

The Sovereign Triumph of Delighting in God

Augustine's Understanding of the Grace of God

October 30, 2016

Hebrews 13:7

Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

To the Glory of God

We are living in a day when there are very few heroes worthy of our imitation. For example, back in 1971, with the movie *"Dirty Harry"*, the directors and producers in Hollywood made a conscious and radical effort to portray the hero of all movies as a villain, the so-called "anti-hero". And, over the last few decades, we have seen men who lead the most powerful corporations in America put in jail for lying¹, military commanders sharing top secret information with their lovers², one President resign for corruption and another one impeached and disbarred for lying about sinful activities in the White House.³

And while we can truthfully say that the culture, in general, has *always* been fallen, and therefore, we should expect such things from unsaved sinners, we are not spared even in the Church. It seems that almost weekly we are hit with yet another scandal involving some spiritual leader being caught up in blatantly sinful activity and gross abuse of position and having to resign.

It is estimated that 6 out of every ten men in the Church who lay claim to be saved today are caught up in weekly episodes of pornography, even those who lead in the Church. And I have been faithful to tell you that this is true because more and more people in the modern Church have never once beheld the Glory of God in the Face of

¹ The Enron scandal that led to not only the destruction of this one corporation and the layoffs of hundreds of thousands of employees who had their entire life savings decimated- but also the exposure of illegal accounting practices by some of the largest accounting firms which led to their re-organization.

² General David Petraeus- who was forced to resign as Director of the CIA for giving his lover information

³ Presidents Richard M. Nixon and William Jefferson Clinton

Jesus Christ. And I know that is true because when a human being has the veil supernaturally lifted from their hearts and minds, the Holy Bible teaches that something wonderful happens; they are:

2 Corinthians 3:18b

... transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

... so they are not being transformed because they have not seen. And they have not seen because the veil is still on their hearts and minds. Many so-called "Christian counsellors" are now openly advocating that married couples look at filthy movies together just before they engage in *the single* most sacred act that, more than any other, *mirrors* the relationship between Jesus Christ and His Church.

The institution of Marriage itself is under assault like never before as people in the Church who lay claim to be saved are making a mockery of their Marriage Vows as they divorce and remarry almost at will, saying, "*Well, it just didn't work out*".

Just last summer, the highest Court in this nation, in an illegal act of Judicial Fiat, issued a ruling that shakes its fist in the Face of Almighty God and that tramples on the Biblical concept of Marriage, and that has now opened the floodgates to normalize the most aberrant and unspeakable behaviors that will decimate human beings for many decades to come.

And that judicial overreach mirrors the one they engaged in back in 1973 where they ruled that unborn babies are not human beings, and therefore, are not entitled to either "due process" or access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And so human beings with a heartbeat and brainwaves may now be legally hacked to pieces or burned to death in their own mother's womb, which should be the safest place in all the world.

The violent, barbaric, cruel, racist, and misogynistic practice called Abortion is deemed now to be standard procedure for those babies who are mentally deficient. But even fully viable human beings may now be strategically turned around so they will be born breach so a pair of scissors can pierce the skull and murder the child by sucking the brain out with a vacuum cleaner before they sell the body parts for a profit.

With godless Feminism leading the way in the culture and godless Egalitarianism leading the way in the Church, Biblical Manhood and Womanhood that celebrates the God-ordained distinctions between men and women, that God uniquely created on purpose, is almost a thing of the past as men are becoming more and more emasculated and feminized than at any time in history.

It is rare today to find a family, in the Church, where the wife lovingly helps her husband to assume a servant/leadership position, where he is the spiritual priest and prophet who *loves* his family, and who *provides* for his family, and who *orders* his family after the similitude of Joshua who, 3,500 years ago said:

Joshua 24:15b

... as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.

And so, I would suggest to you that we are in great need today to have some spiritual heroes; those who *didn't* fail, those who *didn't* fall apart, those who *didn't* wilt under the pressure, those who *didn't* disgrace the Name of Christ, and those who accomplished great things for Jesus in the Power of the Spirit and to the Glory of God. And this morning, I would offer as one example: Augustine of Hippo.

Now the verse that Brother Andy just read to you is where the writer of **Hebrews** instructs the people of the Christian Church to "remember". And we are to remember people who have two characteristics:

1. Those who led you.
2. Those who spoke the Word of God to you.

And then the writer goes on to say that we are to "do" two things with those who led us and who spoke the Word of God to us:

1. Consider the result of their conduct.
2. Imitate their faith.

Now the way this is written in the original Greek tells me that the people we are to "remember" are dead, because the writer doesn't say that we are to merely consider their conduct, but we are to consider the

result of their conduct, and you simply cannot do that until the life of that person is over and there is no more conduct to consider.

