

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

AUGUSTINE: *ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*



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The Fellowship of Ailbe

A PASTOR TO PASTOR RESOURCE

The Ministry of the Word
Readings and Reflections in Scripture and Augustine's On Christian Doctrine
T. M. Moore

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Introduction

Welcome to *The Ministry of the Word: Readings and Reflections in Scripture and Augustine's On Christian Doctrine*, the first – and still one of the best – handbooks for studying and teaching the Bible.

Augustine was Bishop of the North Africa city of Hippo into the early 5th century. His many works continue to provide solid doctrinal and spiritual instruction for Christians of all communions. *On Christian Doctrine* was written to encourage and guide those entrusted with the ministry of the Word, that they might handle the Word properly and learn to love God and their neighbors more consistently and truly.

On Christian Doctrine reminds us that studying and teaching the Scriptures are not ends in themselves. The goal of all our instruction is love, and Augustine insists that we have neither learned the Word nor taught it well until that outcome is increasingly in evidence.

Pastor to Pastor studies combine the resources of Scripture and great Church leaders from the past in a format agreeable to personal or group study. We are happy to offer these resources at no charge to pastors and church leaders, to help you in better grounding the work of ministry in the Word of God and the great tradition and heritage of Christian Church leadership.

Pastor to Pastor studies can be used by church leaders as a supplement to their devotional reading or as a resource for leadership training. Daily “Next Steps” and weekly Questions for Reflection or Discussion can help in bringing new perspectives and developing new skills for the task of leading and building the local church.

The entries in this *Pastor to Pastor* study are arranged for a month of readings, one reading per day followed by a series of Questions for Reflection or Discussion at the end of the week.

We hope you will find this study helpful and encouraging as you continue the Lord's work in building His Church, His Body, His Bride.

T. M. Moore
Principal

Week 1, Day 1

Enjoy Yourself

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
Psalm 16.11

***On Christian Doctrine*¹**

Augustine (354-430)

“The things which are to be enjoyed are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a single Trinity, a certain supreme thing common to all who enjoy it, if, indeed, it is a thing and not rather the cause of all things, or both a thing and a cause.”

Effective ministry of the Word begins in the study of Scripture, as Augustine pointed out in *On Christian Doctrine*. And a primary end of the study of Scripture is to know and enjoy God. In other words, unless our preaching begins in our own relationship with the Lord, how effective can it be? Studying Scripture is hard work, but it should also be enjoyable work, because in the Word we meet and commune with the Lord Who created, redeemed, saved, called, and is sanctifying us. What could be more thrilling and filled with delight than His presence in glory?

Do you find that your time in Scripture leads you regularly to a deeper enjoyment of the Lord? Why or why not?

Week 1, Day 2

For the Love of God

“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Deuteronomy 6.5

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-43)

“Thus all your thoughts and all your understanding should be turned toward Him from whom you receive these powers...He did not leave any part of life which should be free and find room to desire the enjoyment of anything else. But whatever appeals to the mind as being lovable should be directed into that channel into which the whole current of love flows. Whoever, therefore, justly loves his neighbor should so act toward him that he also loves God with his whole heart, with his whole soul, and with his whole mind.”

Love and enjoyment for God, Augustine argued, spill over into loving and enjoying our neighbors. As preachers read and study Scripture to know and enjoy the Lord first of all, they will find that they have more love for and enjoyment from the members of their congregation. Achieving this can only make our preaching and teaching more effective.

How would you describe the relationship between the love you have for your congregation and the effectiveness of your preaching?

¹All quotations are from Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, D. W. Robertson, Jr., tr. (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958).

Week 1, Day 3

Teach them to Love

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1.5

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Thus man should be instructed concerning the way of loving, that is, concerning the way of loving himself properly. To doubt that he loves himself and desires to improve himself is madness. But he must be instructed in how he should love his body so that he may care for it in an ordinate and prudent way... ‘Thou shalt love,’ He said, ‘the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind,’ and ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets.’ ‘Now the end of the commandment is charity,’ and this is twofold: a love of God and a love of your neighbor.”

