

I. A Brief Summary of Augustine's Life (354-430)

- Aurelius Augustine was born November 13, 354 in the North African city of Thagaste.
- Thagaste was a city in the hills about 45 miles inland from the Mediterranean, in the province of Numidia Consularis, a cross-roads and market¹ not far from Carthage². It is modern-day Souk-Ahras in eastern Algeria.³
- His father, Patricius, a Roman civil servant known in the community, was devoted to the pagan worship common to the Roman Empire. His mother, Monica, was a Christian mother.
- Towards the end of his life, Augustine's father came to Christ through Monica's testimony. Monica also became a major spiritual influence on her son. She prayed deeply (with tears) and consistently for her son's conversion.
- Augustine became a student of rhetoric and a teacher of literature, oratory and philosophy.
- Extremely worldly early life. We know this because of his *Confessions*, which emphasize the sinfulness of his youth.
- He lived for 14 years with a woman out of wedlock and had an illegitimate son, Adeodatus, who lived 18 years.



¹ Henry Chadwick, *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 7.

² Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999), 256.

³ Bryan Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007), 217.

- He joined the Manichaeian heresy and became an ascetic.

Manichaeianism mixed a naturalistic rationalism with a disdain for the physical. The Manichaeians had rejected the Old Testament as God's Word.

- Augustine was converted to Christ in 386

Stephen J. Nichols: "If we were to look in on Augustine's life at certain times, however, we would be quite surprised to find out that the one we were observing would become the towering figure of church history. In his early adulthood, he's running from God. The Scriptures lack rhetorical punch for him, the work of the theologians leaves him intellectually unsatisfied, and a Christian ethic imposes far too much restriction on him – especially when he looks upon his mistress. Christianity is both too much and not enough for Augustine. This despite the lifelong prayers and pleas of his saintly mother, Monica.

Augustine himself would agree with our surprise. In fact, he would state it much more starkly. . . Herein is Augustine's story. It is the story of the Hound of Heaven – Augustine applied that term to God with the utmost reverence – tracking him down" (*Pages from Church History* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2006] pp. 66–67)

- Human factors leading to his conversion:
 - Constant prayers of his mother.

You stretched out Your hand from on high and pulled my soul out of these murky depths because my mother, who was faithful to You, was weeping for me more bitterly than ever mothers wept for the bodily death of their children. In her faith and in the spiritual discernment she possessed by Your gift she regarded me as dead; and You heard her, O Lord, You heard her and did not scorn those tears of hers which gushed forth and watered the ground beneath her eyes wherever she prayed.⁴

- Conversion of a friend, Victorinus.
- Testimony of Ambrose, bishop of Milan, and a preacher.

⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Maria Boulding (New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 51 (III.11.19).

- Exhortation from his friend, Allochus, to read his Bible.
- One day, while walking, he heard a child say, “pick it up and read it.” He opened his Bible to Romans 13:13-14 and was saved (386 AD).

Romans 13:13–14 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lusts.

- He and Allochus were baptized on Easter Sunday, 387, by Ambrose. Augustine would have been in his early 30s.
- Ordained as a pastor in 391, then as Bishop of Hippo in 395
- Had an enormous writing and teaching ministry (*The Works of Augustine* are contained in approximately 55 volumes).
- Augustine of Hippo died on August 28, 430.

Summary of Augustine’s Life

354 – Born at Thagaste	390 – Son Adeodatus dies
370 – Begins studies at Carthage	391 – Ordained as a priest largely against his will
371 – His son Adeodatus is born to his mistress	395 – Becomes Bishop of Hippo largely against his will
373 – Becomes enamored with Manichaeism	400 – Writes <i>Confessions</i>
376-383 – Teaches at Carthage	410 – Visigoths sack Rome, August 26
383 – Sails to Rome	412 – Starts <i>City of God</i> ; Writes <i>On the Spirit and the Letter</i>
384 – Breaks with Manichaeism	415 – Writes <i>On Nature and Grace</i>
384-388 – Becomes professor of rhetoric at Milan Embraces Neoplatonism Consistently hears Ambrose preach	418 – Writes <i>On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin</i>
385 – Monica arrives in Milan and begins to make plans for Augustine to marry	421 – Writes <i>The Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope and Love</i>
386 – Dismisses his mistress Conversion in the Garden	425 – Completes <i>City of God</i>
387 – Baptized on Easter Sunday, April 24 Monica dies later in the year	427 – Writes <i>On Grace and Free Will</i>
388 – Returns to North Africa and settles at Hippo	429 – Writes <i>On the Predestination of the Saints</i>
	430 – Dies at Hippo, August 28, amidst Vandal invasion

