

Augustine, Defender of the Faith

Young Augustine

A long time ago, a young man named Augustine lived in North Africa. His mother, Monica, taught Augustine the Christian faith. Monica prayed constantly for her son because he was restless and often in trouble.

Augustine's family was wealthy, so the young man went to Carthage, the largest city in North Africa. The best schools were there, but so were many temptations. Augustine studied hard but also plunged into a life of sin.

In Carthage, Augustine began to follow a strange religion called Manichaeism, which believes that every person has a good soul trapped inside an evil body.

~~Manichaeism taught that one must free the body from the soul to gain salvation.~~ While Augustine followed the teachings of Manichaeism, Monica continued to pray.

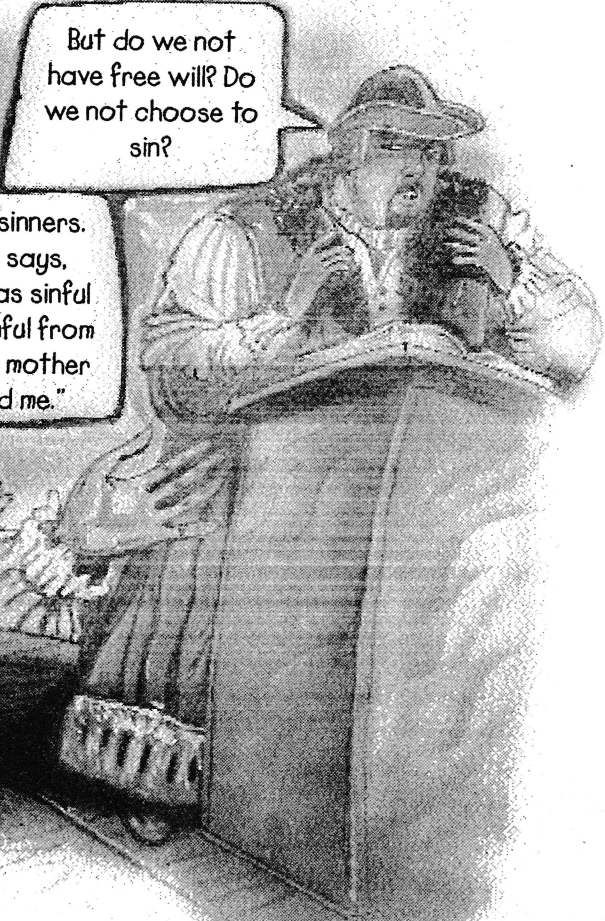
Augustine moved to Milan, Italy, to teach public speaking. It proved to be an important move.

A Turning Point


As a young adult, Augustine was still doubtful of the Christian faith. He considered philosophy more important than the Bible.

Augustine enjoyed listening to public speakers in Milan. He heard the great preacher Ambrose, the bishop for the region. Ambrose's speaking impressed Augustine, and his heart was touched by the Gospel message. Augustine attended Ambrose's classes regularly. The Holy Spirit worked in Augustine's hardened heart.

One day, while walking in a garden, Augustine thought about his sinful past. He sat down to rest and noticed a copy of Paul's letter to the Romans beside him. He picked it up and read. It was the turning point in his



But do we not have free will? Do we not choose to sin?



We are all sinners. The Bible says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me."

tion or believe on our own.)

life. Augustine studied the Scriptures eagerly. He rejoiced to learn that all of his sins were forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection.

On Easter Sunday, A.D. 387, Bishop Ambrose baptized Augustine. Monica, who was visiting her son at the time, praised God for His faithfulness and love.

Augustine devoted himself to the work of the church. He became a monk and was later appointed bishop in North Africa.

Faith Defender

Augustine defended the church against false teachings through writings and debates. He led the fight against the Manichaeans by rejecting the belief that every person has a good soul trapped inside an evil body.

Another problem in the early church involved the followers of a man named Donatus. The Donatists taught that believers who had denied their faith during persecution should not be readmitted to the church. Some pastors had surrendered their Bibles to be burned by government officials. Donatists said these pastors should not be allowed to baptize or serve the Lord's Supper. Augustine argued that the Sacraments are gifts from God and do not depend upon the goodness of the pastor.

Augustine also opposed the teachings of Pelagius. Pelagius taught that people are born without sin. He said that people become sinful as they grow older and see the example of others. Pelagius believed that humans had a completely free will and could save themselves merely by deciding to believe in Jesus.

Augustine used Scripture to fight against these false teachings. He reminded the church that all people are born in sin, and it is only by God's grace that we are saved. The Holy Spirit works faith in people's hearts to believe. Faith is a gift from God, not something we have done on our own.

Augustine won the fight against Pelagius. In 418, Pelagius and his followers were banished from the empire. Augustine worked throughout his life to fight against false teachings in the church.

Defending the Faith

1. Augustine faced many false teachings in his day. Briefly describe what Manichaeans, Donatists, and Pelagians believed to be true.

2. Augustine used the teachings in Scripture to defend the Christian faith. Look up the following passages. Which passage clearly speaks against each heresy, or false teaching?

Psalm 51:5

Isaiah 44:22

John 17:3

3. How are we equipped to become faith defenders today?

4. Have you ever been a faith defender? Where were you? What did you say or do? What happened next? If you haven't been a faith defender, what kind of situation would cause you to defend your faith?

To Review and Remember

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. *1 Peter 3:15*