Our preaching and teaching must endeavor to promote three kinds of love: a proper self-love, love for God, and love for our neighbors. Love is the end of all Christian instruction, because love is the mark of Christian discipleship (Jn. 13.35). As we grow in love ourselves this will be easier to do, and we will become more consistent at it. But the goal of every message we preach must have the aim of love, so that love in some form is the “take-away” God’s people carry with them out of worship into everyday life.

Do you find that your preaching consistently emphasize applications of love in one form or another?

Week 1, Day 4

Join the Party!

Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37.4

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Among those who are able to enjoy God with us, we love some whom we help, some by whom we are helped, some whose help we need and whose wants we supply, and some on whom we bestow no benefits and from whom we await none ourselves. Be that as it may, we should desire that all enjoy God with us and that all the assistance we give them or get from them should be directed toward this end.”

Here’s a challenging thought: our ministries of the Word must equip people to love God and their neighbors, but we must also strive to lead them to join us in the enjoyment of God. Here’s a real challenge for our preaching and teaching, because it extends beyond mere exposition to the way we handle the text, the affections we display, the encouragement we extend to the people, and the applications to which we point them in our ministry of the Word.

Ask some of the people to whom you preach whether your messages are helping them to enjoy the Lord more. See what you can learn from them about how to improve on this important goal of preaching.

Week 1, Day 5
To Sum Up

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the prophets." Matthew 22.37-40

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

"The sum of all we have said since we began to speak of things comes to this: it is to be understood that the plenitude and end of all the Law and of all the sacred Scriptures is the love of a Being which is to be enjoyed and of a being that can share in that enjoyment with us, since there is no need for a precept that anyone should love himself. That we might know this and have the means to implement it, the whole temporal dispensation was made by divine Providence for our salvation. We should use it, not with an abiding but with a transitory love and delight like that in a road or in vehicles or in other instruments, or, if it may be expressed more accurately, so that we love those things by which we are carried along for the sake of that toward which we are carried."

Preaching is one of the facets of this "temporal dispensation" which God has given to the Church to carry their hearts and minds upwards to God. But so much preaching these days seems to focus on the people, their needs and concerns, and what will make them feel good about themselves. Meanwhile, in the presence of the Lord fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore await us. Should we not use the ministry of the Word to carry people into such a context as this?

What is one thing you might do in order to help ensure that your preaching is a vehicle to carry God's people into the presence of Him and His joy and delight?

Week 1, Day 6
Love or Nothing

...and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 1 Corinthians 13.2

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

"Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all. Whoever finds a lesson there useful to the building of charity, even though he has not said what the author may be shown to have intended in that place, has not been deceived, nor is he lying in any way."

Interesting: Augustine says we can miss the primary meaning of a text, and if we still manage to inculcate something of love for God and our neighbor, we'll have done a good thing. If all the Scriptures direct us to love, that has to be true. So if we keep love for God and neighbor the focus of our studies and preparation, we won't have to worry too much if we don't quite get the exegesis of the text like an expert theologian. Of course, we should always strive to be accurate in our interpretations. But if we keep our eye on love, we'll never be too far from the mark.

What is the danger in preaching in such a way that we fail to emphasize and inculcate love for God and men?

Week 1, Day 7

Aim at the Whole Person

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. James 1.22

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Therefore, when anyone knows the end of the commandment to be charity ‘from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith,’ and has related all his understanding of the Divine Scriptures to these three, he may approach the treatment of these books with security.”

We must preach the true Word to enlighten the mind. We must speak to the affections of the heart and the values and priorities people harbor in their consciences. And we must lay out the pathway of love so that an “unfeigned” (the Greek is “unhypocritical”) faith is the outcome (1 Tim. 1.5). Preaching is not just imparting information with enthusiasm. It is ministering the Word of God to the whole person.

How do you prepare in your preaching to speak to the whole person – mind, heart, conscience, and life?