II. The Theology Embraced by Augustine

- Philosopher and Augustine scholar T. Kermit Scott has rightly said that the main feature of Augustine's theology is "its emphasis on the absolute supremacy of God and the accompanying absolute helplessness and dependency of the human soul on the grace of God."⁵
- Augustine's view of God's sovereignty dominated all of his thinking.

Scott: "While Augustine makes a titanic effort to preserve both human freedom and the goodness of God, it is clear that his God is, above all, the imperial ruler of the universe, and what cannot be sacrificed at any price is the absolute *power* of that God. This is the guiding thread of Augustine's thought, that which gives shape to those doctrines most associated with his name."⁶

- Church historian Roger Olson: "Augustine's entire soteriology flows from two major beliefs: the absolute and total depravity of human beings after the Fall, and the absolute and total power and sovereignty of God."⁷
- Those doctrines most associated with his name have come to be understood as the biblical "doctrines of grace."
- Besides his tremendous impact on the Reformation of the 16th century – inspiring the doctrines of Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, and others – the great Princeton theologian and defender of orthodoxy, B. B. Warfield, notes that the most significant fact about Augustine was that he was the first among the Church teachers to give "adequate expression to that type of religion which has since attached to itself the name of 'evangelical.'"⁸
- Augustine did not invent the doctrines of grace. He observed them from Scripture.
- John Piper: "His passion was to display above all things the glory of God through the exaltation of His omnipotent grace. Augustine's entire life was one great 'confession' of the glory of God's grace."⁹

⁵ Scott, *His Thought in Context*, 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁷ Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 271.

⁸ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 319.

⁹ Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, 24.

- In the *Confessions*, “he laid out in intimate detail his sins from almost infancy into adult life and emphasized at every point his own total depravity and the power of God’s grace to heal and transform. The *Confessions* reveals that Augustine was a pessimist about humanity, including his own, and an optimist about grace.”¹⁰
- From start to finish, through all the ups and downs of his life, he happily confessed his own utter inability to do anything about his sinfulness, and testified of God’s meticulously sovereign orchestration of all the details of his life.
 - He opened his *Confessions* by declaring that God has made all of us for Himself, that we are restless till we find rest in Him, and that He has created us to find joy in His praise.¹¹
 - He confesses his own sinfulness, selfishness, and inability even as an infant.¹²
 - He acknowledges that God Himself was actively “sprinkling very bitter disappointments over all my unlawful pleasures so that I might seek a pleasure free from all disappointment.”¹³
 - His credits God with “stretch[ing] out Your hand from on high and pull[ing] my soul out of these murky depths” because He heard and answered the prayers of His mother. Even her prayers were gifts of God’s grace.¹⁴
 - He says of the great preacher Ambrose, under whose preaching he was converted, yet whom he sought out not for his preaching but for his rhetorical style: “Unknowingly I was led by You to him, so that through him I might be led, knowingly, to You.”¹⁵
 - As he begins to recount his conversion, He exclaims, “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.”¹⁶

¹⁰ Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 256.

¹¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 3 (I.1.1).

¹² *Ibid.*, 10-11 (I.7.11-12).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26 (II.4).

¹⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 51 (III.11.19).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 93 (V.13.23).

¹⁶ As quoted in Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, 24, emphases mine.

