

Lesson 1: The Pelagian Controversy

Have you become aware of your addiction to sin? What if you do not **want** to be freed? What should you do?

Augustine – A Story of God’s Grace

Augustine came to faith through incremental steps:

Wisdom (age 19) → Manichees (Faustus) → Neoplatonists → Ambrose of Milan → conversion/baptism

Lesson: Do not despise any step towards Christ—keep praying with Monica for the conversion of your son!

Augustine was keenly aware of his sinful nature:

Baby crying, pear tree, gladiator match, and (especially) the garden of two wills

Concupiscence – indwelling sin, a hostile law, the flesh (Rom. 7:7-8:8)

A contagion from Adam (Rom. 5:12) – the original sin cleansed at baptism in Latin theology

Augustine was also keenly aware of the God’s grace in salvation:

The name of “Christ” remained with him through life.

The power of the silent word—Ambrose, the garden (Rom. 13:14 and 14:1), and extensive correspondence.

Divine initiative in the five spiritual senses (*Confessions*, Book X):

Late have I love you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.

Putting the two facts together naturally led to this conclusion:

“You command continence; grant what you command, and command what you will” (Book X).

Pelagius was incensed when he heard this quote—it appeared to be condoning sin in Christians!

The Pelagian view says that we have free will to love God and keep His commandments!

Ironically, Augustine defended free will against the Manichees and then defended grace against Pelagius.

How should we resolve this tension?

Augustine’s Theology of Grace

against Manichees...

we have free will

Natural Ability

(man as created)

Did Augustine change his mind?

against Pelagius...

we do not have free will

Moral Inability

(man as fallen)

Illus. Staring at the sun and then saying, “I can’t see the glory of God in rainbow or fall colors.”

On Grace and Free Will – Augustine quotes Scripture after Scripture on God’s sovereignty in a spiral back in time

Eastern Christianity vs. Western Christianity
the *perfectibility* of man vs. the *sinfulness* of man

Illus. Augustine’s reaction to *The Life of Antony!*

Legacy: Reformation in the West, not in the East

For the next thousand years in the West, theology talks like Augustine. What a significant influence!

Tension: Augustine on the church (sacraments) vs. Augustine on salvation (predestination)

Augustine is more similar to the Protestant view of salvation than he may appear (e.g. faith and humility).

For the next thousand years in the West, marriage ethics also talk like Augustine.

How much did his personal sin influence official views on the purpose of sex in marriage?

The ascetic differences in East and West remained until the Reformation’s affirmation of daily life.

Application

How can your will be freed?

Only by grace through faith, but faith comes by hearing the word (Rom. 10:17).

“Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom. 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32)

Jesus said, “If you stay in My word,...you will know the truth and the truth will *set you free*” (John 8:31-32).