For reflection or discussion

1. Suggest some ways you might keep love for God and neighbor more in focus as you begin studying the Word of God:
2. What would you suggest as benchmarks to guide a person in growing in love for God?
3. What would you suggest as benchmarks to guide a person in growing in love for his or her neighbors?
4. Meditate on 1 Timothy 1.5. We typically approach the task of preaching or teaching with a view to affecting the way people think – their minds. But how should our preaching and teaching speak to someone’s heart? His conscience?
5. Is it fair to say that all our applications in all our preaching and teaching should be expressed as some form of love? Why or why not?

Week 2, Day 1

Approach with Fear

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!
Psalm 111.10

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Before all it is necessary that we be turned by the fear of God toward a recognition of His will, so that we may know what He commands that we desire and what He commands that we avoid. Of necessity this fear will lead us to thought of our mortality and of our future death and will affix all our proud motions, as if they were fleshly members fastened with nails, to the wood of the cross.”

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If we would be wise in our understanding of Scripture, and in our ministry of it with the people of God, we must settle into the fear of the Lord each time we come before Him in His Word. Without the fear of the Lord we cannot expect to discern His will. The fear of God is not simply *reverence*. Knowing Who God is and what He is capable of where sinners such as we are concerned, we should fear the Lord for the discipline He can bring to bear against us (Heb. 12.3-11).

Why do you suppose the fear of the Lord is not much talked about in our day? How do you nurture this most important affection?

Week 2, Day 2

Lead Fear Beget Humility

“And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul... Deuteronomy 10.12

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-43)

“Then it is necessary to become meek through piety so that we do not contradict the Divine Scripture, either when it is understood and seen to attack some of our vices, or when it is not understood and we feel as though we are wiser than it is and as better able to give precepts. But we should rather think and believe that which is written to be better and more true than anything which we could think of by ourselves, even when it is obscure.”

Fear of God should lead to humility before His Word, so that we hear Him speaking to us and acknowledge our vices and shortcomings. But when the Word is obscure, let us not simply resort to our own best ideas. We must continue to wait on the Lord lest, in our lives or teaching, we “contradict the Divine Scripture” by imposing on it meanings never intended. Wait on the Lord in meekness, until He teaches you piety.

In your preparation for preaching or teaching, what steps do you take to apply the lesson of the text to yourself?

Week 2, Day 3

From Humility to Conviction

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.
Psalm 19.14

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Then it follows that the student will discover in the Scriptures that he has been enmeshed in the love of this world, or of temporal things, a love far remote from the kind of love of God and of our neighbor which Scripture itself prescribes. Then, indeed, that fear which arises from the thought of God’s judgment, and that piety which can do nothing except believe in accede to the authority of the sacred books, will force him to lament his own situation. For this knowledge of a good hope thrusts a man not into boasting but into lamentation.”

Tears of sorrow for our sins should frequently flow as we strive with wisdom to understand the Word of God. For Scripture is like a mirror, showing us the very depths of our souls, and, as we submit humbly to its teaching, making known to us deep recesses of world-love that we have not known. How can we be so churlish as to harbor such affections, knowing that Jesus died to free us from them?

In what ways do you experience this lamenting for your sinful condition? Do you find this depressing or cleansing?

Week 2, Day 4

From Conviction to Hunger

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.” Matthew 5.6

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“This attitude [of lamentation] causes him to ask with constant prayers for the consolation of divine assistance lest he fall into despair, and he thus enters the fourth step of fortitude, in which he hungers and thirsts for justice. And by means of the affection of the spirit he will extract himself from all mortal joy in transitory things, and as he turns aside from this joy, he will turn toward the love of eternal things, specifically toward that immutable unity which is the Trinity.”

In the presence of the Lord are fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, as we have seen (Ps. 16.11). Once we have, in our reading and study of God’s Word, been stripped of our worldly entanglements, we may come in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ into the presence of God and His glory, beyond the veil, as it were, and there confidently expect and hope to be transformed by the Spirit of God (2 Cor. 3.12-18). If we truly hunger for the Lord in His Word, He will not disappoint us (Ps. 37.4).