You see, because we are fallen creatures; as long as somebody is alive, they are able to destroy a lifetime of service and faithfulness. But, after a person is dead and with the Lord, the result of his entire life can be considered, and the faithfulness that that person demonstrated to Jesus during his life can then be “imitated”.

So, from this we see that part of being “biblical” is to have “heroes of the Faith” who are now dead, men who led the Church and men who preached and taught the Word of God during their lives; and we are told to consider the end result of their conduct, and we are to then *imitate* or *copy* or *emulate* their faith. In fact, the writer of **Hebrews** thought this was so important that he included, in his Epistle, his own brief biographical sketch of several of the OT heroes of the faith, which is what we call today the 11th Chapter of **Hebrews**.

Now *part* of this effort will be to not only look at the glorious *successes* that God wrought through these people, but also to look honestly and truthfully at their *failures*, because even though we are correct to think of these people as genuine heroes, all of them were sinful human beings with clay feet who were saved by God’s amazing Grace. And so, in addition to being led by God’s Spirit and faithfully heralding God’s Word and being used by God to bring about Good and godly things, they also made bad decisions and said things they shouldn’t have said. And part of us learning from these people is not only in imitating their faith, but in also understanding their mistakes and *not* imitating them.

Now we began this exercise last year. And so, I pray that not only will this particular Message be a blessing to you today, but this effort will be something that we will engage in from now on, that on the last week of October and the first week of November, in celebration of the many people who came before us and who lived lives of godliness and faithfulness to Jesus Christ, we will *obey* this portion of Scripture and we will *remember* some of the heroes of the Christian Faith.

So, I would like to take two Sunday’s, this week and next, to humble ourselves to the Authority of the Word of God and look at Christian biographies. Now anytime you do something like this, there is a danger. And the danger is *not* that we might get some historical facts wrong or get some dates mixed up, but that we will, even slightly,

replace inerrant and infallible Scripture with the weak and frail *experiences* of other human beings, no matter how important they may be.

And yet we see that the writer of **Hebrews** tells us right here to *risk* that danger and to go ahead and remember them. And so, in an effort to be fully Biblical, let us obey this verse and remember these people. And the way I would like to do this is by taking an *ancient* example in the first week, and then a more *contemporary* example in the second week. And, by "ancient", I mean someone who followed Jesus faithfully who lived over a thousand years ago, and, by "contemporary", I mean someone who lived and remained true to Scripture within the last 500 years or so.

So, today we will look at a hero from the ancient Church, Augustine, who lived and preached and taught and remained faithful some 1,700 years ago. And next Sunday, Lord willing, Brother Joe will help us to examine a more contemporary hero, the "preaching machine" from the 19th Century, George Whitefield.

Now anytime somebody thinks they can preach a single sermon on Augustine and his contribution to the Christian Church quickly sees just how silly that notion is. The influence of Augustine on the Western World is simply staggering. No less than the 19th Century German theologian and historian, Adolf Harnack, said that Augustine was:

"... the greatest man the church has possessed between Paul the Apostle and Luther the Reformer."

The last of the great Princeton theologians, Benjamin Warfield, argued that through his writings, Augustine:

"entered both the Church and the world as a revolutionary force, and not merely created an epoch in the history of the Church, but . . . determined the course of its history in the West up to the present day."

Warfield went on to say that Augustine had:

"... a literary talent . . . second to none in the annals of the Church."

And:

"The whole development of Western life, in all its phases, was powerfully affected by his teaching."

The publishers of *Christian History* magazine wrote without any hesitation:

"After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity."

Now, about twelve years ago, I was in Barnes and Noble and was looking through the books, and I ran across a rather thick book called "*The City of God*" that Augustine had written some 1700 years ago. And on the back the cover said:

"This book has done more to influence Western Civilization than any other save for the Bible itself."

... and I bought the book and read it because I was ashamed that I had never read a book that had that kind of statement made about it. After I read that book, I read another book that Augustine wrote, "*Confessions*", which, to my knowledge, is the only book ever written that is entirely a prayer of confession of sins and repentance. Let me repeat what I just said. 1700 years ago, Augustine wrote a thirteen volume book that was centered around two things, a detailed confession of his many sins along with a desperate prayer of repentance. No wonder Dr. Don Carson has made "*The Confessions of St. Augustine*" required reading for his seminary students.