- The pinnacle of his testimony to God’s absolute sovereignty: “During all those years [of rebellion], where was my free will? ... 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, sovereign joy.”¹⁷
 - He speaks of his own faith as “Your gift to me, which You have breathed into me through the humanity of Your Son and the ministry of Your preacher.”¹⁸
 - He acknowledges that in and of ourselves we are powerless to obey the commands given to us by God.
 - Augustine understood that God must grant what he requires: “On your exceedingly great mercy rests all my hope. Give what you command, and then command whatever you will.”¹⁹
- And so Augustine’s theology of sovereign grace arose out of a living relationship with the *God* of sovereign grace, the Hound of Heaven.²⁰

Fueled by the Pelagian Controversy

- Yet it was not merely because of God’s own gracious dealings with him that Augustine wrote volumes on man’s depravity and God’s sovereignty. It was the Pelagian Controversy that moved him to write on the doctrines of grace.
- R. C. Sproul: “The controversy began when the British monk, Pelagius, opposed at Rome Augustine’s famous prayer: ‘Grant what Thou commandest, and command what Thou dost desire.’ Pelagius recoiled in horror at the idea that a divine gift (grace) is necessary to perform what God commands. For Pelagius and his followers responsibility always implies ability. If man has the moral responsibility to obey the law of God, he must also have the moral ability to do it.”²¹
- Pelagius denied the reality of original sin. He believed that Adam’s sin affected Adam only, not the entire human race, despite

¹⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 170 (IX.1).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1 (I.1.1).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 223 (X.29.40).

²⁰ Cf. Nichols, *Pages from Church History.*, 77.

²¹ R. C. Sproul, “Augustine and Pelagius,” *Tabletalk* 6 (June 1996): 12.

Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned

- Augustine responded to this man-centered, legalistic heresy with works such as *On the Spirit and the Letter* (412), *On Nature and Grace* (415), *On the Grace of Christ and Original Sin* (418), *On Grace and Free Will* (427), and *On the Predestination of the Saints* (429).²² These works would be a treasure chest of Augustine's Biblical theology of grace.

Original Sin

- Against Pelagius's teaching that Adam's sin affected no one but himself, Augustine presented the Biblical teaching that all of humanity sinned "in Adam" (Rom 5:12ff).
 - Because Adam was the representative of the human race in the garden, when he sinned (freely, according to his will), we sinned, and so when he died spiritually, all of humanity died spiritually along with him.

1 Corinthians 15:22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.
 - Adam and Eve were created sinless, but since then every member of the human race except One was born dead in their transgressions and sins, by nature a children of wrath" (Eph 2:1-3).

Human nature was in the beginning created blameless and without any defect. But that human nature, in which each of us is born of Adam, now needs a physician, because it is not in good health. All the goods which it has in its constitution: life, the senses, and the mind, it has from the sovereign God, its creator and maker. But the defect which darkens and weakens those natural goods so that there is need for enlightenment and healing did not come from its blameless maker. It came from the original sin which was committed by free choice. And thus a nature subject to punishment is part of a punishment that is completely just. After all, if we are no a new creature in Christ, we were, nonetheless, by nature children of [wrath], just as the others. But God who is rich in mercy, on account of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead by sins, brought us to life with Christ, by whose grace we have been saved.²³

²² Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 270.

²³ Augustine, "On Nature and Grace," in *The Works of Saint Augustine Volume 23: Answer to the Pelagians*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), 226 (III.3).

Total Depravity

- The result of Adam's fall was the imputation of original sin to the entire human race. From that moment, humanity had become totally depraved. Mankind became enslaved to sin, alienated from God, and totally unable to reconcile themselves to Him such that without a supernatural work of divine grace, all would perish apart from Him and endure eternal punishment for their sins.
- R. C. Sproul: "Augustine's view of the Fall was opposed to both Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism. He said that mankind is a *massa peccati*, a 'mess of sin,' incapable of raising itself from spiritual death. For Augustine man can no more move or incline himself to God than an empty glass can fill itself."²⁴
- However, some argue against total depravity on the basis of the perceived innocence of children. "How could a baby," some reason, "be guilty and held responsible for moral evil?" Augustine held his view of total depravity consistently, commenting on even the utter selfishness and sinfulness of infants (including himself!):

I would throw a tantrum because my elders were not subject to me, nor free people willing to be my slaves; so I would take revenge on them by bursting into tears.

Who is there to remind me of the sin of my infancy (for sin there was; no one is free from sin in your sight, not even an infant whose span of earthly life is but a single day).