How do you experience being in the presence of God and His glory? Does this create in you a strong desire to be more like that which you encounter there?

Week 2, Day 5

From Hunger to Mercy

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! Psalm 51.1, 2

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“When, in so far as he is able, [the preacher or teacher] has seen this Trinity glowing in the distance, and has discovered that because of his weakness he cannot sustain the sight of that light, he purges his mind, which is rising up and protesting in the appetite for inferior things, of its contaminations, so that he comes to the fifth step, the counsel of mercy.”

In Leviticus 16.12-14 the high priest entered the presence of the Lord behind the veil with burning coals, incense, and blood. In that holy and glorious presence, he was to pour the incense – symbolic of the prayers of the people – onto the coals – symbolic of their redemption – as he sprinkled sacrificial blood on the mercy seat. The smoke of the incense was to cover the mercy seat, now marked with the blood of the sacrifice. When we achieve the presence of God’s glory in our study of His Word, our prayers for mercy, pleading the blood of Jesus, will cover God’s throne like sweet incense.

Would you describe your prayers for mercy like this?

Week 2, Day 6

Through Mercy to Clarity of Vision

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4.6

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Here he eagerly exercises the love of his neighbor and perfects himself in it; and now, filled with hope and fortified in strength, when he arrives at the love of his enemy he ascends to the sixth step, where he cleanses that eye through which God may be seen, in so far as He can be seen by those who die to the world as much as they are able.”

Conviction and pleading for mercy help us to recover a proper sense of love – for our neighbors, and even for our enemies – which brings even more clarity to the eye of the heart, so that we can see the pure vision of our exalted King even more clearly. This process of studying the Word of God may seem strange and “mystical,” but Augustine is merely describing his own experience in the light of the teaching of God’s Word. Reading, studying, and meditating on God’s Word are for the purpose of knowing Him better, first of all.

How do you understand what Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4.6? Is this your consistent experience as you turn to the Word of God?

Week 2, Day 7

Unto Wisdom and Peace

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11.28, 29

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Therefore this holy one will be of such simple and clean heart that he will not turn away from the Truth either in a desire to please men or for the sake of avoiding any kind of adversities to himself which arise in this life. Such a son ascends to wisdom, which is seventh and last step, where he enjoys peace and tranquility. ‘For the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.’ From fear to wisdom the way extends through these steps.”

Augustine traced seven steps by which the man of God can gain wisdom from the study of His Word: fear leads to humility, humility leads to lamentation, then to hungering for righteousness and pleading for mercy, then purity of love and, finally, wisdom. No wonder there are so many exhortations in the psalms and elsewhere to “wait” upon the Lord!

How might you begin to incorporate following these steps to wisdom in your own times of devotion and study?

For reflection or discussion

1. Do you agree with Augustine that love for God and fear of Him should go together in the ministry of the Word? Why or why not?
2. Outline and summarize the steps whereby, in our study of the Word, we proceed from love and fear of God to wisdom:
3. Do you think following this outline in your study of God’s Word would help you grow in love for God and your neighbor? Why or why not?
4. Do you think following this outline in your preaching and teaching would help those you serve to grow in love for God and neighbor? Why or why not?
5. What would you suggest as some benchmarks to suggest that someone was growing in the fear of the Lord?

Week 3, Day 1

All the Counsel of God

“Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” Acts 20.26, 27

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“But let us turn our attention to the third step which I have decided to treat as the Lord may direct my discourse. He will be the most expert investigator of Holy Scriptures who has first read all of them and has some knowledge of them, at least through reading them if not through understanding them.”

I continue to be surprised – though I don’t know why – at how many pastors I meet who are not in the practice of reading through the Scriptures continuously, over and over. I find it difficult to understand how we can equip the saints with all the counsel of God if we’re not even allowing all the counsel of God to speak regularly and consistently to our own souls.

Does your practice of reading the Scriptures take you through the entire Bible, regularly and repeatedly?

