

(Men of Whom the World Was Not Worthy) Augustine the Swan Is Not Silent

by John Piper

John Piper explores the profound impact of Augustine's life and thought on Christianity and the importance of seeking God's glory amidst worldly distractions.

Duration: 1:32:06

Scripture: Romans 13:14

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "Faith Renewal"

Description

In the morning, a visitor shared the story of Antony, a monk in Egypt who, upon hearing the gospel, renounced all worldly desires and dedicated himself to a life of poverty, celibacy, and service. This story deeply impacted the speaker, causing him to confront his own struggles with lust and pornography. He felt a strong desire to change and sought guidance from the Bible. As he read a passage from Romans 13, he experienced a profound transformation and found confidence and joy in his faith. The speaker emphasizes the importance of seeking God's work in our lives and teaching others to appreciate the beauty of truth and God's presence.

Transcript

Let's pray. Oh Father, I pray that we mean what we say. I will suffer not to hide Thee, not, I ask, beside Thee.

There is a savage necessity in the Christian life to wage war against the hiddenness of Your glory. Pluck out an eye, if you must, to get to heaven and see God. Cut off a hand, if you must, to wean yourself off lower pleasures and fix yourself on endless ones.

And I pray that You would make warriors of us all, make savages of us, if we must be, in order not to let television or food or internet or the praise of men hide Thee. And I pray that You would use Augustine's life and thought to sharpen our sword. In Jesus' name I pray.

We heard this morning that the unthinkable happened in 410 A.D., namely that Alaric and the gods came against Rome and sacked it. St. Jerome was in Palestine at the time, and he said, if Rome can perish, what can be safe? Well, Rome didn't perish immediately. Sixty-six more years until the last emperor was dethroned by the Germans.

And the shockwaves in that 410 event crossed the Mediterranean very quickly. Augustine was fifty-five years old. In the prime of his ministry, he would go on ministering the Word for another twenty years in Hippo, just southwest across the sea in present-day Algeria, for another twenty years.

But it was shocking, though it wasn't the end yet. And as you heard this morning, it did unleash the city of God, in which his own philosophy of history over against the possible demise of Rome was developed for about twenty years of writing. August 28, 430, he dies.

And just as he's dying, 80,000 vandals, as they were called, were coming across the north of Africa, where they had invaded through Spain, and the city in which he was living and ministering was under siege. In other words, these times in which Augustine lived were tumultuous times, and between the shifting of whole civilizations. In those last months, as he saw the vandals coming, he had heard that two other Catholic bishops had been tortured to death in other cities as they came, as the vandals came.

And when his own elders counseled him with the words of Jesus, flee to another city, he said, Let not one dream of holding our ship so cheaply that the sailors, let alone the captain, should desert her in a time of peril. But strangely, he died four months before the city was overrun and completely sacked by the vandals. And I just want to insert a preliminary parenthetical exhortation to courage.

My friend John Enzer came from Boston to talk about pro-life issues two weeks ago at our church, and he pointed out to me something I'd never noticed before, and I'll point it out to you. In Revelation 21.8, in the list of things that will be passed into the lake of fire, the first sin on the list is cowardice. Take that home, brothers, and open your mouths.

That's a parenthesis. I will not forsake this ship. But the Lord took him.

He had been bishop in Hippo since 396. Five years before that, he had been appointed priest and elder and had preached. So approximately 40 years now, he had been serving this one church in Hippo, shepherding God's little flock there and defending the faith, and had become known all over the empire, in the Christian church anyway, as a God-besotted, biblical, articulate, persuasive defender of the faith against Manicheism and Donatism and Pelagianism.

Those were the three big false teachings as he saw them in his day, and he wrote on all of them. He was an unbelievable controversialist for all the mysticism in him. We'll say more about that later on.

Just before he died, he handed over the reins to Heraclius, his associate, because he was an old man now. He died when he was almost 75, and Heraclius picked up the administrative duties. And on the day when Heraclius was installed as co-adjutor bishop, there was a great ceremony.

And Augustine took his seat in the cathedral, the throne, where he sat to preach. He sat to preach for 40 years. The people stood, and he sat.

I think that would really settle some pastors down to take content seriously instead of motion. It would be really hard for me. I'm glad that's not in the Bible.

Heraclius stood in front of him to preach the sermon at this retirement of their beloved bishop. And overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy, he said, The cricket chirps, the swan is silent. So if you wondered where the title came from, that's where it comes from.

The cricket chirps, the swan is silent. If Heraclius had known what we now know about the next 16 centuries, he wouldn't have said that. Because the swan is not silent today.

He never has been silent for 1600 years, and he was not silent. He had several more years to go when this man was installed, and some of his great work was done right up to the end. The man's influence is simply incalculable, as you know.

Adolf Harnack said that the greatest man the church has possessed between Paul and Luther is Augustine. Now, Harnack was German. He had to say Luther.