The only innocent feature in babies is the weakness of their frames; the minds of infants are far from innocent. I have watched and experienced for myself the jealousy of a small child: he could not even speak, yet he glared with livid fury at his fellow nursling.²⁵

The Bondage of the Will

- Total depravity is experienced by human beings in part by the bondage of their will. Unlike Adam, who had free will before sin entered the world, all people after him are born enslaved to sin.
- Their wills are corrupted to seek after and desire evil.

Romans 3:10–12 as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED

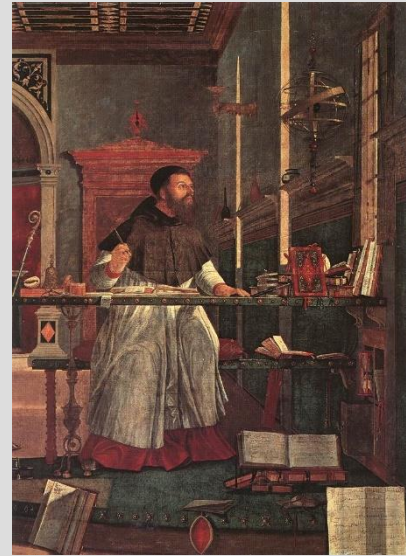
²⁴ Sproul, "Augustine and Pelagius," 13.

²⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 7-11 (I.8-I.12).

ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.”

The sinner, dead in his sin, is neither *able* nor *willing* to come to God for forgiveness, but desires to continue in sin.

- Did Augustine deny, then, that humans have free will? If by free will we mean the libertarian concept of ultimate and decisive self-determination, then no, Augustine did not believe in free will. Prior to regeneration, the human will is bound by sin (e.g. Rom 3:11 there is none who seeks for God).
- However, the unregenerate heart possesses a will with the ability to choose what it desires. The will is free to act within the bounds of its nature. However, it only desires sin (Rom 3:10-12). For humanity apart from the grace of God, that is a *sin* nature. So, we may (and do) freely choose to sin, and so incur responsibility.
- Sproul: “Augustine did not deny that fallen man still has a will and that the will is capable of making choices. He argued that fallen man still has a free will (*liberium arbitrium*) but has lost his moral liberty (*libertas*). The state of original sin leaves us in the wretched condition of being unable to refrain from sinning. We still are able to choose what we desire, but our desires remain chained by our evil impulses. He argued that the freedom that remains in the will always leads to sin. Thus in the flesh we are **free only to sin, a hollow freedom indeed. It is freedom without liberty, a real moral bondage**. True liberty can only come from without, from the work of God on the soul. Therefore we are not only partly dependent upon grace for our conversion but totally dependent upon grace.”²⁶
- T. K. Scott: “For Augustine, people are free to sin **but not free not to sin**. That is because they want to sin. The Fall has so corrupted their motives and desires that sinning is all they want to do apart from God’s intervening grace. Thus they are sinning ‘freely.’”²⁷
- This “freedom,” however, is not a freedom we would want to celebrate, for in reality it is bondage.²⁸ Thus, speaking most precisely, we may say that people



²⁶ Sproul, “Augustine and Pelagius,” 13, 52.

²⁷ Scott, *His Thought in Context*, 162.

²⁸ Nichols, *Pages from Church History*, 71.

have a will – an inclination to do this or that – and thus are not merely robots. However, that will is not free. “Because of the inherited depravity and corruption of sin, fallen humans are not free not to sin: ‘A man’s free will,’ he wrote against Pelagius, ‘avails for nothing except to sin.’”²⁹

Sovereign Election and the Gift of Faith

- If a man’s will avails for nothing except to sin, the only way anyone is saved and reconciled to God through Christ is by sovereign grace alone (God’s work in the sinner on the basis of his grace). Contrary to contemporary evangelicalism’s pop-theology, God, not man, is the decisive determiner of who will be saved.
- If God is not sovereign over human will, then man can overpower God, not only in salvation, but other matters. However, this contradicts Scripture (Job 42:2; Ps 33:11; Isa 46:9-10; Dan 4:35).
- Discussing Romans 9, Augustine writes the following in *On Divers Questions to Simplicianus*, published in 396:

