



# Patristics and Christian Learning

with Dr. Jordan Wood

## Lecture 7: Christ the Inner Teacher: Augustine on Curiosity and Truth

### Outline:

Christ the Inner Teacher: Augustine on Curiosity and Truth

- Augustine was a rhetorical genius. He denigrates his own education, brilliantly. He enjoyed learning, but he failed to receive it as a gift from God. This led him to boast about his own intellect. This is the vice called *Curiositas*, lust of the eyes/mind (I John 2:16).
- Curiosity is the very temptation of human learning.
- Four different types of curiosity:
  - Monstrous sights
  - Magic
  - The pursuit of physics, learning about nature:
    - People just crave the experience, the mere spectacle.
    - Standing foolishly gaping at a mere spectacle without any intention of going beyond the surface to find the source is what Augustine has a problem.
    - Two reasons why curiosity becomes a vice:
      - It becomes pride from mastery.
      - One becomes prideful by forgetting the source of the learning. This is a forgetting of God.
- *On Christian Teaching*, Augustine
  - To enjoy something is to hold fast to something in love for its own sake.
  - To use something is to apply what it is to the purpose of it being loved. Apply it to a greater purpose, something worthy of true love.
  - To misuse or abuse something is to direct it to the wrong thing or to not direct it at all to anything beyond itself.
  - Derive eternal and spiritual value from corporeal and temporal things.
  - Our lives are beset with temptations to stop and gawk. It is a temptation to delight in what is good but not refer it to the Good.
  - We often treat many things as just things, when everything ought to be referred back to God.
  - If we simply enjoy things, we end up missing their true joy (paradox).
  - If you discern something good in the pursuit of knowledge, use the joy to refer those things back to God. That joy will imbue the thing that is delightful with true delight.



- Augustine constantly counsels us to go back into ourselves and find the source of our searches rather than the searches themselves.
- “You created us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they come to rest in you.” Augustine, *Confessions*.
- **You can mistake your own self for a mere thing. Your own strivings have a source, and that source, that person within you already is Christ, the teacher.**
- Two key implications for education and learning:
  - **This perspective of Augustine’s redeems learning because it acknowledges it as a search for God who resides in the depths of our study.**
  - **This relieves the anxiety or nervousness about whether or not things are Christian enough. Are we judging it based on whether or not the thing can give us an opportunity to become a sign that points to God? Christian pedagogy is about learning how to see God in all things.**
    - **This perspective places a lot of emphasis on the character formation of the student. It also places a difficult task on the teacher, who needs to read deeper.**
  - **The whole goal of education for Augustine is to learn how to see everything as also a sign.**