But others have said things differently than that. For example, Christian History magazine, without any qualification or hesitation, said, this was written just a few years ago, After Jesus and Paul, Augustine of Hippo is the most influential figure in the history of Christianity. Benjamin Warfield argued in his writings on Augustine that he 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.

He said he had a literary talent second to none in the annals of the church. Then he added, the whole development of Western life in all its phases was powerfully affected by his teaching. Now, one of the most remarkable things about his influence is that it has flowed into remarkably contradictory camps.

So, for example, he is revered as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, father in the Roman Catholic Church. And Warfield said, Augustine gave us the Reformation. Now, that's odd.

He said that, quote, 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. Both sides in the controversy, the Reformers and the Counter-Reformation, appealed on a huge scale to the texts of Augustine. There are unresolved issues in Augustine.

One way of putting it that Warfield did use was, the Reformation was the triumph of Augustine's view of grace over Augustine's view of the church. I don't want to make much of that, but something like that is probably the case because as I read his views on sacraments and baptism, I cannot put them together with some other things that he says, but that's for another time. I'm not expert enough in Augustine to resolve those things.

There are reasons for why Augustine has had such phenomenal impact. This biography here, written by a man named Augustine, although it's written Augustino Trappe, called Saint Augustine, Man, Pastor, and Mystic, where you can find a lot of very personal, this is kind of an anecdotal biography, a lot of personal things which are interesting. I like them as well, as long as I'm showing you books.

Let me just go ahead and show the rest. This is the main one I've leaned on and probably is esteemed as the modern biography that is most authoritative, Peter Brown, Augustine of Hippo. It's a very, very good biography in my judgment.

And, of course, this is his autobiography up to age 32, which are formative years, but the confessions have, I probably in my talk here quote from the confessions more than anything else. And they have this same edition of The City of God in the bookstore, unless they're all gone, but you can check those out. This is a good translation.

I think you should read these in a modern translation. I have this thing about modernizing the Puritans. I don't like that.

I don't like updated English versions of Jonathan Edwards or Owen. But I do like, if you've got to translate from Latin, do it in the contemporary idiom. Don't enshrine anybody's old translation of Augustine.

So I enjoyed reading this one, remembering how I'd read as a 19-year-old at Wheaton the Confessions of Augustine in another kind of English. In this one, Augustino Trappe, he said something very, very good to explain his influence. 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 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. Now, I found that quote accurate and unexaggerated from my exposure to Augustine over the years. So we all must, who undertake to say anything about this man, insert a disclaimer.

Benedict Groeschel has written the most recent that I know of, 1996, the most recent treatment of his works. And he went to Villanova University in his researches where they have the Augustinian Heritage Institute and was overwhelmed that there is a library of works by Augustine. Works on Augustine fill a library.

And then he was exposed to the computer five million word disks that Augustine wrote. And, of course, he inserted his disclaimer. I wish I had jotted down in my readings.

I only remember reading it and I didn't take a note on it that somebody, even in Augustine's own day, said, anybody who claims to have read all of Augustine is a liar. Here's what Groeschel says. I felt like a man beginning to write a guidebook of the Swiss Alps.

After 40 years, I can still meditate on one book of the Confessions. It's divided into 13 books. On one book of the Confessions, during a week-long retreat and come back feeling frustrated that there is still so much more gold to mine in those few pages, I, for one, know that I shall never in this life escape from the Augustinian Alps.

Well, that's true. Nevertheless, people visit the Alps. And so we're going to visit the Alps.

And I just take heart from the fact that one can go to the Alps and spend an hour there and benefit from it and not have exhausted the Alps. So that's where we are. If you ask now, well, suppose I want to spend a little more time in the Alps when you're done, where should I go? Well, I would say, as virtually everybody else would say, start with the Confessions.

If you've never read Augustine's Confessions, you should. David Wells told me at supper last night he assigns this in his class on spiritual classics or classics of the Western heritage or whatever the class is called. And anybody that leaves that book out of spiritual classics would, of course, be committing an error.

Start there. Then the other four big books, famous books are, number one, On Christian Doctrine, which he wrote between 397 and 426. The Enchiridion, On Faith, Hope, and Love, which Warfield says is his most serious attempt to systematize his thought.

On the Trinity, written over another 25-year period, which gave definitive formulation to the Trinity for years. And then The City of God, which he spent about 29 years writing. No, no, no, no, not 29 years.

From 413, I was doing my math wrong. From 413 to 426, 13 years. So let's go on a little short tour here.

I'm very eager to get to my thesis, but I want also to weave it into his life, so I'm torn as to how to proceed, but I'll weave them together the best I can. What I have seen and what I want to preach when we get to it is tremendously important, I believe, for our day. For me personally, it's tremendously important, and I think the Lord is putting together a conference here with what David Wells is saying, what Alistair Begg said this morning, and what I'm about to say that has a coherency about it, though perhaps some apparent tensions in it that will be very good for us to think through.

