

2. THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD: CONSTANTINE AND AUGUSTINE

1. INTRODUCTION

(a) Where is your home?

- Constantine and Augustine
- Acknowledgements
 - Capitol Hill Baptist Church: “Core Seminars”
 - Garry Williams: “Church History Survey” (Oak Hill College; unpublished)
 - Garry Williams: Augustine (EMA 2013, lecture)
 - Garry Williams: *Silent Witnesses*

Psalm 87:1-3, On the holy mount stands the city he founded; the LORD loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwelling places of Jacob. Glorious things of you are spoken, O city of God.

Ephesians 2:19, So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God,

Hebrews 11:8-10,13-16, By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God... These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

1 Peter 1:17, And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile...

2. THE EMPEROR CONSTANTINE (B.274 – D.337)

(a) What did he do?

33AD 120 Christians (Acts 1:15)

Subsequent persecutions

300 c.5 million Christians (out of Empire of c.60 million people)

312 the Battle of Milvian Bridge

313 Edict of Milan: toleration of Christians

By 400 Great spread of the Christian faith



Constantine was praying to his father's god, beseeching him to tell him who he was and imploring him to stretch out his right hand to help him in his present difficulties. While he was fervently praying, an incredible sign appeared to him from heaven. (It would be hard to believe his account if it had been told by anyone else. But the victorious emperor long afterwards declared it to the writer of this history -- when I was honored to meet and talk with him and he even confirmed his statement by an oath. Thus, who could doubt him, especially since time has established its truth?) He said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and an inscription that said 'Conquer by This' attached to it. Seeing this, he and his army, which followed him on an expedition and witnessed the miracle, were struck with amazement. He said that he doubted within himself what importance the vision might hold. He continued to ponder its meaning through until he fell asleep. While sleeping, the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign he had seen earlier in the heavens. God commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens and to use it as a safeguard in all encounters with his enemies.

(From Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*)

(b) Evaluation?

- **Constantine's own faith is a puzzle**
(politics? pagan worship? violence?)
- **Constantine did much that was good**
(church relief, godly laws)

- **Constantine left a mixed legacy to the church down the ages**
(church-state relationship very confused: nominalism... coercion...
Caesaro-papism)

➤ **Some applications for us today:**

The state cannot make the church grow.

Don't ever confuse one particular country or state with God's special covenant people.

3. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (B.354 – D.430)

(a) Augustine's conversion

- Born 354 Thagaste (Algeria)... pagan... sexual sinner...
teacher of rhetoric... evangelised by Ambrose of Milan...
gripped by sin and then by God's Sovereign grace!
- *Augustine's Confessions...*



... you were always with me, mercifully punishing me, touching with a bitter taste all my illicit pleasures.

I was caught up to you by your beauty and quickly torn away from you by my weight... This weight was my sexual habit.

... I could see how vile I was, how trusted and filthy, covered in sores and ulcers. And I looked and was appalled, but there was no way of escaping from myself... you once again placed me in front of myself; you thrust me before my own eyes so that I should discover my iniquity and hate it... the day had now come when I stood naked to myself...

Now when deep reflection had drawn up out of the secret depths of my soul all my misery and had heaped it up before the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm, accompanied by a mighty rain of tears... And, not indeed in these words, but in this effect, I cried out to thee: 'And thou, O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord? Wilt thou be angry forever? Oh, remember not against us our former iniquities.'... I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when suddenly I heard the voice of a boy or girl I know not which – coming from the neighboring house, chanting over and over again, 'Pick it up, read it; pick it up, read it.'... So I quickly returned to the bench..., for there I had put down the apostle's book when I had left there. I snatched it up, opened it, and in silence read the paragraph on which my eyes first fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof.' I wanted to read no further, nor did I need to. For instantly, as the sentence ended, there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away.

(b) Augustine's ministry

- Studied under Ambrose... Bishop of Hippo... fighting for truth against heresy...
- Best legacy: the depth of sin and God's sovereign grace (see next week)
- Dubious legacy: purgatory, baptismal regeneration, Roman idea of the church
- B.B. Warfield, the Reformation was a "triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church."

(c) Augustine's masterpiece: *The City of God*

- His context: from persecution... to state endorsement... to the end of Empire
- The two cities: the city of man/world/earthly city... and the City of God.
- Be a godly citizen of both... but do not confuse the two... and don't forget your true home

➤ **Applications for us today:**

A brief anatomy of the earthly city:

1. There are ONLY two cities – there is nowhere else – the heavenly city and the earthly city.
2. The earthly city is especially manifest at certain points, but is EVERYWHERE that the heavenly city is not.
3. The earthly city is demonic – it is from Satan.
4. Both cities are driven by love (and this is so, so important for understanding our times): either love for God, or love for self.
5. You can understand the earthly city as being driven by disordered love. Sin does not make or create anything. Rather, it consists in loving a good thing wrongly. It makes created things our final end.
6. The earthly city is divided against itself. Each citizen wants to be God and will not be content to live equal with others and under the reign of the true God. They are dominated by a lust for power, and as soon as powerful enough will oppress others.
7. The earthly city faces eternal destruction – a state of eternal way, in hell.

How should we respond?

1. NO NEUTRAL GROUND
2. DON'T PIN YOUR HOPES ON THE WORLD
3. DON'T WITHDRAW
4. DON'T FORGET WHERE THE EARTHLY CITY IS LOCATED. It's not just "out there."