Now one of the most remarkable things about Augustine's influence is the fact that it flows into radically *opposing* religious movements. For example, on the one hand, he is cherished to this day as one of greatest "fathers" of the Roman Catholic religious system, and yet, on the other hand, it was what Augustine taught about Grace and the Sovereignty of God and the Radical Ruination of Man and Original Sin that inspired the men whom God used to give us the Protestant Reformation, not only because: "Luther was an Augustinian monk, or that Calvin quoted Augustine more than any other theologian . . . [but because] the Reformation witnessed the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of Grace over

the legacy of the Pelagian view of Man." So, as weird as it seems, the leaders of both the Roman religious organization and the Reformers appealed on a huge scale to what Augustine taught.

The 20th Century Church historian, Henry Chadwick, tries to get at the scope of Augustine's influence by pointing out that:

"[Early Church Fathers and philosophers like] Anselm, Aquinas, Petrarch, Luther, Bellarmine, Pascal, and Kierkegaard all stand in the shade of Augustine's broad oak. His writings were among the favorite books of the early 20th Century mathematician, Ludwig Wittgenstein. And Augustine was said to be the "*bte noire*" [worst nightmare] of Friedrich Nietzsche- the man who inspired Adolf Hitler."

And there are reasons for this extraordinary influence. One of the many, many biographers of Augustine, Agostino Trapè, gives an excellent summary of Augustine's influence that makes him incomparable in the history of the Church:

"Augustine was . . . a philosopher, theologian, mystic, and poet in one. . . His lofty powers complemented each other and made the man fascinating in a way difficult to resist. He is a philosopher, but not a cold thinker; he is a theologian, but also a master of the spiritual life; he is a mystic, but also a pastor; he is a poet, but also a controversialist. Every reader thus finds something attractive and even overwhelming: depth of metaphysical intuition, rich abundance of theological proofs, synthetic power and energy, psychological depth shown in spiritual ascents, and a wealth of imagination, sensibility, and mystical fervor."

Up until President Obama disbanded it just a few years ago, for over 230 years when the United States entered a war, the heads of all branches of the Military went through an exercise to determine the "justness" of the conflict. So, in addition to having to meet the criteria for war set forth in the Constitution, the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, the Military Academy at West Point, the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and Camp Lejeune for the Marines all study Augustine's concept of "Just War" that determines the *morality* of a military engagement that this man hammered out 17 Centuries ago.

The concept of Just War seeks to reconcile the paradox between the sixth Commandment that says:

Exodus 20:13

You shall not murder.

... and fighting and killing in a war.

The concept of "Just War" states in part that as evil as war is, *more* evil will be allowed by *not* going to war. And therefore, the killing in that "Just War" is, therefore, *defensive* in nature and designed to stop or eliminate "evil" while protecting a weaker and defenseless person or group or nation, and thus, is not a sin for a believer to engage in.

So, what you need to hear is that Augustine was used by God to develop some very important concepts, entirely from Scripture, that rescued the Christian Church from the darkness of heresy and man-made teaching. But what you also need to hear is that Augustine was also a human being with clay feet. And so, he wasn't perfect. He made some very serious mistakes. For example, he was just flat out wrong about Baptism. He, also, *over-emphasized* the importance of the one of the "Means of Grace", the Lord's Supper. He was also pretty goofy when it came to ecclesiastical hierarchy. And so it is true to say that the Protestant Reformation was:

The triumph of Augustine's understanding of Grace
over his understanding of the Church.

But Augustine was "right as rain" about a whole lot of very important things, eternal things, serious things, like Justification by Faith Alone, and Original Sin, and the overwhelming Power of God's Grace, especially in saving the elect.

Aurelius Augustinus was born in Thagaste, near "Hippo", in what is now modern day Algeria, on November 13, AD 354, some 325 years after the Resurrection. His father, Patricius, a middle-income farmer, was *not* a believer. But he worked hard to get Augustine the best education in "rhetoric" that he could. His father was converted in AD 370, the year before he died, when Augustine was 16 years old. Yet Augustine mentions his father's death only in passing a single time in

over 5 million words that he wrote. And so, there is reason to believe that, like many today- Augustine's family was more concerned with his *financial* and *material* status than they were his status with God. Augustine wrote:

"As I grew to manhood, I was inflamed with desire for a surfeit of hell's pleasures. . . . My family made no effort to save me from my fall by marriage. Their only concern was that I should learn how to make a good speech and how to persuade others by my words."

In particular, he said his father:

"... took no trouble at all to see how I was growing in your sight [O God] or whether I was chaste or not. He cared only that I should have a fertile tongue."

Now just last week, as I was walking and praying, in response to studying this very area of Augustine's life, the Lord God brought me under great conviction for lacking in this area. And that even though my children are now grown and have children of their own, I am still their father, and I still bear responsibility before God to "speak into their lives" and do all I can to influence them for Jesus Christ.