I titled this, The Power of Pleasure in the Life and Thought of St. Augustine. I might have called it the sovereignty of joy in the life of Augustine, or the place of sovereign joy in the exposition and defense of evangelical Calvinism, or if I wanted to be really at home, I would say it's about the Augustinian roots of Christian hedonism, which in fact it is, and it is a delight to me to find my own tree planted in such deep soil. But let's go to the life first.

Augustine was born November 13, 354. His father, Patrick or Patricius, was a middle-income farmer, not wealthy, scraped together money to give him the best education he could in rhetoric, first in Madalra, 20 miles away from Bagas, where he was born, which is south of Kipo in northern Africa, in Algeria today. Then, between the ages of 17 and 20, he was educated in Carthage.

His father was an unbeliever until the year of his death, and he died when Augustine was 16 years old. His mother, Monica, is very famous because of her relentless prayer for her lecherous son. And I'm not sure that she did the best job she should, rearing him.

He said, 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.

So, poor Monica. She's included in that, as is his father. Then he said particularly about his father, My father took no trouble at all to see how I was growing in your sight, O God, and whether I was chaste or not.

He cared only that I could have a fertile tongue. But he left for Carthage when he was 17, and his mother, waking to the danger evidently, said to him that he should not commit fornication and, above all, not seduce a man's wife. And this is what he 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. He's writing this at age, what's 397, 354 from 397, 43. My real need was for you, my God, who are the food of the soul.

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.

I was pleased with my superior status and swollen with conceit. It was my ambition to be a good speaker for the unhallowed and inane purpose of gratifying human vanity. So, lust, theft, and conceit.

He took a concubine when he was 16 and lived with her for 15 years and had a son by her, Aediodus, which means gift of God. To put his life in a nutshell from that early schooling in Carthage on, he was getting trained in rhetoric to be a teacher and so for 11 years, 19 to 30, he taught rhetoric. First in Carthage, then Rome, then Milan and was basically a school teacher for young, aspiring, well-to-do Roman boys.

And the next 44 years, he was a bishop. So, you could sum his life up to say he spent 11 years as a profligate and 44 years as a celibate. Because once he was cured, he went all the way with Chastity and would never come near a woman.

And women were forbidden from entering the monastery where he lived next door to the bishop's house or to the church. Now, here is an interesting thing. His conversion did not happen nearly as suddenly as it's made out often.

We have to make things simple when we are telling little stories and sermons and whatnot, but I was surprised that this was a very long, drawn-out, agonizing thing. For example, in Carthage, when he was 19 years old, he read for the first time Cicero, specifically the Hortensius. And this had an effect on him, which was a kind of first conversion.

Cicero was a total pagan. No Christ in it. But, he says, it altered my outlook on life.

It changed my prayers to you, O Lord, and provided me with new hopes and aspirations. This is 11 years before his conversion. All my empty dreams suddenly lost their charm.

My heart began to throb with a bewildering passion for wisdom and eternal truth. I began to climb out of the depths into 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 this love that the Hortensius inflamed in me. Now, that sounds really good. But he lived with his concubine, and he was a pagan for another 11 years.

But what had happened was, he experienced by the providence of God, a lifting out of the groveling of lust in Carthage, at least to the level of caring about some truth issues. So, don't begrudge pagan conversions to paganism. Don't begrudge that.

That can be used of the Lord in the university. If you see a guy move out of living with his girlfriend to start reading Plato, rejoice! Don't give him any encouragement that that's salvation. But it might become salvation because it did for Augustine.

Well, he fell in with the Maniches, and I don't want to take you through that long deal of 11 years of trying to understand this dualism and all that. When he was 29, big jump now, he went to Rome. But in Rome, these boys, these students, he did not like.

They were very misbehaving, and so he looked for another place to teach as soon as he could. And in God's providence, he said, the Lord transferred him to Milan, north of Rome, Milan, Italy. And there two things happened.

He discovered the Platonists, and he met Ambrose, the bishop. These are awesome things, as he describes them, because the Platonists were his second conversion. He discovered Plotinus.

Who cares and who knows about Plotinus? Died in 270, a neo-Platonist, recovering the vision of Plato's ideas and forms. Remember from college philosophy classes? And he fell absolutely in love and appropriated this Platonism into his search for wisdom so that it stamped him for the rest of his life. A lot of people write off Augustine today because they just say he's just distilled Christianized Platonism, which I think is a mistake.

And he met Ambrose, this godly, truth-speaking bishop. Peter Brown, this biographer here, says that the discovery of Plato and Plotinus did nothing less than shift the center of gravity of Augustine's spiritual life. He was no longer identified with his god, as in Manichaeism.

This Platonic god that he now met was utterly transcendent. So that's a next stage in his moving toward Christianity. Now you can hear the influence of his Platonism as he diagnoses, in those days, his own condition.

Here's the way he described it. I had my back to the light, and my face was turned toward the things which it illumined. Remember the story of the cave in Plato.

So that my eyes, by which I saw the things which stood in the light, were themselves in the dark. This is a Platonic analysis of his lost condition at that moment. Now here's the final move to closing with Jesus.