In the solution of this question, we struggled indeed for the free choice of the human will; but the grace of God conquered: otherwise the apostle could not have been understood to speak with obvious truth when he says, “For who maketh thee to differ? And what has thou that thou didst not receive? But if thou didst receive it why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”³⁰

- B.B. Warfield: “Augustine was led somewhat against his will to recognize that the ‘will to believe’ is itself from God. Accordingly, in this ‘question’ he teaches at length that whether man despises or does not despise the call does not lie in his own power.”³¹

Clearly it is vain for us to will unless God have mercy. But I do not know how it could be said that it is vain for God to have mercy unless we willingly consent. If God has mercy, we also will, for the power to will is given with the mercy itself. It is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure [Philippians 2:13]. If we ask whether a good will is a gift of God, I should be surprised if anyone would venture to deny that. But because the good will does not precede calling, but calling precedes the good will, the fact that we have a good will is rightly attributed to God who calls us, and the fact that we are called cannot be attributed to ourselves. So the sentence, ‘It is

²⁹ Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology*, 272. He quotes from Augustine, *On the Spirit and the Letter*, 5.

³⁰ Quoted in Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 377.

³¹ Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, 378.

not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that hath mercy' [Romans 9:16] cannot be taken to mean simply that we cannot attain what we wish without the aid of God, but rather than without his calling we cannot even will.³²

- Therefore, man's ability to turn his will away from sin and towards God and spiritual things is entirely dependent on a prior act of God's mercy. Even the faith by which we are justified is a gift of divine grace.

The Spirit of grace, then, causes us to have faith so that through faith we may obtain by prayer that we can do what we are commanded. The apostle himself continuously set faith above the law because we cannot do what the law commands unless, by asking with faith, we obtain the ability to do so.

For the Almighty sets in motion even in the innermost hearts of men the movement of their will, so that He does through their agency whatsoever He wishes to perform through them.³³

- Thus, we have in Augustine's doctrines of human depravity and divine grace, the foundation for the Reformation doctrines that would come to be known as the five points of Calvinism. Man's total depravity has been made clear, as well as the Father's unconditional election of some and not others from eternity past. God's grace is absolutely sovereign and thus irresistible. Apart from this grace man can do absolutely nothing, so there is no potential, universal atonement for him to activate by his faith. And finally, since there was nothing man could do to earn his salvation, there is nothing he can do to lose it. He is made to persevere to the end by divine grace.

Theodicy: The Problem of Evil

- With God as absolutely and meticulously sovereign over all events – even the human will – how does Augustine avoid styling God as the author of sin?
- If “the Almighty sets in motion even in the innermost hearts of men the movement of their will, so that He does through their agency whatsoever He wishes to perform through them,”³⁴ does that not mean, since men will to sin, that God performs sin?

³² Augustine, *To Simplicianus*, II.12; quoted in Scott, *His Thought in Context*, 181.

³³ Augustine, “Grace and Free Choice,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine Volume 26: Answer to the Pelagians, IV*, ed. John E. Rotelle (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1999), 89-90 (XXVIII).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 99 (XX.41).

- Augustine answered that by leaning on his NeoPlatonic philosopher friends. He insisted that *evil* is not a created thing, *per se*, but is merely the absence of good – that is, the absence of God.
- Thus, he would say of God, “You treat [man] mercifully because you made him, though the sin that is in him is not of Your making.”³⁵ And again, “O Lord God, you are the disposer and creator of everything in nature, but of our sins the disposer only.”³⁶
- Augustine’s presentation of God as the ultimate cause of all things is biblically sound:

“There is no one besides Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am Yahweh who does all these” (Isa 45:6-7; cf. Lam 3:37-38; Rom 8:28).

- The tension that we perceive is allayed by understanding the difference between (1) God’s will of decree and His will of precept, and (2) ultimate vs. proximate causes.
- God’s sovereign will of decree is God’s will in the sense that Paul speaks of it in

Romans 9:18–20 So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires. ¹⁹ You will say to me then, “Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?” ²⁰ On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, “Why did you make me like this,” will it?

