1. The Importance of Real Relationship with God

The first thing we notice about him is the emphasis he placed on the relationship of the individual to God. He lived in a world that was rapidly becoming Christian, at least in a formal and public sense. It would have been very easy for him to have gone with the flow, as many of his contemporaries did. But Augustine confessed that he became a Christian only when the Holy Spirit of God moved in his heart, and not before.

He had to be brought face to face with his sinfulness and complete inability to save himself. He was forced to recognize that he had no hope other than to put his trust in Jesus Christ, who had died to pay the price of his sin. He had to learn that to be a Christian was to be in fellowship with the Son of God, to be united with him in a deeply individual union that rested on personal conviction, not on outward support or tradition. From beginning to end, his faith was a walk with God that could only be expressed as a dialogue between two spirits. Take that away and there would be nothing to speak of at all—no faith to confess and no life to live.

2. The Necessity of the Church

Next on the list comes his adherence to the church. Augustine knew that although every Christian must have a personal faith that is not dependent on outward rites and traditions, he also belongs to the universal church. Christians cannot leave the church and live on their own, as if nobody else is good enough for them. There may be good reasons for establishing new congregations, but believers ought to be in fellowship with others and not cut themselves off as if nobody else is quite as good or as pure as they are.

There is no such thing as a pure or perfect congregation, as those who have tried to establish such things have discovered to their cost. In every place, the wheat and the tares grow together until the harvest; the sheep and the goats will only be separated at the last judgment. It was Augustine who first stated this clearly as the reason for not breaking away from the church, and his logic is as valid today as it was when he wrote.

3. The Helplessness of Humanity

Augustine has also taught us that the human race is united in sin and rebellion against God and cannot save itself. Those who have met with Christ have learned that they must trust him completely and not rely on their own efforts, qualities, or inheritance for their salvation.

The works which they do as Christians are those that have been commanded by God, but they only make sense within the context of the relationship that he has already established with his people. If that relationship is right, then everything a Christian does will be forgiven by God, however bad or unfruitful it may be. But if that relationship is wrong, then even “good” works will be of no use, because the context and rationale for them is lacking.

4. The Supreme Authority of the Bible

Augustine also taught the church that the Word of God is to be found in the Bible and nowhere else. He suffered from the problem that he was unfamiliar with the original languages of Scripture and he had inadequate textual resources at his disposal. As a result, his exegesis is often faulty and cannot be trusted.

However, because he had a concept of the Bible as a single, overarching message from God, these faults of detail were less serious than they might otherwise have been. He never appealed to an isolated verse in a way that would make it contradict the general witness of Scripture as a whole. For example, he did not use the assertion that “God is love” in a way that would preclude eternal punishment in hell, of which Jesus himself warned his followers. However “God is love” was to be understood, it had to be consistent with the existence of eternal damnation. On more than one occasion, this sense of “the whole counsel of God” preserved Augustine from errors into which he might otherwise have fallen.

Augustine’s sense of the bigger picture is of great importance to the church, because there is a constant temptation to take Bible verses out of context and use them in ways that contradict the overall message of the God’s Word. There is also a temptation to introduce human traditions that are not in the Scriptures and make them tests of orthodoxy. Augustine’s method of interpretation was designed to prevent aberrations like these, and the miracle is that—despite the limitations of the resources available to him—he succeeded as well as he did.

We should not always follow him, of course, and must correct him when we can show that he was wrong. However, that is true of any interpreter of Scripture—nobody gets it right all the time! What we must not do is reject Augustine because of his limitations and deny that he has anything to teach us. His conclusions may not always have been right, but his methods and principles remain surprisingly valid, even after so many centuries.

5. The Trinity of Love

Augustine taught the church that God is a Trinity of love. He certainly did not invent the idea that God is love; that is clearly stated in the New Testament (1 John 4:15). Nor did he construct the doctrine of the Trinity, which he inherited from both his Greek and his Latin forebears.

What Augustine did—in a way that nobody before him had managed—was to bring the two things together. Love cannot exist on its own because it is not a thing or an attribute possessed by a thing. In other words, God cannot be love unless there is something for him to love. But if that something were not part of himself, he would not be perfect. The Bible does not teach us that God needed the creation in order to have something to love, because if that were true, he could not be fully himself without it. So Augustine reasoned that God must be love inside himself. To his mind, the Father is the one who loves, the Son is the one who is loved (the “beloved Son” revealed in the baptism of Jesus), and the Holy Spirit is the love that flows between them and binds them together. It is in the Spirit, moreover, who binds believers to God and makes us partakers by adoption of that love which is intrinsic to the Trinity’s being.