Ambrose was 14 years older than Augustine and preached Sunday after Sunday. And he began to go. In fact, he became a catechumen, committed him to nothing.

It was a thing to do. The aristocracy in Milan were all Christian. His mother had arrived on the scene and was trying to finagle a marriage for him so he'd get out of this concubinage with this woman who was below him in social class.

It was just easy to do. So he signed on and started going to church, and this is what he said. In Milan, I found your devoted servant, the Bishop Ambrose.

At that time, his gifted tongue never tired of dispensing the richness of your corn, the joy of your oil, and the sober intoxication. Now, just stop there. This man is brilliant.

The sober intoxication. You just fly over things like that way too fast. If you read, David Wells said, like, he has a hard time getting his students to read this book slow enough.

I had to read, I did not see that until I typed it. Sober intoxication. That's all over the place in Augustine.

Powerful use of language here. One of the things we're going to address now, we will again tonight, we will again tomorrow, is what David Wells said last night about this other worldview over against the therapeutic, psychologized, man-centered worldview. He used the words, I think, clear, winsome, powerful must be this worldview presentation.

Augustine will help you, brothers, as does C.S. Lewis. Anybody who's lasted centuries will help you in this, to find language to commend God. Now, I stopped in the middle of the sentence.

Let's go back. At that time, his gifted tongue never ceased dispensing richness of your corn, oh God, joy of your oil, the sober intoxication of your wine. Unknown to me, it was you who led me to him so that I might knowingly be led by him to you.

That's also typically Augustine. So his Platonism liberated him from a mere quest for wisdom in the manatee heresy of being identified with God in a great dualism in the world to a transcendent God who he suddenly felt scandalized by in the Word made flesh. Utterly un-Platonic.

This is why I said those who think he's just warmed over Platonism are not getting it. Because Platonism undergoes a radical criticism by the Incarnation in Augustine's own life. So Ambrose is preaching and he says, I was all ears to seize upon his 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 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 that was not his conversion. He just knew there's a God out there. He's transcendent and I've got to discover this personal transcendent God this Ambrose is preaching.

That's where he was now. I was astonished, he says, 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 dismay.

With dismay, I plunged again into the things of this world as though I had sensed the fragrance of the fair, but was not able to eat it. Now in that sentence, I want you to notice the phrase, I did not persist in the enjoyment of my God, because right here we begin to see the categories in which Augustine is framing his quest and the interpretation Augustine is going to put upon his conversion and the theology of grace that he draws from it, just like the Apostle Paul put on his own conversion and the theology of grace that grew out of that stunning event on the Damascus Road. He now conceived of his quest as a life in search of a firm, unshakable enjoyment of God.

And that's going to be utterly determinative in his thinking about everything else, including his battle with Pelagianism near the end of his life, which is what I hear David Wells talking about. I'll try to say more about that in a minute. But now it wasn't intellectual anymore what he's being held back by.

There's one thing, sex. So wake up now. One thing is keeping him back, lust.

I was still held firm in the bonds of a woman's love. I began to search for a means of gaining the strength I needed to enjoy you. You see the issue he's shaping for us? Sex enjoyment or you enjoyment.

That's the issue for Augustine. But I could not find this means until I embraced the mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. His mother, who had prayed for him all her life, all his life at least, came to Milan, 385, the spring of 385, began to arrange this marriage for him with a girl who was two years too young to marry.

I assume that puts her at about 14 or something. He's 30 or 31 here. And he is pressured to let this concubine go.

And he sends her away after 15 years, back to Africa, and will never live with her again. Never in five million words does he name her. The woman with whom I had been living was torn from my side as an obstacle to my marriage, which he never consummated.

He never did get married. And this was a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly. She went back to Africa, vowing never to give herself to any other man.

But I was too unhappy, too weak to imitate this example set by a woman. I took another mistress without the sanction of wedlock. Talk about bondage.

You got bondage in your church, in your life? There's hope. There's hope. So the day came.

Let's go to the day. This is the day that everybody knows about. And this day is more complex, too, than I thought it was.

But I don't have time for that complexity. What happened in the morning determined what happened in the afternoon. And all we know about is what happened in the afternoon.

But in a nutshell, in the morning there was a visitor who told a story about Antony, a monk in Egypt. And as the story was being told about this monk in Egypt, who with his disciples had heard of the gospel, had stripped themselves of all concubinage and all sexual lust and all possessions, and sold themselves out to the monastic way of poverty and celibacy and service, and went to Egypt in missionary labors, caused his heart to burn and to smite himself because he was in the bonds of lust, as he heard the story, and hated himself. Hated himself because of these stories that he was telling, that he was hearing from the visitor in the morning.

This is the most important day in his life. It is one of the most important days in church history. 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.

If you don't have time to read it, just read book eight. Just read book eight in the Confessions. There was a small garden attached to the house where we lodged.

I now found myself driven, this is the afternoon now, 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 would, now there it is again, I was beside myself with madness that would bring me sanity.

Sober intoxication, mad sanity. Don't miss this. Don't miss the power of this in your reading and your preaching.