So yesterday morning, in what I pray will become a tradition for us, I gathered my family together and cooked them breakfast. And as we sat around the table, I repented to them for failing them and asked them to forgive me. I then asked them to speak about what is going on in their lives and how I might help them and pray for them and lead them and teach them. And then we prayed. It was a good time and I can thank Augustine's parent's failure for that.

Augustine wrote that before he left for Carthage to study for three years, his mother warned him earnestly, "*not to commit fornication and above all not to seduce any man's wife.*" But, in spite of that. Augustine said:

"I went to Carthage, where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. . . . My real need was for You, my God, Who alone are the Food of the soul. But I was not aware of this hunger. I was willing to steal, and steal I did, although I was not compelled by any lack. I was at the top of the school of rhetoric. And I was pleased with

my superior status and swollen with conceit. . . . And it was my ambition to be a good speaker, for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity."

So Augustine took a concubine in Carthage. Augustine was driven by his lust from age 19 to 30, and then spent the last 44 years of his life as a celibate bishop. Now it is important to understand a "Bishop" in the early Church as nothing more than a "Senior Pastor" rather than part of some priestly hierarchal system as is taught today. So, another way to say this was that Augustine was sexually immoral until he was 31, and completely celibate till he was 75. And from this we can see that his conversion was not as sudden as is often thought.

Now when he was 19 in what he called, the "cauldron of Carthage swollen with conceit and given over utterly to sexual pleasures", Augustine read Cicero's *Hortensius*. And even though Cicero was a pagan, this was significant because this book exalted the quest for Eternal Wisdom and Absolute Truth above mere physical pleasure. And Augustine said:

"[This book] altered my outlook on life. It changed my prayers to you, O Lord, and provided me with new hopes and aspirations. All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm and my heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for the Wisdom of Eternal Truth. I began to climb out of the depths to which I had sunk, in order to return to You. . . . My God, how I burned with longing to have wings to carry me back to You, away from all earthly things, although I had no idea what You would do with me! For Yours is the Wisdom. In Greek, the word 'philosophy' means 'love of wisdom', and it was with this love that the *Hortensius* inflamed me."

Now this was nine years before his conversion to Christ! So for nearly a decade after reading this, Augustine was still lost. And over the next nine years, Augustine's journey to Salvation took him first to the ridiculousness of the dualistic teaching called "Manichaeism" to the utter folly of the Platonists. But, it was there that he would meet the great bishop named Ambrose.

Augustine was now 30 years old and still had his son and his concubine whom he never once names in all his writings. In the early summer of AD 386 he discovered the writings of Plotinus, who had died

116 years earlier. And this was Augustine's second major watershed moment since reading Cicero eleven years earlier. This encounter, historian Peter Brown says:

"... did nothing less than shift the center of gravity of Augustine's spiritual life. He went from understanding a weak and frail God to One Who was utterly transcendent."

Yet, Augustine was still in the darkness of his fallen nature. But, through the influence of Ambrose, who was 14 years older than him, Augustine now moved from the writings of philosophers to the infallible Scriptures, especially those written by the Apostle Paul as he was moved along by God the Holy Spirit.

Everything Augustine had learned to that point was being brutalized by the Biblical teaching of "the Word was made flesh." And, week in and week out, as he would listen to Ambrose preach.

"I was all ears to seize upon his [Ambrose's] eloquence, I also began to sense the truth of what he said, though only gradually. I thrilled with love and dread alike. I realized that I was far away from You, O God . . . and, far off, I heard Your Voice saying, '*I am the God who IS!*' I heard Your Voice, as we hear voices that speak to our hearts, and at once I had no cause to doubt."

Now this is something that I want to stress here. Most everybody I know would leap for joy to hear somebody talk like this. And we would be quick to say that surely a person with that kind of experience is saved. But we would be wrong. As strong and powerful as this experience was, this was *not* a true conversion. And that is not me saying this, it is Augustine himself. About this powerful experience he wrote:

"I was astonished that although I now loved You . . . I did not persist in the enjoyment of my God. Your Beauty drew me to You, but soon I was dragged away from You by my own weight and in dismay I plunged again into the things of this world . . . as though I had sensed the fragrance of the fare but was not yet able to eat it."

Listen carefully to what this "Doctor of Grace" says here:

“... although I now loved You . . . I did not persist in the enjoyment of my God... Your Beauty drew me to You, but soon I was dragged away from You by my own weight and in dismay I plunged again into the things of this world...”