➤ Thus, God’s will cannot be resisted.

- What God has decreed will come to pass. Whatever takes place in history happens because God has decreed it to happen from eternity.
- On the other hand, God’s prescriptive will (also known as his “revealed” or “commanded” will) is what God commands. God wills that His commandments be followed, and yet they not always are followed. This means that God’s will of decree has ordained that human beings violate His will of precept.
- This is not the same as causing them to sin.

³⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, 9 (I.7.11).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 (I.10.16).

- Certainly, in an ultimate sense, God is the uncaused Cause of all the things, the unmoved Mover of all of His creation.
- Yet even in His sovereign decree that sin exists through human means. God never becomes the proximate, or immediate, cause of that sin.
- Thus, God's absolute sovereignty – even His eternal decree which included the ordaining that sin and evil be – does not make Him the author or instigator of sin.

III. Augustine on Joy and the Worship of God

- At the heart of Augustine's theology and understanding of the Christian life is his view on the centrality of joy and the affections. This is because God himself ought to be at the heart of theology and the Christian life, and God himself is, as Augustine himself put it, "the true, sovereign joy."³⁷ Thus, one's religious affections, to borrow a phrase from Jonathan Edwards, are of paramount importance.

Everyone Desires to Be Happy

- At the heart of Augustine's emphasis on joy lay a fundamental assumption about human nature: "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."³⁸

What is a life of happiness? Surely [it is] what everyone wants, absolutely everyone without exception. ... It is known to everyone, and if they could all be asked in some common tongue whether they wish to be happy, they would undoubtedly all reply that they do. ...

Thus all agree that they want to be happy, just as they would, if questioned, all agree that they want to enjoy life, and they think that a life of happiness consists of this enjoyment. One person pursues it in this way, another in that, but all are striving for the same goal, enjoyment.³⁹

³⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 170 (IX.1).

³⁸ Quoted in Hand, *Augustine on Prayer*, 13.

³⁹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 216-218 (X.20.29-21.31).

[The human soul] tends towards what it loves, so that attaining it, it may find rest. ...
Just as the body gravitates according to its weight, so also the soul, in whatever
direction its movement tends, is carried along by love.⁴⁰

Happiness is Only Found in God

- However, as Augustine would painfully learn, true joy is found in God himself.
- Every human being seeks to satisfy the longings of his soul, but only he who comes to know and worship the true God through Jesus Christ is the one who will find such satisfaction.
- In that famous opening paragraph of the *Confessions*, he declares:

“Because you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.” (*Confessions*, 1.1.1.)
- Augustine teaches us that God has so designed human beings that the deep longings and desires for happiness and joy that are built into the very fabric of our souls are only met and satisfied by Him.

A happy life is to be sought from the Lord our God. Many different people have given many different answers when discussing wherein true happiness resides. But why should we go to many teachers or consider many answers to this question? It has been briefly and truly stated in Holy Scripture: *Happy are the people whose God is the Lord* (Psalm 144:15).⁴¹

You Yourself are their joy. This is the happy life, and this alone: to rejoice in You, about You and because of You. This is the life of happiness, and it is not to be found anywhere else.⁴²

- And so it is not uncommon for Augustine to refer to God as the treasure chest of his holy joy. In the *Confessions*, he called God “my holy sweetness,”⁴³ “O God most beautiful,”⁴⁴ and “O my joy.”⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Quoted in Hand, *Augustine on Prayer*, 14.

⁴¹ Quoted in Hand, *Augustine on Prayer*, 24.

⁴² Augustine, *Confessions*, 218 (X.22.32).

⁴³ Augustine, *Confessions*, 5 (I.4.4).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 (I.12).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 (II.2.2).

- Augustine contrasts the counterfeit beauty of so many various sins with God as true beauty, and shows how the satisfaction we seek in our sin is truly and entirely found in God Himself:

For in vice there lurks a counterfeit beauty: pride, for instance – even pride apes sublimity, where as You are the only God, most high above all things. As for ambition, what does it crave but honor and glory, while You are worthy of honor beyond all others, and eternally glorious?

The ferocity of powerful men aims to inspire fear; but who is to be feared except the one God? Can anything be snatched from His power or withdrawn from it – when or where or whither or by whom?