Arrest people. Get people with your language. Labor to find language in the twentieth century worthy of God.

I was frantic, overcome by violent anger with myself for not accepting your will and entering into your covenant. I tore my hair. I hammered my forehead with my fists.

I locked my fingers and hugged my knees. I was held back by mere trifles. He began to see at this point the beauty of chastity.

Now this is the miracle of deliverance. It's the same story that was told in Leadership Magazine eighteen years ago. How many of you read that article? You remember that one? The older guys maybe read it.

You got to see something more powerful, more beautiful, more enjoyable, more delightful, more thrilling, more satisfying than masturbation and the internet and the concubine and the weekend fling. It's just got to ravish you. And it did.

He began to see chastity. Listen to this description. I was 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 forever and ever. That's exactly the way pornography talks. Never again.

Can you say never again to me? And while I stood trembling at the barrier on the other side, I could see chaste beauty of continence 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 now. The battle is down to just two things.

Which is more beautiful? I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears that now streamed from my eyes. In my misery I kept crying and crying. How long shall I go on saying tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment? Some of you are saying that perhaps right now.

All at once, and I may be this for you, all at once the sing-song 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 even 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.

That's what he said. So I hurried back to the place where Elipius was sitting, seized the book of Paul's epistles, opened it, and in silence I read the first passage on which my eyes fell. Not in reveling, in drunkenness, not in lust and wantonness, not in quarrels and rivalries, rather arm yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Spend no more thought on nature and nature's appetites. Romans 13. 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 my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.

Praise God. Now, I want very much to launch into my exposition of this interpretation of his conversion as it gets unfolded in his theology of grace and joy, but I think you should hear the rest of his life quickly. 44 years in a flash, because it's pretty simple.

As most pastors' lives are, we get up, we go to work, we preach, we go to bed, it's a pretty simple life. He was baptized the next Easter, 387, by Ambrose. His mother dies that autumn.

A very happy woman, very happy and ready to go. At age 34 he returns to Africa, goes back to Thagash, his hometown, wants to set up a monastery. He has sworn off marriage, he's sworn off sex.

He's going to be a monastic, literary, philosophic, knower of God, dispenser of truth through whatever means God allows. And it was not meant to be. There's a lot of parallels with Calvin here, if you read the story.

He discovers Thagash is not a very good place for a monastery. It's off the beaten track, and if you're going to have any impact and bring other monks into your monastery, have an influence and amount to be priests in churches, you better get to a big town. So he looked for a town where they already had a bishop, so that he would not be conscripted.

And he chose Hippo, where there was a good, solid bishop named Valerius. And he moved his monastery to Hippo. And almost immediately he miscalculates.

And like Calvin, a thousand years later, he is forced into the priesthood. At the end of his life, here's the way he describes it. He stands up and preaches to his people, A slave may not contradict his Lord.

I came to this city to see a friend whom I thought I might gain for God, that he might live with us in the monastery. I felt secure for the place already had a bishop. I was grabbed.

I was made a priest, and from there I became your bishop. And so like so many people, it seems, who left a mark on the church, he was catapulted out of a life of contemplation into a life of action. He would visit jails to protect prisoners.

He would intervene in criminal disputes, because in Hippo, the bishop was granted civil authority to settle all the civil disputes for those who were members of the church. And he groaned that his mornings were spent doing what Jesus wouldn't do, who made me a, you know, judge over you. And they said, settle accounts, and oh, my brother and I can't figure out this inheritance, and Jesus wouldn't touch it.

Well, Augustine touched it week after week after week, and he groaned like many of us groan under certain aspects that are necessary in the ministry. Forty years of service to this church, biblically saturated priests turned out of his monastery, changed the face of North Africa, vigilant over his personal life, a vegetarian diet, except when the guests came, poverty. When he came to the end of his life, there was no will because there were no possessions.

He held everything in complete commonality. He had no money to will to anybody when he died. He had his own books, and he had his clergy, and he had his monastery.

Those were his legacy to the world. Now, what's the point that I would like to develop my thesis? And here's what it is. R.C. Sproul is right, I think, that the church today is in a Pelagian captivity.

I would add, here's my prescription, I don't know whether he would agree with this, that the cure, let's say a piece of the cure, is for the Reformed community to recover a healthy dose of Augustine's doctrine of sovereign joy. My assumption is that too much Reformed thinking and preaching and worship in our day has not penetrated to the root of how grace actually triumphs through joy in believers' lives. And therefore, our Reformed thinking and writing and preaching and worshiping is only half Augustinian and half biblical and half beautiful.

It isn't beautiful to people. Let me try to unpack that. Pelagius was a British monk who lived in Rome.

He was there when it was sacked, he had to leave. He taught, though grace may facilitate the achieving of righteousness, it is not necessary to that end. Grace is not necessary to making right choices.