Augustine now conceived of the quest of his life as a quest for a firm and unshakable *delight* and *enjoyment* of the one, true, and living God. *Not* simply knowing God. *Not* simply understanding some facts about God and how to put all the theological pieces together. No, to Augustine, Salvation was being so radically transformed by the Sovereign Act of God and the finished Work of Christ, that a wicked, fallen sinner would seriously begin to *enjoy* God and *delight* himself in the Almighty!

And, from this moment on, Augustine understood that he was held back from true Salvation *not* by some intellectual barrier, but by his sin, specifically his sexual lust:

"I was still held firm in the bonds of woman's love."

Therefore, Augustine began to understand that the battle over his soul would be determined by the kind of Eternal Pleasure that would triumph over his sin.

"At that moment, I began to search for a means of gaining the Strength I needed to enjoy You, to delight myself in You. But I could not find this Means until I embraced the Mediator between God and myself, Jesus Christ."

So, because of the fact that he had not been transformed into the Image of Christ in his behavior led Augustine to understand that he had not yet seen the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. As long as he was held captive by the inferior pleasures of sin, Augustine knew that he had not yet been delivered by the superior Delight in God found only in Salvation in Jesus Christ. But, then came one of the most important days in all of Church history. On that day, Augustine began to pray:

"O Lord, my Helper and my Redeemer, I shall now tell and confess to the Glory of Your Name how You released me from the fetters of lust which held me so tightly shackled and from my slavery to the things of this world."

And this is the very heart of his book, the *Confessions*, and one of the great works of Grace in the history of the world. And yet, it was a titanic struggle. But listen carefully how it was won. (And read it for yourself in Book VIII.)

Even this day was more complex than the story often goes, but to go to the heart of the battle, let's focus on the final crisis. It was late August, AD 386, and Augustine was almost 32 years old. With his best friend, Alypius, he was talking about the remarkable sacrifice and holiness of an Egyptian monk that he had read about. And as he was talking, Augustine became deeply convicted about his *own* bondage to lust, when others were so free and holy in Christ.

And, as they continued to walk and talk, they came upon a small garden attached to the house where they were staying. And Augustine began to agonize in prayer. Later he wrote about this moment, and said:

"I now found myself driven by the tumult in my breast to take refuge in this garden, where no one could interrupt that fierce struggle in which I was my own contestant. . . . I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity. I was dying a death that would bring me life. . . . I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. . . . I tore my hair and hammered my forehead with my fists; I locked my fingers and hugged my knees."

Augustine said that it was at this moment that he began to see more clearly that the Gain of delighting in Jesus Christ was a far greater Treasure than any loss of sinful pleasure. And through the miracle of Grace this wicked sinner was saved, and began to see the Beauty of enjoying God in the Face of Jesus Christ. Augustine wrote about this and said:

"I had been held back by mere trifles. . . They plucked at my garment of flesh and whispered, '*Are you going to dismiss us? From this*

moment we shall never be with you again, for ever and ever.' . . . And while I stood trembling at the barrier, on the other side I could see the chaste beauty of Continnence in all her serene, unsullied joy, as she modestly beckoned me to cross over and to hesitate no more. She stretched out loving hands to welcome and embrace me."

So, to Augustine, having the power to utterly forsake his sin was the undeniable proof that the miracle of the New Birth had taken place. The battle for this man came down to "the Beauty of Continnence and her tenders of love" versus the "trifles of sin that plucked at his flesh". And so, he said:

"I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes . . . In my misery I kept crying, *'How long shall I go on saying 'tomorrow, tomorrow'? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment?'* . . . All at once I heard the singsong voice of a child in a nearby house. Whether it was the voice of a boy or a girl I cannot say, but again and again it repeated the refrain *'Take it and read, take it and read.'* At this I looked up, thinking hard whether there was any kind of game in which children used to chant words like these, but I could not remember ever hearing them before. I stemmed my flood of tears and stood up, telling myself that this could only be a Divine Command to open my book of Scripture and read the first Passage on which my eyes should fall.

So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting . . . seized [the book of Paul's epistles] and opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell: "**Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts. (Roman 13:13-14).** I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled."

Now there is a lot that we can say about this. But this morning

what I want you to see is that Augustine's Salvation was manifested through the triumph of God's Grace, working through the finished Work of Jesus Christ, brought to him through the hearing and understanding of the Biblical Gospel in giving this fallen sinner both the "will" and the "power" to delight himself in God over the pleasure he experienced in sexual sin. And *that* is the great message for us this morning. And you can substitute loving money or the desire for vengeance or the sin of disbelief or any other sin for Augustine's struggle with lust.

