

Saint or Sinner?

*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick.
I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*
Mark 2:17

Few people have been more transparent about their struggle with sin than Augustine... that's *Saint* Augustine! If you think that "sainthood" is reserved only for those who have never stumbled, well, think again. In his *Confessions*, written over 1,600 years ago, Augustine speaks candidly of his pre-Christian youth when he succumbed again and again to all manner of temptations, especially sexual temptations.

Clouds of muddy carnal concupiscence filled the air. The bubbling impulses of puberty befogged and obscured my heart so that it could not see the difference between love's serenity and lust's darkness... The invisible enemy trampled on me and seduced me because I was in the mood to be seduced...

In his youth, Augustine once stole some pears from a neighbor's orchard. Why? Not because he was hungry. Not because these pears were of a better quality than what he normally ate. No, his motives were much more sinister.

I had no motive for my wickedness except wickedness itself. It was foul, and I loved it. I loved the self-destruction, I loved my fall, not the object for which I had fallen but my fall itself... I picked (the pears) solely with the motive of stealing. I threw away what I had picked. My feasting was only on the wickedness which I took pleasure in enjoying...

Moving to the city of Carthage, he found himself surrounded by a *hissing cauldron of illicit loves*. Here he began to give full throttle to all his passions and desires.

As yet I had never been in love and I longed to love... I was in love with love... I rushed headlong into love, by which I was longing to be captured... I was glad to be in bondage... During the celebration of (the Eucharist) within the walls of the Church, I even dared to lust after a girl and to start an affair that would procure the fruit of death... From my 19th to my 28th year, (my) life was one of being seduced and seducing, being deceived and deceiving, in a variety of desires. Publicly I was a teacher of liberal arts, privately I professed a false religion - in the former role arrogant, in the latter superstitious, in everything vain....

We don't often think of "saints" writing so candidly. And yet, it was Augustine's willingness to confront his own moral depravity that made it possible for him to receive sanctifying grace.

Here's the deal: I'll never know the liberty of redemption until I come to grips with the bondage of my own addictions. I'll never know the beauty of holiness until I see clearly the true ugliness of my own depravity. I'll never know the joy of salvation until I weep in sorrow over my sin. I'll never be what God intends for me to be until I realize what a wretched, messed up, perverted, self-absorbed, arrogant, egotistical, dirty, rotten bum I really am! Hallelujah!

Pastor Stan