He did not believe in the doctrine of original sin, and he believed that human nature was at its core irreducibly good and we are able to do everything we are commanded to do. And therefore, Pelagius and Augustine were on a collision course because when he read the Confessions, this sentence infuriated him. 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. Well, Pelagius went ballistic at this sentence because it was an assault on human goodness, it was an assault on the freedom of the will. In his judgment, it was therefore an assault on responsibility and the whole moral fabric of the world would unravel if Augustine had his way in this assessment of his own conversion and experience with God.

Well, now Augustine had not come to this conviction quickly, namely that anything good he does is a gift from God. He had not arrived there quickly. I walked into a bookstore at Hope College and saw the book by Augustine on the freedom of the will.

I said, Oh good, I've got a lecture on this in a year. So I picked it up and started reading it. I said, Howie, what is this? I don't want a lecture on this.

He wrote that book four years after his conversion and radically changed his mind from what that book said. So be careful claiming what Augustine thinks about this or that. When he wrote his confessions, he had settled the matter differently and deeply and unchangeably in his own mind.

Now, this paragraph that I'm about to read here, in my judgment, for me and my theology and my ministry and my life, is the most important paragraph I've ever read in Augustine. Here it is. During all those years, 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. You drove them from me and you took their place.

You who are sweeter than all pleasure, though not to the 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.

Oh Lord, my God, my light, my wealth, my salvation. There's a theology in that quote. It's called Christian hedonism.

I call it Christian hedonism. Nobody else calls it that. And you don't have to call it Christian hedonism, but I hope you believe it.

You drove them from me. You are the true, the sovereign joy. There's the missing piece in contemporary Reformed preaching.

Augustine's understanding of grace is this. Grace is God's giving us sovereign joy in God that triumphs over the joy of sin. That's grace in the thought of Augustine.

I'll say it again. Grace is God's giving us a sovereign joy in God that triumphs over the joy in sin. In other words, God works deep in the human heart to transform the springs of joy so that we love God more than we love sex or anything else.

Now Mark, here's another problem with contemporary American Christianity. Loving God in Augustine's mind is never reduced to deeds of obedience or acts of willpower. How common that is in our day.

Love is commanded so it can't be an emotion. Love is an act of will. Love is obedience to God.

Oh, for Augustine in our day. Here's his definition of the love of God. I call charity the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for his own sake and the enjoyment of oneself and one's neighbor for the sake of God.

Joy is the essence of love. And for American Christianity, it's a caboose. No wonder our Reformed thinking and preaching is unappealing.

We don't get grace. Grace is the giving of a sovereign joy that triumphs over all competitors. Loving God, for Augustine, is always conceived essentially as delighting in God above all things and in other things for the sake of God.

He loves thee too little, O God, who loves anything together with thee which he loves not for thy sake. That is a revolutionary sentence. I read that years ago, and it just blew me away.

I like my wife. She's here somewhere. I like Canada.

I could idolize my family. My four boys are a treasure to me. And better that they die than that I love them more than God or love them for any reason but for God's sake.

That's Augustinianism at its core. Now, Augustine analyzed his own motives down to the root. He saw this as a universal.

Every man, he said, that's a quote. This is not John Piper. This is Augustine.

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 and that he prefers it to all other things. Whoever, in fact, desires other things, desires them for this end. And this desire, this delight, this longing for happiness governs the will.

Now, here's the catch. The delight that the will always follows we do not determine. And Pelagius smelled it and hated it.

Here's the quote from Augustine. 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 will delight him will turn up? Or that he will delight in what does turn 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. In other words, converting, saving grace is God's giving delight in God, holiness,

Christ, Scripture, the beauty of holiness and glory.

Suddenly, you see and love and cherish and revel and long for them. Where'd that come from? Now the will will move with it. But before that's given, the will's going back to the Internet and the magazine and the concubine and the television and the family.

He concludes this way. 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 take delight in and feel a love for it, he neither does his duty nor sets about it nor lives rightly.

What more could I ask from Augustine? Now in order that such a course... This is still Augustine. Now in order that such a course may engage our affections, God's love is shed abroad in our heart, not through the free will which arises from ourselves, but through the Holy Ghost which is given to us. He wrote to Simplician at the end of his life, 427, three years before the end of his life, in answering this question about free will, in answering this question, I have tried hard to maintain the free choice of the human will, but the grace of God.

He was asked by Paulinus. Now picture this. He's 72.

He's supposed to retire at 65. You don't take on Pelagius at 70, which he did. It was the last battle he fought.

You give that to younger people. That's your job. But he did.

And Paulinus, his friend, said, Augustine, why? You're an old man. Lay it down. That's my paraphrase.

But here's a non-paraphrase answer quoted from Augustine. Why? 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? Now what makes that answer so compelling and so powerful is that the healing, stirring, helping, enabling grace, I call it future grace, is the giving of a compelling, triumphant joy.

Grace governs life, even the life of a 70-year-old man, by giving a supreme joy in the supremacy of God and His glory and His sufficiency and His beauty and His treasure which triumphs over all other things. And when you see a Pelagius coming along undermining that grace and that gift, even at 70, you go to battle. This is why the concept of Christian freedom is so radically different from Augustine.