By understanding God in this way, Augustine not only explained the Trinity but made it a necessary part of the divine being. Without the Triune framework, God would not be the love that the New Testament said he was. Moreover, said Augustine, the inner necessity of a Triune divinity can be seen in the composition of human beings, who are created in his image and likeness. The fact that our minds possess memory, intellect, and will—all of which can be distinguished but not separated, and which are all equally important if we are to love God, our neighbors, and ourselves as we are called to do—is additional evidence of the coherence of the Creator and his creation.

6. The Purpose of the Universe

Augustine further taught that God created the world for a purpose. The fact that he placed his own triune image in Adam—who was intended to be the crowning glory of his creation—teaches us that God’s otherwise mysterious act had a reason that we cannot fully understand or appreciate.

Nobody can say why God made the world. It was not necessary for him to do so, and although it was an act of love on his part, we do not know why he chose to express himself in this particular way. More importantly, we cannot say why he made creatures that were not only free to disobey his will but that would not be annihilated as a result. Satan rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven, but he was not eliminated. Instead, he is still the prince of this world, and the human race has been tempted into subjecting itself to him. Why did this happen? Could God not have prevented it?

From our human standpoint, we cannot understand many of the things we experience or see going on in the world around us. But we can be confident that there is a purpose in God’s plan that will one day be revealed to us. Sometimes, as in the resurrection of Jesus, we see what that purpose is, because it is worked out within a time frame that we can grasp. But on other occasions, God’s plans are not tied to our schedules. For him, a day is as a thousand years, so the outworking of his will is hidden from our eyes.

Augustine could not have known that his world would disappear and that a new Christian culture, based to a large extent on his ideas, would spring up centuries later in Western Europe. He would probably have been astounded to think that people would still be reading not only his major works, but even his letters and sermons, so many generations later. But he did know that there was a divine purpose at work in his life and that God was using him in ways that he could not fully appreciate, and that is what mattered to him.

7. The Christian Life as a Journey of Faith

Augustine also taught us that the Christian's life is a journey that we walk by faith. Within the context of his theology, this is an important complement to the doctrine of predestination which, if it is not personalized, can easily look like a kind of fatalism.

Augustine did not believe that a Christian should just sit back and let events take their course. To be in a relationship with God means to live with him, to share his thoughts, to have the mind of Christ, and to do his will in the power of the Holy Spirit on a day-to-day basis. From birth to death, every waking moment belongs to God, even if we are not believers.

This is part of the message he conveys in his Confessions, where he reviews different aspects of his pre-Christian life and points out how God was using them to further his purposes and how Augustine had already embarked on the Christian journey, even though he was not consciously aware of it at the time.

8. The Christian Life as Mission

Finally, Augustine taught us that the Christian mission is important wherever it is exercised. Augustine was a man who was schooled in philosophy and rhetoric. To pursue those interests, it was necessary for him to go where the action was—to Carthage, Rome, and Milan, the seat of the Western empire at that time. Had he stayed at home in Thagaste, such a career would have been inconceivable.

Yet after he became a Christian, his fortunes changed. He retraced his steps—from Milan to Rome, then back to Carthage and even to Thagaste for a time. After a few years, he was called to Hippo, a port city of medium importance commercially and unknown for any literary or academic achievement. He did not want to be a bishop, nor was he interested in spending the rest of his life in a backwater like that.

For over thirty years, he was forced to preach to congregations that had little appreciation for his genius and would as soon go to the theater as listen to him. He had to write time and again against Donatism and Pelagianism, errors that his keen mind must have found risible at one level, but which were disturbing the church to which he had to minister. Somehow or other, he found the time to do other things as well, but there must have been many days when he was weary of the struggle and wished he could have been doing something else.

A Most Influential Life

Augustine died in the knowledge that a few days later the barbarians would enter Hippo—which they were besieging at the time—and he must have feared that his life's work would go up in flames. Things did not turn out quite as badly as that, but there was to be no lasting legacy of his labors in Hippo. No great basilica with his name carved into it. No academic chair dedicated to his memory. Not even a park bench with a plaque saying that his estate had paid for it.

To the naked eye, there was nothing. Yet as we know, what must have appeared then as a fairly insignificant ministry in a provincial town became the backdrop for the most productive life any theologian in the Western world has ever lived. Generations of Christians who would never go anywhere near Hippo would read what Augustine wrote in the hot and dusty chambers that were his earthly dwelling place, and would marvel at his gifts and intellect. More than that, they would be moved—as we still are—by his passion for Christ, and would go away from his writings more determined than ever to walk in the way mapped out for them by God.

Gerald Bray (DLitt, University of Paris-Sorbonne) is research professor at Beeson Divinity School and director of research for the Latimer Trust. He is a prolific writer and has authored or edited numerous books, including [God Is Love](#), [God Has Spoken](#), and [Augustine on the Christian Life](#).