Flirtatiousness aims to arouse love by its charming wiles, but nothing can hold more charm than your charity, nor could anything be loved to greater profit than your truth, which outshines all else in its luminous beauty.

Curiosity poses as pursuit of knowledge, whereas you know everything to a supreme degree. Even ignorance or stupidity masquerades as simplicity and innocence, but nothing that exists is simpler than Yourself; and what could be more innocent than You, who leave the wicked to be hounded by their own sins?

Sloth pretends to aspire to rest, but what sure rest is there save the Lord?

Lush living likes to be taken for contented abundance, but You are the full and inexhaustible store of a sweetness that never grows stale.

Extravagance is a bogus generosity, but You are the infinitely wealthy giver of all good things.

Avarice strives to amass possessions, but You own everything.

Envy is a contentious over rank accorded to another, but what ranks higher than You?

Anger seeks revenge, but whoever exacts revenge with greater justice than Yourself?

Timidity dreads any unforeseen or sudden threat to the things it loves, and takes precautions for their safety; but is anything sudden or unforeseen to You? Who can separate what You love from You? Where is their ultimate security to be found, except with You?⁴⁶

The Christian Must Pursue His Greatest Happiness

- In Augustine's mind, God is so glorious that to experience Him is to enjoy Him. As he said above, God Himself *is* our joy. Thus, just as it is the Christian's duty to

⁴⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 33 (II.13).

pursue God and be devoted to glorifying Him, so it is the Christian's duty to pursue his own greatest happiness.

- Piper writes, "Augustine...conceived of the quest of his life as a quest for a firm and unshakable enjoyment of the true God. This would be utterly determinative in his thinking about everything."⁴⁷
- Augustine says it plainly: the definition of being a Christian is relentlessly pursuing the joyful blessings of God's promises.

He who does not think of the world to come, he who is a Christian for any other reason than that he may receive God's ultimate promises, is not yet a Christian. ⁴⁸

- And what is God's ultimate promise but the gift of Himself? His promise is that all who trust in Christ for righteousness will have God for their God, and that He will dwell among them and that they will be His people.
- Thomas Hand summarizes Augustine's thoughts well here: "In this life, therefore, our most important and pressing duty is to unite ourselves to God by love. Going in quest of God, striving to adhere to him, reaching out for him, makes us good; attaining him seeing him, securely possessing him makes us happy."⁴⁹
- Thus, all of life is about beholding the beauty of the Lord. Indeed, Augustine defined *life* in such terms:

Open the ears of my heart and say to my soul, "I am your salvation." Let me run toward this voice and seize hold of You. Do not hide Your face from me: let me die so that I may see it, for not to see it would be death to me indeed. ⁵⁰

- We must fight for our joy as fighting for our very lives. When Augustine was battling against his sexual immorality, he understood that the battle was one of competing pleasures.

I looked for a way to gain the strength I needed to enjoy you, but I did not until I embraced the mediator between God and humankind, the man Christ Jesus. ⁵¹

⁴⁷ Piper, *The Legacy of Sovereign Joy*, 50.

⁴⁸ Quoted Chadwick, *A Very Short Introduction*, 59.

⁴⁹ Hand, *Augustine on Prayer*, 19.

⁵⁰ Augustine, *Confessions*, 6 (I.5.5).

⁵¹ Augustine, *Confessions*, 139 (VII.18.24).

- Indeed, he even defined love for God in terms of enjoying Him:

“I call [love to 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.⁵²”

- It was the pursuit of his own pleasure that strengthened him to engage in the many debates and altercations of the Pelagian controversy. When a friend asked him why he even bothered with the polemical disputes, he 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?”⁵³ For Augustine, there was no dichotomy of “enjoying grace” on the one hand and “fighting for grace” on the other. His pursuit of consummate joy in God drove both.

Depravity is a Failure to Delight in the Supremely Delightful

- Augustine understood the essence of man’s sinfulness – the very foundation of our total depravity and the state from which God’s sovereign grace is needed to save us – as being a failure to seek pleasure in God. Said another way, depravity is a failure to delight in what is supremely delightful.