Get this now. This is just another piece that blows your mind away and shows you how far our whole discussion today is from where He was. Oh, how we need to bathe ourselves in the old people.

We are fish swimming in alien waters and we can't imagine air from 1600 years ago. Listen to this. Augustine said, Christian freedom is not the freedom to choose.

It's the transcendence of choice. Meaning, it is no ideal for Augustine to stand with Pelagius in sovereign, autonomous equilibrium between good and evil and be able to go this way or that way. Augustine regards that as the disintegration of the will.

Freedom is when we are so ravished in the truth that our minds perceive it holy for what it is and our delights and affections embrace it so holy for what it is. There is no choice left. That's freedom.

That's heaven. That's where we're going. To argue that we should all try to cultivate a philosophy and a theology which will help people stand in sovereign, autonomous equilibrium with their supposed free will between good and evil as though that is a noble human thing.

Let us say it is simply not Augustinian. You can draw your own judgments about whether it's biblical or not and you should right now simply say if you have any doubts about this, he's not quoting much scripture, and that's right, I'm not. I'm giving you this man's great vision.

I have written a few things about the scriptures to try to give grounding to these things, but Augustine does well. So, life's quest, what is it? What's life all about now? If this is grace, if this is the sovereignty of grace flowing through sovereign joy liberating us from the power of alternative gods and pleasures, what is life all about? This is his answer, quote, The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire. The whole life of a good Christian is a holy desire.

The key to Christian living is passion, desire, hunger, longing. So, one of the reasons these things are incomprehensible in our churches is that our people have so shriveled in their capacity to feel desire that a talk like this absolutely makes no sense. It's a foreign language.

Listen to the way he describes it. It was true in his own day, so don't feel hopeless about the 20th century or 21st. He said, The soul of men shall hope under the shadow of thy wings.

They shall be made drunk with the fullness of thy house and of the torrents of thy pleasures. This is Augustine. The torrents of thy pleasures thou wilt give them to drink.

For in thee is the fountain of life and in thy light do we see light. Give me, this is still a quote, Give me a man in love. He knows what I mean.

Give me one who yearns. Give me one who's hungry. Give me one far away in the desert who's thirsty and sighs for the spring of the eternal country.

Give me that sort of man. He knows what I mean. But if I speak to cold men, he just does not know what I am talking about.

The remedy for this condition of cold men, cold Reformed men, or cold Arminian men or women, is number one, prayer and utter dependence upon God, and two, displaying God himself more infinitely desirable than all other things in creation to our people. It is not an accident that every sentence in this book is addressed to God. This is a prayer.

Did you know that? The confessions are a prayer. Every sentence is to you, O Lord. 350 pages of prayer.

He told his autobiography to God. Why? It stands on almost every page. I am utterly dependent in everything on you.

That's what this book symbolizes. It is a prayer because he is totally and utterly dependent on God for the joy which will liberate him from the bondage of sex, which was his downfall until he was 32 years old. His mother, of course, is famous for praying for him when he wasn't praying for himself.

O Lord, that I may love you freely, for I can find nothing more precious. Turn not away your face from me, that I may find what I seek. Turn not aside in your anger from your servant, lest in seeking you I run towards something else.

You see, I feel this so deeply, don't you? I get up in the morning and there is in me prone to wander. Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love. And therefore, what do you do? You cry out in prayer, Don't let me go! Don't let television get the upper hand.

Don't let food get the upper hand. Don't let sex get the upper hand. Bind me to you, O God, with a sovereign joy.

Anything else is legalism. There are a lot of bound up people in the world, preaching. A lot of bound up reformed people getting a lot of bound up reformed Calvinist lemon.

Because they don't understand that the bondage is released by a sovereign joy. Which overcomes everything else. And the last thing I said was displaying God.

This is a challenge to us, brothers. A challenge. Do you want souls? You want conversions, I mean real conversions.

Listen to Augustine. If you delight in souls, love them in God, draw as many with you to Him as you can. You yourself, O God, are their joy.

Happiness is to rejoice in you and for you and because of you. This is true happiness and there is no other. The only evangelist who is going to produce this kind of Christian is an evangelist who loves God like this.

And then loves people in God. So we got to find words, brothers. And let me read you some words from Augustine.

I don't have a pastor except my staff who pastors me and loves me. But there's no older man that I can go to when I have a... I'm the oldest guy on the staff now. It used to be.

I'm three days older than David Livedly. So I go to David. And we have a good brotherly relationship.

I have to go to these guys. I have to go to these guys. Augustine, Edwards, Luther, Calvin.

I have to because the stuff that's being written about God, by and large today, doesn't come near to what I'm about to read you. So listen. This is what we have to do.

What do I love when I love my God? Not the sweet melody of harmony in 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 the sound that never dies away. When it breathes the fragrance that is not born 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 served by fulfillment of desire. This is what I love when I love my God.

You are ever active. You always are 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 but you 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.

Is that a mandate to preach or what? If it's true as R.C. Sproul says that 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 said we need an Augustine. This is a quote from the Table Talk.