This powerful experience of God's Grace in his own conversion set the trajectory for Augustine's theology of Grace that brought him straight into the terrible conflict with Pelagius just a few years later that rescued the Church from the darkness of Secular Humanism. And it made Augustine to be the very source of the Protestant Reformation a thousand years later.

And this theology of Sovereign Grace was a very self-conscious theology of the triumph of fallen sinners being both able and willing to delight themselves in God. And *that* is the message I want us to hear.

Augustine was baptized the next Easter, AD 387, in Milan, by Ambrose. And that autumn, his mother died, a very happy woman that the son of her tears was now safe in Christ. At 34 years of age, in AD 388, Augustine returned to Northern Africa with a view to establish a way for men to devote themselves to God. And Augustine thought that he would spend the rest of his life celebrating in his Salvation and rejoicing in Jesus Christ and teaching others.

But God sovereignly interrupted those plans. In AD 389, Augustine got the idea that it might be more strategic to move his teaching center to the larger city of Hippo. And he chose Hippo because they already had a Bishop, so there was less chance of him ever having to take on that role.

But, as we often do, Augustine didn't understand God's Will. And so, as he was completely content to live in the background, a series of events caused the Church to come to Augustine and compel him to first be the priest, and then later the Bishop of Hippo.

And so, like so many in the history of the Church who left an enduring mark, at the age of 36, Augustine was thrust out of a life of contemplation into a life of action. Because, at that time, the role of "Senior Pastor" or Bishop included settling legal disputes of Church members and handling many civil affairs.

Now please let me try to bring this all to a head. I think that R. C. Sproul and others are right when they cry out that the modern Church is in a "Pelagian captivity". In other words, the heresy of Pelagius that *denies* Original Sin and that *denies* Sovereign Election and that *denies* the triumph of God's Grace over sin, and that *elevates* Human Self-Determination that was confronted and utterly defeated by the Church 1700 years ago, through the words and actions of Augustine, is alive and well today and living in a Church near you.

In other words, due to real shallow teaching, and due to an almost total rejection of Biblical Purity and an almost universal pursuit of sensual pleasure at the expense of genuine "Spirit and Truth Worship", the modern Church has embraced with open arms the very heresy that God used Augustine to defeat 17 Centuries ago.

So, I agree that this is the single biggest problem that we face today. But where I depart from many of my Reformed brethren is in the Cure. I think that, *in addition* to the Church repenting, and *in addition* to providing deep, serious, line upon line, and precept upon precept teaching and solid expositional preaching, and that *in addition* to promoting genuine Biblical spirituality to replace the shallow emotional sensuality that has taken the modern Church by storm, and that *in addition* to pursuing solid Biblical precision, that *in addition* to all of that, the Cure is for us to re-discover a healthy dose of Augustine's Doctrine of Grace. We must know the Bible. Yes. We must understand Theology. Yes. But we must also personally *experience* the freedom from sin that comes only through delighting in God.

And so, Augustine speaks to us today to say that unless and until we begin to genuinely delight ourselves in God, to the degree that we are both *willing* and *able* to overcome pervasive sin, that the Grace that we talk so much about and the Grace that we sing so much about and the Grace that we say we promote better and more than others is still a distant, vague, and blurry theological concept, and is not real in our lives.

Listen, I love Reformed Theology. I am in awe of the men who stand in the pulpits today and herald God's Grace with power and unction. I feel like a child when I hear men exposit God's Word. I am truly the least in my Father's House.

But, as nothing more than the donkey that God has chosen to speak to the madness of the prophets, I am convinced that far too much

of Reformed thinking and preaching in our day has not penetrated to the root of how God's Grace actually *triumphs* in our lives. And that utter triumph is *not* measured in material possessions or financial security or healthy bodies. But, it is also not measured in being able to fit in with the Reformed check list. It is found only through overwhelming Joy! And that Joy must be experienced. It isn't enough to believe that it exists. It must be experienced by each one of us. And because that is true, what we have today in many Reformed Churches is *not* really a full Embrace of what Augustine taught. It is *not* a total Reform away from the pollution of Man-made teaching. It is *not* a complete Return to the Original, Biblical Model. It is only *half-Augustinian*, it is only *half-biblical*, and therefore, it is only *half-beautiful*.

Let me try to tell you what I mean. Pelagius was a British monk who lived in Rome in Augustine's day and taught:

"though grace may *facilitate* the achieving of righteousness, it is not *necessary* to that end."

Pelagius denied the Doctrine of Original Sin, and asserted that, even after the Fall, human nature at its core was "Good", and was able to do all it is commanded to do by God. Therefore, Pelagius was horribly offended when he read Augustine's prayer in *Confessions*:

"Give me the Grace [O Lord] to do as You command, and command me to do what You will! . . . O holy God . . . when Your Commands are obeyed, it is from You that we receive the Power to obey them."

