



Who do you think you are? Thinking Like a Christian April-June 2020

24th April: What are we saved from? Augustine, the Goths and Pelagius AD 391-430

Introducing Augustine of Hippo

Born AD 354

What's going on:

The Empire has become Christian

The Empire is beginning to crumble – Goths, Visigoths, Vandals

Converted 386, Baptized 387

391 Ordained presbyter (elder) at Hippo

395 Consecrated bishop at Hippo

died 28th August 430

1. What is the gospel? Part 1: The Welfare of Rome?

Alaric the Goth sacked Rome, 24th August 410.

The City of God.

Against Paganism:

For Christianity:

'In former times you had glory from the peoples, but, through the inscrutable decision of divine providence, the true religion was not there for you to choose. Awake! The day has come...

It is to this country that we invite you, and exhort you to add yourself to the number of our citizens. The refuge we offer is the true remission of sins. Do not listen to those degenerate sons of yours who disparage Christ and the Christians, and criticize these times as an unhappy age, when the kind of period they would like is one which offers not a life of tranquility but security for their vicious pursuits. Such satisfactions have never been enough for you, even in respect of your earthly country. Now take possession of the Heavenly Country, for which you will have to endure but little hardship; and you will reign there in truth and for ever. There you will find no Vestal hearth, no Capitoline stone, but the one true God...

You must not regret the loss of those false and deceitful gods; abandon them in contempt and spring out to genuine liberty.'

(Augustine, 'City of God' 2.29)

→ 1. Do not confuse social stability here on earth with the progress of the Kingdom of God.

→ 2. See history as God sees it: a single plan from beginning to end

→ 3. Live as a citizen of both an earthly city and the heavenly city

2. What is the gospel? part 2: the Pelagian Controversy

‘Give what you command, and command what you will.’

What is the attraction of Pelagianism?

TLRC (Thinking Like a Roman Christian) multiple choice!

1. God gave laws which we a) Are able to keep, b) are not able to keep, c) would never want to keep anyway because they're no fun.
2. People are saved because a) They choose to be Christians, b) God chooses them to be Christians, c) They sacrifice bulls to Jupiter
3. Children are born a) Innocent of sin, b) guilty of sin. c) worthless until they grow up
4. People are naturally a) good, b) bad, c) disposable
5. Evil is a) something we often choose, b) A massive problem but doesn't actually exist, c) I don't know what you mean.
6. God's grace means a) God shows us what to do to please him, b) God changes our hearts to love him, c) nothing: real Gods don't do anything as weak as showing grace
7. God loves people a) because they are godly, b) even when they are not godly, c) who show strength and honour and bravery in battle
8. Human free will is a) fundamental to human existence, b) nonexistent until God gives it, c) an illusion because everything is controlled by fate.
9. Human nature is a) able to do good, or not good, as we choose c) never able to do good, c) are you saying slaves and citizens have the same nature?
10. Most of the time we want to a) do the right thing, b) do the wrong thing, c) do the honourable thing
11. We should be good because a) God tells us to, and rewards those who do, b) We love God, because he loved us first, c) I'm sorry, but I don't understand what you mean by 'good'.
12. For God to choose who is saved would mean a) God is incredibly unfair, b) God is incredibly gracious, c) even Zeus cannot change what has been foretold.
13. People should a) be free to do what they want to do, b) be saved from doing what they want to do, c) persuade the gods to arrange for the things they want to happen.
14. The most important thing in the universe is a) Human freedom, b) God's glory, c) Power and honour and victory
15. People should be a) valued for who they are, b) valued only for God's sake, c) valued by auction at a slave market.
16. The gospel is all about a) law, b) grace, c) a weird fixation with worshipping a crucified slave.

Augustine says...

'You can't do anything good if God does not, by his grace, free you from your sinful desires'

'We are born with Adam's sinful nature, and Adam's guilt, already in us'

'Men are incapable of fulfilling the commandments of God'

'God alone gives the ability to keep his laws – that's what grace is'

Pelagius says...

'Why would God give laws that you can't keep?'

'God can't condemn those who've done nothing wrong.'

'We cannot be held accountable for our actions unless we have the ability to choose'

'God cannot condemn for breaking his laws unless we were able to do them.'

'There's no incentive to be good if we can't choose to be good ourselves'

'It's a great excuse to be bad – "I can't do any better than this"'

'Children are born good – they do not inherit Adam's sinfulness'

In order, indeed, that we might receive that love whereby we might love, we were loved while as yet we had no love ourselves. This the Apostle John most expressly declares: "Not that we loved God," says he, "but that He loved us;" and again, "We love Him, because he first loved us." Most excellently and truly spoken! For we could not have wherewithal to love Him, unless we received it from Him in His first loving us. And what good could we possibly do if we possessed no love? (Augustine, 'On the Grace of Christ' ch. 27)

We are dead in our sins, and born that way

The only thing that can set us free is a miraculous work of God in our hearts to forgive and transform us– this is what grace means.

This is entirely undeserved. God gets the credit, not us.

Any other view ends up accounting us as deserving credit for our salvation.

And, as Augustine well knew, would have no hope for those trapped by the power of sin.

John Cassian, southern Gaul. An attempted middle way.

	Augustine	Pelagius	Cassian
What is our nature like?			
What do we need saving from?			
What do I need to do?			
Who gets the credit for my salvation?			
Is there hope for the depraved?			
Is there such a thing as character?			

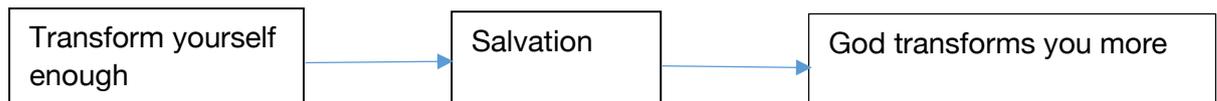
Augustine:



Pelagius:



Cassian:



- 1. The gospel is all about salvation from our corrupt desires.
- 2. The gospel is profoundly humbling, and therefore offensive, to the proud human heart.
- 3. Pelagianism is everywhere today.

Inside the church & Outside the church

- 4. Semi-pelagianism is always attractive but takes away from God's glory

And some problems Augustine didn't foresee...

1. The rising authority of the Bishop of Rome
2. Are *all* our bodily desires sinful?
3. Grace as *forgiveness* and grace as *transformation* – are they the same thing?