



Teaching Augustine with Dr. Junius Johnson

Lecture 2: Augustine's *Confessions*, Part I

Outline:

“Confession leads to healing and forgiveness because it constrains the heart to humility and submission...Facing our sins and laying them bare before God begins to work a change in us: we move towards the true vision of ourselves...”

In this lecture, Dr. Junius Johnson takes students on Augustine’s journey through sin, intellectual struggle, and eventual conversion. Augustine’s story provides a timeless model for self-examination, confession, and faith.

Introduction to The Confessions

- **Overview:** Augustine’s *Confessions* is a pioneering spiritual autobiography.
 - It offers insights into late 4th-century Roman life and Christianity.
 - The title refers to religious confessions, not legal ones—rooted in the Christian tradition of acknowledging sins to seek healing and forgiveness.
- **Purpose of Confession:**
 - Augustine emphasizes humility and submission to God through confession.
 - Confession brings healing, honesty, and aligns oneself with God's judgment.

Augustine’s Motivation for Writing

- **Public Confession:** While public confessions were common in Augustine’s time, writing and publishing one was unusual.
 - Augustine’s sins (debauchery and his adherence to Manichaeism) were well known, particularly his vocal anti-Christian stance.



- **Pastoral Goal:** Augustine wanted to demonstrate *how* to confess, stressing the need for deep, relentless self-examination, avoiding self-justification.
 - He disarmed criticism by humility.
 - He demonstrated that a good confession is directed at one's particular sins.

Key Themes and Passages from Books I-VII

- **Opening: Praise of God** (Books I-II)
 - Augustine contrasts God's greatness with human frailty.
 - Early reflections on infancy suggest that even childhood desires exhibit selfishness.
- **Struggles in School** (Book I)
 - Augustine's reluctance to study mirrors the struggles many students face in education.
 - This section opens discussions on how educators influence students.
- **The Pear Incident** (Book II, Chadwick p. 29)
 - Augustine's theft of pears, symbolizing doing evil for evil's sake, contrasts traditional philosophical views (eg. Plato, Aristotle) that evil is chosen under the guise of good.
- **Monica's Hope** (Book III, Chadwick pp. 49-51)
 - Augustine's mother, Monica, exemplifies unwavering faithfulness and persistence.
 - She prayed consistently and tearfully for Augustine's conversion during his years of wandering in faith and doctrine.
 - Despite Augustine's early reproach for her focus on his worldly success, her prayers and faith eventually influenced him positively.
 - Book III describes Monica's vision/dream that assured her of Augustine's future conversion and strengthened her resolve to pray for him.
- **The Death of a Friend** (Book IV, Chadwick pp. 56-60)
 - Explores grief, self-pity, and the psychology of misery, particularly Augustine's desire to dwell in his sadness.
- **Theological Explorations** (Book VII)
 - Augustine wrestles with theological questions: immutability of God, the non-existence of evil, the relation of the spiritual to the material, the divinity of Christ, and grace.



- These questions frame the journey toward intellectual and spiritual clarity where the outcome is not dictated dogmatically.

Significance for Students

- **Support for students with philosophical struggles:**
 - Augustine's *Confessions* provides a model for those grappling with issues like the problem of evil or the divinity of Christ.
 - It emphasizes that questioning is part of God's providential work, not something that must be resolved solely through philosophical argumentation.
- **Model for engaging unbelievers:**
 - Augustine's journey can be presented as a way to understand unbelievers who struggle with the intellectual demands of faith.
 - This approach fosters empathy, making students more sympathetic and helping them engage in deeper, more relational witness.