Pelagius saw this as an evil attack against basic human goodness, human free will, and human responsibility. Pelagius countered Augustine's prayer by saying:

"... if God has to graciously give that which He commands, then we are not already able to do it. Thus, we are not responsible to do what God has commanded and the entire Moral Law of God unravels."

But what Pelagius didn't understand was that Augustine had not come to this position quickly. In his book, *On the Freedom of the Will*,

written between AD 388 and 391, Augustine actually defended the concept of “the freedom of the human will” in such a way that allowed Pelagius to quote Augustine's own book and use this against him during their conflict.

But, by the time Augustine wrote the *Confessions* ten years later the issue was settled. Here is what he wrote. And I think this is one of the most important paragraphs for understanding the heart of true Biblical Christianity, and it comes by way of one of Augustine's written prayers:

“During all those years [of rebellion], where was my ‘free will’? What was the hidden, Secret Place from which it was summoned in a moment, so that I might bend my neck to Your easy Yoke . . .? How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of *those fruitless joys* which I had once feared to lose . . .! *You drove them from me*, You, Who are the true, the *sovereign Joy*. [There's the key phrase and the key reality for understanding the heart of Augustinianism.] You drove them from me and took their place, You Who are *sweeter than all pleasure*, though not to flesh and blood, You Who outshine all light, yet are hidden deeper than any secret in our hearts, You Who surpass all honor, though not in the eyes of men who see all honor in themselves. . . . O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation.

This is Augustine's understanding of Grace. *Grace is God effectively giving us Sovereign Joy in Himself that triumphs over the inferior joys that we experience in our sin.* In other words, God works deep in the human heart, all by Himself, to radically transform the springs of Joy so that we love God more than sex or anything else.

So, “loving God”, in Augustine's mind, was never reduced to mere deeds of obedience or acts of willpower. It was always a “delighting in God” for God's Sake, or for the Glory of God. And he defined it clearly in another book he wrote, “*On Christian Doctrine*” (III, x, 16):

"I call 'charity' [i.e., love for God] the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His Own Sake, and the enjoyment of one's self and of one's neighbor for the Sake of God."

So, Augustine analyzed his own motives down to this root:

Everything springs from delight

And he saw this as a universal Principle:

"Every man, whatsoever his condition, desires to be happy. There is no man who does not desire this, and each one desires it with such earnestness that he prefers it to all other things; whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end alone."

And Augustine taught that it is this pursuit of delight that guides and governs the "will". In other words, human beings may choose, yes. But, we may only choose that which we delight in, that which we love, and that which we chiefly want and desire.

But here's the catch that made Pelagius so angry. For Augustine, it is not in our own power to self-determine what this delight will be. And so he said:

"Who has it in his power to have such a motive present to his mind that his will shall be influenced to believe? Who can welcome in his mind something which does not give him delight? But who has it in his power to ensure that something that will delight him will turn up. Or that he will take delight in what turns up? If those things delight us which serve our advancement towards God, that is due not to our own whim or industry or meritorious works, but to the inspiration of God and to the Grace which He bestows."

So to Augustine, *saving* Grace, or Grace that has the power to convert the human nature, is *God sovereignly giving us a Sovereign Joy in Himself* that triumphs over all other joys, and therefore, effectively sways the will. You see, the will is free to move toward whatever it delights in most fully. Yet it is *not* within the power of the individual to determine what that *Sovereign Joy* will be. Therefore, Augustine concluded:

"A man's free-will, indeed, avails for nothing except to sin, if he knows not the way of truth; and even after his duty and his proper aim shall begin to become known to him, unless he also takes delight in and feels a love for it, he neither does his duty, nor sets about it, nor lives rightly. Now, in order that such a course may engage our

affections, **God's "love is shed abroad in our hearts"** not through the free-will choices that arises from ourselves, but **"through the Holy Spirit, which is given to us"** (Romans 5:5).

Near the end of his life in AD427, he looked back over a lifetime of thought on this issue and wrote to a friend,

"In answering this question I have tried hard to maintain the free choice of the human will, but the Grace of God prevailed."

When he was asked by another friend why he continued to dispute against Pelagius, even when he was in his seventies, Augustine answered:

"First and foremost because no subject gives me greater pleasure. For what ought to be more attractive to us sick men, than Grace, Grace by which we are healed; for us lazy men, than Grace, Grace by which we are stirred up; for us men longing to act, than Grace, by which we are helped?"