In this lay my sin, that not in Him was I seeking pleasures, distinctions and truth, but I myself and the rest of His creatures, and so I fell headlong into pains, confusions and errors.⁵⁴

- All sin, then, is a failure to look for *pleasure, beauty, and truth* in God. This is precisely what we read in Romans 1, where the Apostle Paul defines all of life as worship of the Creator or the creature – seeking pleasure in God versus seeking pleasure in everything but God.

I was in love with my own ruin, in love with decay: not with the thing for which I was falling into decay but with decay itself, for I was depraved in soul, and I leapt down from your strong support into destruction, hungering not for some advantage to be gained by the foul deed, but for the foulness of it.⁵⁵

⁵² Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.10.16, quoted in John Piper, *Taste & See: Savoring the Supremacy of God in All of Life* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2005), 204.

⁵³ Quoted in Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 355.

⁵⁴ Augustine, *Confessions*, 24 (I.20.31).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31 (II.4.9).

- Here, he specifically uses the word *depraved* to describe his infatuation with decay. This is precisely what it means to be sinfully depraved: preferring the gratification that sin provides over against the gratification that obedience to God provides. If we sin, it is because we find sin more satisfying, gratifying, and joy-giving than a right relationship with God.
- The problem is that, objectively, *sin is not* more satisfying than God. Herein is spiritual death: a blindness that sees repulsiveness as beauty and beauty as repulsive.
- Contrarily, spiritual life imparted by the miracle of regeneration is the giving of eyes to see, such that we see the ugliness of sin for what it is as well as the glory of Christ for what it is, and preferring Christ, living our lives to satisfy our souls in Him rather than sin. Until then, our souls are unhealthy:

I had no desire for the food that does not perish, not because I had my fill of it, but because the more empty I was, the more I turned from it in revulsion. My soul's health was consequently poor.⁵⁶

God's Grace Frees us to Delight in Him

- Thus Augustine believed that the natural human heart was bound by the Fall of Adam to delight only in sin. "A man's free-will," he wrote, "avails for nothing except to sin."⁵⁷ The will is so corrupted by original sin that it is impossible that we should delight in God (i.e., that which is truly delightful) on our own. This is precisely why we need grace, and that is precisely why grace comes to us: to give us true, lasting joy in God.
- Looking back on his rebellion, Augustine presents that God Himself sovereignly and graciously causes all of our pursuits of joy outside of Him to fail to satisfy us. He referred to God as "mercifully angry, sprinkling very bitter disappointments over all my unlawful pleasures" for the express purpose of leading him to "seek a pleasure free from all disappointment," that is, pleasure in God.⁵⁸
- He recognized God's causing him to be displeased in his "unlawful pleasures" as grace.

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 37 (III.1.1).

⁵⁷ Augustine, "The Spirit and the Letter," in *The Works of Saint Augustine: Volume 23*, 152 (III.5).

⁵⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*, 26 (II.4).

- God graciously uses “pain to make Your will known to us, and [You] strike only to heal, and even kill us lest we die away from you. Where as I, and how far was I exiled from the joys of Your house.”⁵⁹
- God’s grace is the act of freeing people to find joy in Him.

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.⁶⁰

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 which arises from ourselves, but ‘through the holy Ghost, which is given to us’ (Romans 5:5).⁶¹

- God’s sovereignty is manifest in overcoming the deadness of our hearts, hearts that only delighted in what never truly satisfies, such that we see and perceive things as they actually are, and not the way our corrupt minds distort them. He sovereignly gives us the eyes to see Christ as glorious and satisfying as He is, and to see sin as repulsive and worthless as it is, so that we run *from* our sin *to* Christ, our true, everlasting joy. Thus, according to Augustine, the Christian experiences God as his *sovereign joy*.

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, sovereign joy. 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.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 26-27 (II.4).

⁶⁰ Augustine, *To Simplicianus*, II.21, quoted in Scott, *His Thought in Context*, 203.

⁶¹ Augustine, “The Spirit and the Letter,” in *The Works of Saint Augustine: Volume 23*, 152 (III.5).

⁶² Augustine, *Confessions*, 170 (IX.1).