

Augustine (354-430): Known as **the theologian of GRACE**; **Ephesians 2: 8 & 9:** *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

A brief overview of his life. Born North Africa in Thagaste near Hippo, now in Algeria. Brought up Christian by believing mother and pagan father. Went to Carthage (in Tunisia) aged 16 to complete education in Law. Aged 21 became interested in Philosophy from reading Cicero's *Hortensius*. This altered his outlook on life, changed his prayers, exalted his quest for wisdom and truth above mere physical pleasure. However, pleasure and sex dominated his life until his conversion, which was nine years ahead. In those nine years he was captured by dualistic teaching of Manicheanism. Mani, Iranian/Persian, light & darkness (matter); Gnosticism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, plus. Offered Professorship in Milan; influenced by Neo-Platonism and the preaching of St Ambrose (339-397), Bishop of Milan. In severe inner conflict renounced unorthodox beliefs and baptised, 387. Returned to Africa and formed community; 391 ordained priest as invading Vandals besieging Hippo (Annaba, Algeria). Much of his vast writings survive; hundreds of books, letters, sermons. Two of his longest books: *Confessions* and *City of God*, made lasting influence on theology, psychology and political philosophy of the West. He died as returning Vandals besieged Hippo in 430. *Augustinianism enshrines the essence of the gospel and doctrines of the grace of God, the great strength of the church since the Reformation* (John Legg).

You made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.

CHILDHOOD: Augustine's mother became a Christian when a servant called her a drunkard. Convicted of sin she became a believer; later married a pagan, Patricius; their two sons not baptised. Augustine followed his father, a bad influence. (From *Confessions*): *Who can recall to me the sins I committed as a baby? For in your sight no man is free from sin, not even a child who had lived only one day on earth. Who can show me what my sins were?* Lured into fruitless pastimes, troublesome to people he set out to please; lied to tutors, masters, parents; stole from larder and table from greed or to swap toys with others; cheated in games from vain desire to win; bitter quarrels and lost his temper with any who cheated him. *Can this be childhood innocence?* *But my sin was that I looked for pleasure, beauty and truth not in Him but in myself and His*

other creatures, and the search led me instead to pain, confusion and error.

ADOLESCENCE: *As I grew to manhood I was inflamed with desire for a surfeit of hell's pleasures ... I ran wild with lust. In your eyes I was foul to the core, yet I was pleased with my own condition and anxious to be pleasing in the eyes of men ... Love and lust together seethed within me ... I strayed still farther from you and you did not restrain me. I was tossed and spilled, floundering in the broiling sea of my fornication, and you said no word. How long was it before I learned you were my true joy? **The pear tree;** I was willing to steal and steal I did; no wish to enjoy the things I coveted, but only to enjoy theft itself and the sin. The evil within me was foul, but I loved it. No sooner had I picked them than I threw them away, and tasted nothing in them but my own sin, which I relished and enjoyed; I loved evil even if it served no purpose.*

PLEASURE: *Carthage; where I found myself in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust. I had not yet fallen in love, but I was in love with the idea; look around for some object for my love; rank depravity. **The Theatre;** plays reflected my own unhappy plight and were tinder to my fire; in those unhappy days I enjoyed the pangs of sorrow. Yet all the while, far above, your mercy hovered faithfully about me. - It was my ambition to be a good speaker; **Cicero,** Roman statesman, lawyer and skeptic philosopher who wrote on rhetoric, philosophy and politics. Longings for God. **The Manichees;** sensualists, astronomy in theology, glib tongues, confusion, truth claimed but no truth, dazzling fantasies, illusions where the eye deceives the mind. I gulped down this food, because I thought that it was you; it was not You but an empty sham.*

TEACHER: *From my nineteenth to twenty-eighth year, I was led astray and led others astray in my turn. In public we were cocksure, in private superstitious,*

and everywhere void and empty. I taught public speaking; love of money gained the better of me; lived with a mistress, son Adeodatus; interest in astrology. Where was I when I looked for you? You were there before my eyes, but I had deserted even my own self. I could not find myself. Much less find you (aged 29). Manichean bishop Faustus came to Carthage; a great decoy of the devil and many people trapped by his charming manner of speech. - His Mother kept praying for him. Rome: sailed secretly at night to deceive his mother; she was wild with grief. His illness; recovered to teach literature & public speaking.

