

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 8 **March 6, 2016**
Teacher: **Pastor Pickens**

Augustine – A Theologian by Grace and for Grace

Life:

- Born on November 13th, 354 in Thagaste (modern Algeria)
- Family: Pagan father (Patricius, local official), Christian mother (Monnica), brother (Navigius), and two sisters
- Augustine hated school as a young boy and would skip to watch bear-baiting or rooster fights
- From 365-369 (11-15 years old) Augustine studied in Madauros which was about 20 miles from his home. While there his instruction included pagan traditions and mythology.
- His father ran out of money and Augustine returned home for a year (370). He lived in a rebellious and depraved manner. This included sexual sin and stealing pears with friends.
 - “My sole gratification in them was my own sin, which I was pleased to enjoy; for, if any one of these pears entered my mouth, the only good flavor it had was my sin in eating it.”¹
- From 371-374 Augustine received thorough education in Carthage supported by a man named Romanian. While there he converted to Manicheism.
 - Manicheism: Gnostic religion, dualism, promotes asceticism
 - Monnica comes to live with Augustine after the death of her husband (371)
- His immoral lifestyle continued and he had an unwanted illegitimate son in 372 (Adeodatus) through an unwed partner that he shared life with for 15 years
- Augustine returned to Thagaste and taught rhetoric for a year (375)
- The loss of a Christian friend (Amicus) whom Augustine had been trying to convert to Manicheism impacted him deeply
- He moved on to teach rhetoric in Carthage from 376-383
 - Continued in Manicheism for 9 years. Meets a gifted preacher named Faustus who is unable to give intellectually satisfying answers.
 - Augustine abandoned Carthage for better teaching conditions in Rome. Augustine left with his partner and son without telling his mother.
- In Rome Augustine turned to Platonism (383) and highly values rationalism
- “Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee,” theological as well as existential
 - “[T]he God who made me must be good and all the good in me is his. I thank him and praise him for all the good in my life, even my life as a boy. But my sin was this, that I looked for pleasure, beauty, and truth not in him but in myself and his other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion, and error.”²
 - “I lived in misery, like every man whose soul is tethered by the love of things that cannot last and then is agonized to lose them.”³
- In 384 Augustine went to Milan and was appointed imperial rhetorician there. His mother, brother, and two cousins would later come to live with him, his partner, and son there.
- His mother arranged a marriage for him to progress his social status. This meant sending his partner away, which hurt him deeply.
- Augustine first heard Ambrose preach in Milan. Another Christian who was more impactful in his life was Simplician, who met with him regularly, encouraged him to read Paul, and told him conversion accounts. Christianity began to strike him as intellectually satisfying.

¹ Confessions, 2.6

² Ibid, 1.20

³ Ibid, 4.6

- Conversion in 386 in a garden on the property with his friend Alypius – Romans 13:13-14
- Makes a break with his former way of life and spends a year in Cassiciacum
- In 387 Augustine, Alypius, and Adeodatus are baptized by Ambrose
- During their return to northern Africa, Monnica dies
- Spent time writing and studying in Thagaste (388-390). Adeodatus passes away. Alypius is later appointed as Bishop of Thagaste.
- In 391 Augustine becomes a presbyter in Hippo; in 395 he is appointed bishop. He preached, taught, and wrote regularly (300 letters and 400 sermons out of estimated 8,000 remain). In 397-398 he completes the *Confessions*
 - “Lord, I cast all my troubles on you and from now on I shall contemplate the wonders of your law (Ps. 119:18). You know how weak I am and how inadequate is my knowledge: teach me and heal my frailty. Your only Son, in whom the whole treasury of wisdom and knowledge is stored up (Col. 2:3), has redeemed me with his blood.”⁴
- Controversies that Augustine faced:
 - Donatists – lapsed Christians cannot return and the effectiveness of sacraments is dependent upon the one administering them
 - Pelagianism – salvation depends on man’s effort meriting God’s help
 - The City of God – sympathetic apologetical work after the fall of Rome in 410
- The Vandals surrounded Hippo from 430-431. Augustine died on August 28th, 430

Take Away:

- God’s grace and power should make us prayerful and hopeful (Rom. 8:1-11; Titus 3:3-7)
 - “Look on these things with pity, O Lord, and free us who now call upon you from such delusions. Set free also those who have not yet called upon you, so that they may pray to you and you may free them from this folly.”⁵
- Every Christian is able to write their own version of the *Confessions*: sins to confess, a God of Grace to confess, a Savior of sufficiency to confess, repentance that sings.
 - “My God, let me be thankful as I remember and acknowledge all your mercies. Let my whole self be steeped in love of you and all my being cry Lord, there is none like you! (Ps. 35:10) You have broken the chains that bound me; I will sacrifice in your honour (Ps. 116:7). I shall tell how it was that you broke them and, when they hear what I have to tell, all who adore you will exclaim, ‘Blessed be the Lord in heaven and on earth. Great and wonderful is his name.’”⁶
- The influence of friendships, both positive and negative (Prov. 27:17; Eph. 4:15-16)
- The power of God’s Word to transform lives (Heb. 4:12)
- The Christian life is the life of greatest joy in the midst of sorrow and misery (1 Peter 1:3-9)

For Further Reading:

- Augustine. *Confessions*. New York: Penguin Books, 1961.
- Bainton, Roland H. *Early Christianity*. Malabar: Krieger Publishing Company, 1984.
- Dowley, Tim. *The History of Christianity*. Minneapolis: Lion Publishing, 1990.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Historical Theology*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1998.
- Placher, William C. *Readings in the History of Christian Theology, Vol. 1*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1988.

⁴ Ibid, 10.43

⁵ Ibid, 1.10

⁶ Ibid, 8.1