We need an Augustine or a Lutheran to speak to us anew lest the light of God's grace not only be overshadowed but be obliterated. And I say, yes, but we also need tens of thousands of ordinary pastors like you and me who are ravished with the extraordinary sovereignty of joy in God. We need to rediscover Augustine's peculiar slant.

I believe a very biblical slant on grace. Grace is the free gift of sovereign joy in God that triumphs over and breaks the bondage of sin in our lives and in our people's lives. We need to rethink Reformed soteriology so that every limb and every branch in this tree is coursing with the sap of Augustinian delight.

We need to understand and make clear that total depravity is not just badness. It's deadness to joy. It's blindness to beauty.

We need to see that unconditional election means that the completeness of our joy in Jesus was planned for us before the foundation of the world. We need to see that limited atonement is the assurance that is indestructible, that joy in God will infallibly, let me say it again, that Christ's infallible work on the cross will secure joy for us infallibly forever. It will not be taken away.

We need to see that irresistible grace is commitment and power and love that God has towards us to be sure that we will not stay in the bondage of suicidal pleasures. Irresistible grace is God's way of saying, I have something better for you. Can we preach it that way? Why does it have to become so controversial that call on my free will instead? Well, who cares if you've got joy on the other side, infinite and eternal, absolutely ravishing forever and ever and ever.

And we need to say that perseverance of the saints is the almighty work of God through all the affliction and suffering of the ministry so that we will not be lost to an inheritance of pleasures at God's right hand. That's the missing note, I think. Why is it missing? This is my closing question to you.

It's missing, is it missing? Because pastors have not experienced it. I mean, you will not go home on Sunday and preach these things unless it happens to you. Can we say these words? 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.

Oh Lord, my God, my light, my wealth, and my salvation. Or are we in bondage to television, food, sleep, sex, money, human praise? Just like everybody. If so, then let us repent and fix our faces like flint toward the word of God with the prayer, Oh Lord, open my eyes to the sovereign sight that in your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Father, I pray that you will not just instruct us, but awaken us. The need is so great in our hearts, in pastors' hearts. They can't preach this if they don't taste it.

God, we're desperately, desperately dependent on you. This is what Augustine discovered. He could not create joy.

You did. Would you do it again in these hours together and for a lifetime and in our people for the sake of the nations and the glory of your name? I pray through Christ. Amen.

We have about seven minutes for questions. Yeah. The question is, in Book 10, this is devastating.

He walks through the senses, the eyes, the ears, the taste, sexuality, asking whether it is possible to experience joy in any of those without becoming idolatrous. And he is incredibly suspicious of music in church. I wish I got big circles around it somewhere, but he does, thankfully, come out by saying, for now, and tentatively, I think it's probably permissible to have music in church.

It's very tentative whether music should be allowed in church for Augustine. I would say that let us be biblical and not Augustinian. The Psalms do virtually reverberate with music.

So I would have to toss Psalm 150 out of my Bible or do some kind of dispensational thing that says the New Testament rejects the Psalms at that point. I think most people say that. I'm not going to go that direction, and therefore I will not renounce music.

However, the balance to strike is to create an awareness in our people that there is an infinite qualitative difference between spiritual delight in God and the good feelings we get from a good tune. And that is frightening, because I think that there are thousands of churches that have never even posed that question, and if they've posed it, haven't made the distinction, and therefore are counting as engagement with God through spiritual affections what is in fact what Edwards would call the moving of animal spirits and fluids. Now, I personally like to have my fluids moved, and therefore I run a great risk here and am working with Chuck all the time, our worship leaders and our staff, just saying this is the danger.

Let us seek not to avoid good tunes that we all like, but rather teach our people to with the eye and the ear of the heart to hear the music of truth and beauty in God. And there's no--I can't give you four ways to do that. That's a miracle, that's regeneration, that's sanctification, that's God's work.

I can describe it in words, but I can't make it happen. And we need to point it out so that our people will cry out for it. They'll come in, they'll sit down in these pews next Sunday, and they'll have an awareness.

That's a beautiful prelude. Oops, what am I supposed to do with that prelude? I am supposed to let it be a vehicle by which my mind is drawn up to God who created those patterns, and therefore what a God it must be who has created this. There's a--I don't have it in here, I don't think, but there's a quote from his seeing of the ocean.

Yeah, yeah, here. Just use the ocean here as music. There is a grandeur of the spectacle of the sea itself as it slips on and off its many colors like robes, and now is all shades of green, now purple, now sky blue, and all these are mere consolations for us unhappy, punished men.

They are not the rewards of the blessed. What can these be like, the rewards of the blessed, then, if such things here are so many, so great, and of such a quality? That's the way to handle beauty. If these things here are so great and so wonderful.

He even praised the intellect of pagans. He said if pagans can rise so high with their intellect and cause us to stand in awe of the intellect with which they defend their heresies, should we not marvel at the God who created them? So, he did have a place for all the senses and all of the intellect.

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