SAINT AMBROSE: *Monica arrives in Milan: [start of conviction] Bishop Ambrose taught doctrine of salvation. Augustine realises his ideas of Christian doctrine were wrong. My soul was in a state of misery and you probed its wound to the quick, pricking it on to turn to you to be healed. My misery was complete, and I remember how you made me realise how utterly wretched I was. I was trying to find the origin of evil but was quite blind to the evil in my own method of research. He begins to read Paul's Epistles. My inner self was a house divided against itself. I knew the evil that was in me, but the good that was soon to be born in me I did not know. I was at odds with myself; throwing myself into confusion.*

CONVERSION: *I flung myself down beneath a fig tree and gave way to the tears which now streamed from my eyes. I felt I was still the captive of my sins, and in my misery I kept crying, 'How long shall I go on saying, "tomorrow"? Why not now? Why not make an end of my ugly sins at this moment? I was asking myself these questions, weeping all the while with the most bitter sorrow in my heart, when all at once I heard the singing voice of a child in a nearby house. Again it repeated the refrain, 'Take it and read, take it and read.' 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; Romans 13: 13 & 14; Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarrelling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires. I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. For in an instant, as I came to the end of the sentence, it was as though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled. Then we went in and told my mother, who was overjoyed. You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith. At Easter the following year he returned to Milan and was baptised with his son *Adeodatus* and friend Alypius. His Mother died; he wrote against Manichaeism; ordained four years later and Bishop of Hippo aged 41. A Bishop, pastor; not an academic.

Controversy with schismatic **Donatists**, after its leader **Donatus**, elected Bishop of Carthage in 313 AD. Regarded themselves as the true church and believed that Clergy must be without fault to lead in prayer and sacraments.

PELAGIUS from Britain, denied the sovereignty of God and original sin. In his theology of free will, Adam's sin affected only himself; therefore, we are born innocent without sin, meaning that human nature is basically good so we can live and please God. Salvation through imitating example of Christ; therefore Works. We can cooperate with God for salvation. Pelagius did refer to the grace of God but, by that, he meant external influences like the teaching and moral example of Jesus.

Augustine's biographer, Peter Brown: "Pelagianism had appealed to a universal theme: the need of the individual to define himself, and to feel free to create his own values in the midst of the conventional, second-rate life of society. In Rome, the weight of convention was particularly oppressive. The families, whose members Pelagius addressed, had lapsed gradually into Christianity by mixed-marriages and politic conformity. This meant that the conventional 'good

man' of pagan Rome had quite unthinkingly become the conventional 'good Christian' of the fifth century."¹

Augustine wrote in his; *Answer to the Pelagians*; 'Free will is capable only of sinning, if the way of truth remains hidden. And when what we should do and the goal we should strive for begins to be clear, unless we find delight in it and love it, we do not act, do not begin, do not live good lives. But so that we may love it, "the love of God" is poured out "in our hearts," not by free will which comes from ourselves, but "by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 5:5).' **AUGUSTINE**: believed in the total sovereignty of God, genuine human responsibility and freedom at same time. **John 15: 5: *apart from Me you can do nothing***. He knew from Scripture and his own experience, the enslavement of sin; his inability of reform himself or turn to Christ by self-effort or freedom of choice. Only the grace of God could free him and in God's sovereign time he realised that **Grace** is God's unmerited gift of transformation; justification by God's grace. Realised that Romans 7 refers to the believer not a person under law prior to grace. We can never satisfy the demands of God's Holy law in ourselves. God's enabling him to stand firm prevented a theological landslide, an abandonment of the gospel of the grace of God. **Theologian of GRACE**.

The Oxford scholar Stanley Rosenberg has written: 'Augustine authored ninety-three books (all but one of which are extant). He was an extensive correspondent (299 letters are extant) and was foremost a preacher. It has been estimated that he delivered between 8,000 and 10,000 sermons, many of which were recorded at the time by *notarii*, or stenographers, and some of which he dictated for distribution. Preaching occurred on Saturdays as well as Sundays and even daily during Lent and the week following Easter. Of these sermons we have over a thousand still available'.²

For Augustine, redemption is possible only as a divine gift. Only the living God initiates the process of salvation, not men or women.

From the **Confessions**: *Your works proclaim your glory, and because of this we love you; and it is in our love for you that they proclaim your glory ... They have their beginning and their end in time, their rising and their setting, their progress and decline, their beauty and defect ... But then you began to enact in*

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo, A Biography*, Faber and Faber, London, 1967, 346.

² Stanley P. Rosenberg, 'Interpreting Atonement in Augustine's Preaching,' in *The Glory of the Atonement*, Edited by Charles E Hill & Frank A James 111, IVP, 2004, 221-238.

time all that you had predestined in eternity, for it was your purpose to reveal what had been hidden and to introduce order where disorder reigned. For we were overwhelmed by our sins; we had fallen away from you into the depths of darkness, and your good Spirit was moving over us, ready to bring help when the time was due.