

# Augustine – Sovereign Grace Theologian

## His Early Life:

- 1) Aurelius Augustinus (Augustine) was born on November 13<sup>th</sup>, in 354 AD in Tagaste, a small town in North Africa near the city of Hippo, which is in present day Algeria. His father's name was Patricius, an unbeliever whose primary concern for his son was that he should excel in intellectual matters that would lead to fame and fortune. His mother, Monica, on the other hand was a pious, godly woman who spent most of his early years grieving over the godless life that her son lived. So much, and so long did she pray and weep over his lost condition that he later became known as the "son of tears". Her constant love and concern for his spiritual wellbeing was probably the deepest religious influence in Augustine's life.
- 2) Augustine was an exceptionally gifted student. His father arranged for him to study law in the city of Carthage and it was there that the temptations of life led his heart to pursue all forms of godlessness and he became completely ensnared by the vanities of the world. At the age of 17, the same year that his father died, while studying in Carthage, he began to live with a woman without marrying her, and a year later, fathered a son by her named Adeodatus (meaning "Given by God").
- 3) Having finished his studies in Carthage, he moved back to his birthplace in 376 AD to teach grammar. A short time later he returned to Carthage to teach Rhetoric. In 382 AD he moved to Rome with his mistress and son to seek employment as a teacher. He did not tell his mother that he was going to Rome because of the fact that she had prayed especially that her son might not be allowed to leave Africa for Italy because she feared that the temptations to sin might be even greater there than it was in Carthage. In God's providence, however, though she feared the worst, it would be here that Augustine would come to know the Lord.
- 4) All this time, Augustine drifted from one heresy to another. First he embraced the Manichaean error, which taught that there are two eternal and independent principles in the world: Light or the good god, and darkness or the evil god. These two principles, they taught, are in eternal conflict with one another and the final outcome will forever be undetermined.
- 5) From there he embraced astrology, with all of its vain and empty superstitions. From astrology, he drifted into Skepticism, a philosophy which is nothing more than an intellectual shrug of the shoulders, believing that it is never possible to know what is true and what is false or what is right and what is wrong.

## His Conversion:

- 1) While in Rome, Augustine taught Rhetoric for just a short time and then moved to Milan. It was in Milan that he became acquainted with Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan, a godly man who was a powerful preacher. Augustine was initially drawn to hear him more because of his eloquence as a speaker than because of the preaching of the Gospel. In time however, Ambrose's powerful sermons began making an impression on the heart of Augustine. While in Milan, his mother came to live with him, and the Lord again used her godly example coupled with the truth from God's Word to make inroads into his heart and mind, Augustine began to struggle deeply in his own soul with regard to the matters of sin and righteousness and judgment to come. It was this great struggle that Augustine experienced by which he was brought to understand that the grace of God which delivers from sin is sovereign and irresistible. It overcomes and defeats our every resistance to it, accomplishing a supernatural work in the heart and life of the sinner.
- 2) Finally, Augustine wrote concerning his conversion, that one day, torn by violent struggles, and feeling more deeply than ever his sinfulness and need of salvation, he opened the scriptures to Romans 13 and read there in verses 13-14, "Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof." Augustine continued, "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 faith flooded into my heart, and all the darkness of

doubt was dispelled.”

3) Augustine was converted in the summer of 386 AD. He immediately told his mother of his conversion, the news of which turned her mourning for her son into joy. He ended the sinful relationship with his mistress and requested to be baptized by Ambrose, which he did that same year.

4) Shortly after his conversion, Augustine left Milan to return to Africa. While making the journey back to Africa, his mother, accompanying him, died in his arms at the port on the River Tiber. The following year, his son Adeodatus died as well at the age of 18.

5) In 396 AD, Augustine was ordained Bishop of Hippo Regis, where he spent the rest of his life pastoring and writing.

#### **His Life's Work:**

1) In addition to his pastoral work, Augustine is best known for his many writings, which have been of much benefit to the church throughout history. His book “Confessions”, one of his most famous works, describes the way that the Lord led him out of sin and doubt into grace and truth.

2) The second notable work was entitled “The City of God”, which explained the fall of Rome and included a Christian philosophy of history and some of Augustine's beliefs regarding sovereign predestination.

3) His third book, “On the Trinity”, is the clearest exposition on the doctrine of the Trinity prior to the writings of John Calvin. In it he taught the full equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and the relationship that the Holy Spirit has in relation to the Father and the Son.

4) His influence was especially felt in the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius was a British monk who lived in Rome and caused a great deal of theological controversy in Augustine's time by teaching false doctrine. Pelagius denied original sin and believed that Adam's sin did not affect the entire human race. He claimed that man is not born sinful, but is able to do all that God requires of him, if he only wills to do so. Pelagius taught that the ability to be saved, is found in the lost sinners heart if he will but use it. He denied the necessity for a “birth from above”, for an inward work of the Holy Spirit, and for the intervention of the unmerited grace of God. For Augustine, the teachings of Pelagius contradicted both the clear teaching of scripture, as well as his own religious experience. Augustine taught sovereign predestination, limited atonement, total depravity, imputed guilt, and salvation by the sovereign work of grace in the heart of the elect. Single handedly, he laid the whole foundation for a biblical anthropology ( the nature origin and destiny of mankind) and soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). Because of this he was for centuries the most influential theologian of the church.

5) Calvin, in his Institutes, often appealed to Augustine in a conscious effort to point out that he stood in the tradition of the Bishop of Hippo.

#### **His Death:**

1) As he lay on his death bed, Augustine asked that the Penitential Psalms be written on the wall so that they might constantly be before him that they might be read at will. He died on August 28, 430 AD at the age of 75, while the city of Hippo was surrounded by a barbarian tribe from Europe called the “Vandals”. A few months following his death, the city fell to the invaders and it was utterly destroyed.

2) Only the cathedral and Augustine's library, escaped the destruction that was brought upon the city.

3) The truth that Augustine held dear and staunchly defended could be summed up in this short statement written by himself, “Thou hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless till it rest in thee.”