

Augustine – “Confessions” Session 2

“The impulse present in our seeking goes out beyond the seeker, and hovers, as it were, unable to rest in any other goal until what is sought has been found and the seeker is united with it.” “Let the reader, where we are equally confident, stride on with me; where we are equally puzzled, pause to investigate with me; where he finds himself in error, come to my side; where he finds me erring, call me to his side. So we may keep to the path, in love, as we fare on toward Him “whose face is ever to be sought” (Trinity)

Could you give “Confessions” a different title that sums up the book for you?

I Augustine’s path (book 5)

- A. Faustus disappoints (5:10)
- B. Rome and sickness (5:16)
- C. Milan (5:23)

Tell us about his relationship with Ambrose? What effect did Ambrose’s preaching have upon Augustine? What else touched him, moved him in the right direction?

II Ambrose and Augustine (book 5, 6)

- A. Ambrose’s story
- B. Ambrose and the Old Testament (and Augustine)
- C. Ambrose and power

What did Monica think of Bishop Ambrose? Does Augustine’s attitude toward Ambrose change as he attends services? What changes him?

III Augustine and Platonism (book 5, 7)

- A. Plato’s story
- B. Augustine’s philosophical problems (7:1,2,5,7,11,13-15)
 - 1. source of evil, suffering
 - 2. God as Spirit, Eternal, omnipresent
- C. Plotinus- “baptized Platonism”

2

Was Plato accepted in the early church? Why / why not? How about Aristotle? Did Platonism really help Augustine on his path to truth? Are there philosophers today

who, similar to Plato/ Plotinus are “rated above the rest of the philosophers, near Christians”? (City of God) Augustine is getting closer (7:26,27)

IV Augustine’s “pre-conversion” (book 7, 8)

- A. lover sent packing**
- B.**
- C.**
- D.**

Can you fill in some of the people, events, situations that God used to “make his heart curable, softened him” (7:26)?

Can you share any similar people, events, books, philosophies that were used to lead you to Christ and His truth?

V Augustine’s conversion (book 8)

- A. conversion = sudden, effected by an outside force that is emotionally wrenching, change**
- B. how similar to Paul the apostle?**
- C. what other Biblical scenes come to mind?**

Can conversion be an “inward gradual work of grace”? (Anthony Benezet) Who is going to prepare now for baptism with Augustine?

VI Augustine’s baptism (book 9)

- A. Cassiciacum**
- B. preparing for baptism**
- C. reading Isaiah (9:13)**
- D. Monica and Augustine (9:23-26)** **3**
- E. Monica’s death**
- F. back to Africa (with Alypius and Adeodatus)**
- G. Adeodatus’ death (9:14)**

What is Augustine seeking as he heads back to Africa? What do books 10-13 of Confessions tell us about where he is going?

VII Augustine’s “cleansing the temple” and examining Genesis (books 10-13)

Why does Augustine seem almost obsessed with Genesis?

What do you notice about the way he handles Genesis?

How does “stability” become the bookends of Confessions?

Augustine often seems to live in amazement (see 10:15; 13:1,2) – and he is always praying, reaching out, reading, sharing, journeying on toward God. Someone has said of this book, “he seeks one mystery, God; by means of another mystery, himself” (Wills, Saint Augustine)

When he begins to sum up his search he says (13:10, 11) that in our “proper place” we are “stabilized”, that “the weight moving us is love” toward God. He is already delving into the Trinity (he will write “the treatise” on the Trinity in the Western Church); already on the path he would stay on for many years (till his death).

Augustinian Lessons:

1. Augustine’s reading – can you name some of the books, treatises he read during this “Confession”? How important is reading to Augustine? When does he stop reading?

2. Augustine’s friends – who else has written about friendship? Can you name some of the friends (and groups of friends) that Augustine had during his “Confessions”?

4

If you had Augustine as your “mentor” (as he was to so very many) what kind of things would you now expect?

If we are going to be shaped as “leaders”, as people who have an effect in moving other lives toward truth and God, then what can we gather from reading “Confessions”? Where are we lacking? What are some blind spots we have that we have seen from reading about Augustine’s journey?

Did you see any blind spots in his journey?

When “Confessions” ends Augustine still has most of his life ahead of him. Even when he is done writing it he still has most of his bishopric ahead of him. He will spend years dealing with the Donatists, then end up battling (through print and debates) the Pelagians for years. Rome would be taken by Arian Vandals and he would begin his greatest work of all (that would take him 13 years to write) - “The City of God”.

*But through the 1600 years since “Confessions” has been around it remains the most read book by Augustine; **what are the reasons for this fact and what does this tell us about leadership and having an ability to move and direct other’s journeys toward God?***