And this answer has all the more power when you keep in mind that the healing, stirring, helping, and enabling Grace that Augustine celebrates is *the sovereign giving of a compelling, triumphant Delight in God that overwhelms any delight we experience in sin*. So, Grace triumphs over sin by *forcefully and effectually* giving a supreme Joy in the utter Supremacy of Jesus Christ.

So, 1700 years ago, Augustine labored with all his spiritual and poetic and intellectual might to help people see and feel the preciousness of Jesus Christ as the all-satisfying Treasure of our lives. And so he said,

“But what do I love when I love my God? . . . Not the sweet melody of harmony and song; not the fragrance of flowers, perfumes, and spices; not manna or honey; not limbs such as the body delights to embrace. It is not these that I love when I love my God. And yet, when I love Him, it is true that I love a Light of a certain kind, a Voice, a Perfume, a Food, an Embrace; but they are of the kind that I love in my inner self, when my soul is bathed in Light that is not bound by space; when it listens to Sound that never dies away; when

it breathes Fragrance that is not borne away on the wind; when it tastes Food that is never consumed by the eating; when it clings to an Embrace from which it is not severed by fulfillment of desire. This is what I love when I love my God.”

Few people in the history of Christianity have come close to Augustine in portraying the Greatness and Beauty and Desirability of God. A thousand years before Christopher Columbus discovered America, Augustine was utterly persuaded by both Scripture and experience that:

“... he is happiest who possesses God.” You made us for Yourself, and our hearts find no Peace till they rest in You.”

... and this man labored with all his might to make this God of Sovereign Grace and Sovereign Joy and Sovereign Delight- known and loved by the world. And so he said:

“You are ever active, yet always at rest. You gather all things to Yourself, though You suffer no need. . . . You grieve for wrong, but suffer no pain. You can be angry and yet serene. Your Works are varied, but Your Purpose is one and the same. . . . You welcome those who come to You, though You never lost them. You are never in need yet are glad to gain, never covetous yet You exact a return for Your Gifts. . . . You release us from our debts, but You lose nothing thereby. You are my God, my Life, my holy Delight, but is this enough to say of You? Can any man say enough when he speaks of You? Yet woe betide those who are silent about You!”

If it is true, as R.C. Sproul says, that today *“we have not broken free from the Pelagian captivity of the church,”* then we should pray and preach and write and teach and labor with all our might to break the chain that holds us captive. Sproul says:

“We need another Augustine or a Luther to speak to us anew lest the light of God's grace be not only overshadowed but be obliterated in our time.”

Yes, we do. But we *also* need tens of thousands of very ordinary pastors and bond-slaves like you and me, who are utterly ravished with the extraordinary sovereignty of genuine Delight in God.

And we need to rediscover Augustine's very *peculiar* slant, a very Biblical slant, on Grace as being the free gift of a Delight in God that frees us from the bondage of sin. And so, we need to rethink our Reformed Soteriology so that every limb and every branch in the "tree" of Salvation is coursing with the sap of this Delight that Augustine saw. We need to make plain that *Total Depravity* is *not* just "badness", but a frightening *blindness* to the infinite Beauty of God and the complete "deadness" to true Joy. We need to be reminded that *Unconditional Election* means that the completeness of our Joy in Jesus Christ was planned for us before we ever existed, that *Limited Atonement* is the Assurance that indestructible Joy in God has been infallibly secured for us by the Blood of the New Covenant, that *Irresistible Grace* is God's firm and unchanging Commitment to *guarantee* that we will not hold on to suicidal sinful pleasures, but will be set free by the sovereign Power of infinitely superior Delights, and that the *Perseverance of the Saints* is the almighty Work of an almighty God to keep us, through all affliction and suffering, for an Inheritance of Pleasures at God's Right Hand, forever!

This Augustinian flavor of Sovereign, Triumphant Joy is a missing element in too much of our Reformed Theology and our Reformed Worship. And it may be that the question we should pose to ourselves in conclusion is whether this is true because we have not actually experienced the triumph of this Sovereign Delight in God in our own lives. So, I ask you, can you honestly say this with Augustine?

"How sweet all at once it was for me to be rid of *those fruitless joys* which I had once feared to lose . . . ! *You drove them from me*, You who are the true, the *sovereign Joy*. You drove them from me and took their place. . . . O Lord my God, my Light, my Wealth, and my Salvation."

... or are we still in bondage to the pleasures of this world so that, for all our talk about the Glory of God, we love television and video games and food and sleep and sex and money and human praise as much as

everybody else? And if that is true, let us repent and fix our faces like flint toward the Word of God in prayer:

“O Lord, open my eyes to see and to know that in Your Presence is the fullness of Joy and at your Right Hand are Pleasures for evermore!”

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.