

Augustine's Confessions

Book I Study Questions

Chapter 1

1. In what ways does man haul "*his deathliness in a circle*" and haul "*in a circle the evidence of his sin*"?
2. What does Augustine mean by saying that "*our heart is restless until it rests in you*"?
3. What theological tension does Augustine wrestle with in 1.1?
4. How does Augustine's closing prayer in 1.1 handle this tension?

Chapters 2-3

1. What attribute(s) of God does Augustine begin to contemplate at the opening of 1.2?

Chapter 4

1. In 1.4, Augustine praises God with a string of statements consisting of contradictory or opposing pairs. What is Augustine trying to communicate by doing so?
2. How does Augustine in 1.4 answer the questions raised in 1.2-1.3?
3. What paradox does Augustine convey in the following?

"And what have we said now, my God, my life, my holy sweetness, or what does anyone ever say in speaking of you? But woe to those who are silent about you; however garrulous they are in general, they are mute about what counts."

Chapter 5

1. How does the question with which 1.5 opens continue the contemplations of divine sovereignty and human will from 1.1?
2. How does the introduction of God's command that we love Him expand this contemplation?
3. How does the requirement that mankind love God shape both our understanding of sin and the gospel? What impact does it have on evangelization?

Chapter 6

1. In what way does Augustine demonstrate in 1.6 the same attitude of the father of the boy healed by Jesus in Mark 9:1-24?
2. Why Augustine states in 1.6 that he “*won’t contest the matter with you in court,*” what is the “*matter*” to which he refers and why won’t he contest it?

Chapter 7

1. In what ways does Augustine see the grace of God shown to him even in his infancy?

Chapter 8

1. In the thirteen books of the *Confessions* we see only a handful of events in Augustine’s life. Why does he begin by addressing his infancy which he can’t even remember? What events would you include in a biography of yourself?

Chapter 9

1. Where do souls come from?
2. How does the answer to that question affect our understanding of original sin?
3. Further, how does our understanding of original sin impact our understanding of salvation?

Chapter 10

1. To what does Augustine attribute the growing consciousness and abilities of babies?
2. In 1.10, Augustine ponders both God’s immutability and His timelessness, neither of which of which the human mind can fully comprehend. What advice does Augustine give for those who cannot wrap their minds around such truths?

Chapter 11

1. Are infants sinful? Why or why not?
2. What is at the heart of sinfulness, even in an infant, according to Augustine?
3. Can you identify that in the sins that you commit even today?

4. What reason does Augustine give for parents not disciplining a newborn for demanding that the world bend to their will?

Chapter 12

1. How can an infant help us understand the nature of sin in ways that an adult cannot?
2. In what ways can an infant portray to us our relationship to God as unbelievers?
3. What is the answer to Augustine's question "*where and when was I your slave innocent?*"
4. How does Augustine emulate David's confession of Psalm 51 by confessing the sins of his infancy at the beginning of the *Confessions*?

Chapter 13

1. How do children learn? In what ways is this learning "*natural?*" In what ways is it not?
2. Having learned to speak and communicate, Augustine says that this allowed him to then venture "*farther from shore on the stormy sea of our common human life...*" To what does he refer?

Chapter 14

1. What does Augustine identify as the purpose of his boyhood education?
2. What punishments did Augustine suffer for being "*sluggish in learning?*"
3. How did Augustine learn to pray as a boy? Why did he pray? How did God answer?

Chapter 15

1. How did Augustine's parents and other adults respond to the punishments meted out at school?
2. What hypocrisy does Augustine identify in he and his classmates being punished for playing?

Chapter 16

1. Though he believed that the punishments of his school were excessive and hypocritical, in what ways does Augustine acknowledge his own sins at this time?

2. How does Augustine again call attention to the hypocrisy of those who punish children for play? Does that hypocrisy exist in our day?

Chapter 17

1. What was the influence of Augustine's mother during his boyhood years?
2. Why did Augustine request to be baptized as a child? Why did his mother refuse?
3. What was the spiritual condition of Augustine's father during his childhood?
4. How does Augustine portray the relationship between his believing mother and unbelieving father?

Chapter 18

1. What views seemed to be evident in the Church of Augustine's day regarding baptism?
2. Why does Augustine think that the prevailing view of his day with regards to baptism was backwards?

Chapter 19

1. What was Augustine's attitude towards his studies as a child?
2. Why does Augustine say that though he was pushed to do that which turned out to be for his good, he "*didn't do good*"?
3. Why did those who pushed Augustine to do that which was good for him not "*do good*"?
4. How then did God use for good that which neither Augustine nor those who pushed him did for good?

Chapter 20

1. Which studies in school did Augustine enjoy the most? Which the least? Which did he view as having been the most beneficial?

Chapter 21

1. What fault does Augustine find in his appreciation of Latin literature during his school years?

Chapter 22

1. In comparing learning to read and write with the “literary studies” of his day, which does Augustine view as the most important?
2. How should Augustine’s insights in this area shape how we teach reading and writing?

Chapter 23

1. What does Augustine attribute as the cause of his lack of love for the Greek language and its literature?
2. What principle does Augustine propound in 1.23 with regard to education?

Chapter 24

1. Summarize Augustine’s prayer in 1.24.

Chapter 25

1. What purpose does Augustine assign Homer in composing his stories of the gods?

Chapter 26

1. What was the character of the literature Augustine was forced to read at school?
2. What is Augustine’s evaluation of having young boys read such material?

Chapter 27

1. What assignment does Augustine recollect in 1.27?
2. How well did Augustine do with this assignment?
3. What does he think would have been a better assignment?

Chapter 28

1. Which parable does Augustine reflect on in 1.28?
2. How does Augustine see himself in that parable?

Chapter 29

1. In 1.29, Augustine points to the fact that those in his day were more concerned with violating the laws of grammar and rhetoric than they were with violating God's law. What laws do those in our day find most grievous to violate?

Chapter 30

1. As a "mere boy," what were Augustine's priorities?
2. How was the sin of hypocrisy evident in Augustine in the way he played games with other boys?

Chapter 31

1. To what/whom does Augustine credit with his abilities as a boy?
2. What does Augustine identify as the root sin of his life at this point?

Summary

1. How does even just this first book illustrate the difficulty of classifying the *Confessions'* genre? How would you classify the work thus far?
2. Is it permissible to question God? Why or why not?
3. What is Augustine's view of God in Book I? What is his view of man?
4. How many Scripture references/allusions does Ruden identify in Book I?