Week 3, Day 2

To Know the Will of God

“If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” John 7.17

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“In all of these books those fearing God and made meek in piety seek the will of God. And the first rule of this understanding and labor is, as we have said, to know these books even if they are not understood, at least to read them or to memorize them, or to make them not altogether unfamiliar to us.”

Augustine makes a good point: If the Scriptures contain the will of God, all the will of God for His people, how can any pastor serve His people to the end of knowing God’s will who does not familiarize himself, increasingly, with all the counsel of God?

What is your own approach to reading and meditating on God’s Word? How do you keep track of what you’re learning about God’s will?

Week 3, Day 3

A Knowledge of Languages

Now the promises were made to Abraham and his offspring. It does not say, "And to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "And to your offspring," who is Christ. Galatians 3.16

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

"And Latin-speaking men, who have here undertaken to instruct, need look to others for a knowledge of Divine Scriptures, Hebrew and Greek, so that they may turn back to earlier exemplars if the infinite variety of Latin translations give rise to any doubt."

Over the years some pastors have justified to me their failure to keep up with the Biblical languages by saying that, with so many different translations available, it seemed like an unnecessary discipline. But Augustine's point is relevant: With so many different translations available, how shall we be able to check the reliability of any of them, apart from recourse to Biblical languages?

What's your view of the use of Biblical languages in the study of God's Word? Do you find them useful?

Week 3, Day 4

In Lieu of Languages

They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading. Nehemiah 8.8

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

"Since the meaning which many interpreters, according to their ability and judgment, seek to convey is not apparent unless we consult the language being translated, and since many translators err from the sense of the original authors unless they are very learned, we must either seek a knowledge of those languages from which Scripture is translated into Latin or we must consult the translations of those who translate word for word, not because they suffice but because by means of them we may test the truth or falsity of those who have sought to translate meanings as well as words."

Augustine preferred a "more literal" translation of Scripture – since he did not know Hebrew and had only a rudimentary knowledge of Greek – rather than a "dynamic equivalency" translation. The former tends to be stiffer and more "wooden" than the latter, but Augustine felt it would be a more reliable tool in getting at the sense of the original languages. We agree.

Which translation of the Bible do you predominantly use? Why?

Week 3, Day 5

Know the Creation

Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them. Full of splendor and majesty is his work, and his righteousness endures forever. He has caused his wondrous works to be remembered... Psalm 111.2-4

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Just as a knowledge of the nature of serpents illustrates the many similitudes which Scripture frequently makes with that animal, an ignorance of many other animals which are also used for comparisons is a great impediment to understanding. The same thing is true of stones, or of herbs or other things that take root.”

Augustine counseled his monks to be good students of the Word of God wherever it was being revealed, including in the creation (Ps. 19.1-4). Scripture mentions many different aspects of the creation, and in many different contexts and ways. Teachers of God’s Word will be better prepared to instruct their learners if they are equipped with knowledge of the creation, so that they can understand the ways God uses the creation to reinforce or illustrate knowledge of His will.

Would you describe yourself as a student of creation?

Week 3, Day 6

History, Too

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. Romans 15.4

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Thus whatever evidence we have of past times in that which is called history helps us a great deal in understanding of the sacred books, even if we learn it outside of the Church as part of our childhood education.”

Anyone who doubts the value of reading and studying history as an aid to teaching Scripture need only peruse Augustine’s *City of God* for the excellent way he uses arguments from history to illustrate and support the teaching of Scripture. History is filled with examples of wise and foolish men in whose lives we may read the unfolding of God’s will as it is revealed in His Word.

Do you think that a better knowledge of history would help you to be a better teaching of God’s Word? Why or why not?

Week 3, Day 7

Make Your Case Well

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD...” Isaiah 1.18

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“The science of disputation is of great value for understanding and solving all sorts of questions that appear in sacred literature. However, in this connection the love of controversy is to be avoided, as well as a certain puerile ostentation in deceiving the adversary. There are, moreover, many false conclusions of the reasoning process called sophisms, and frequently they so imitate true conclusions that they mislead not only those who are slow but also the ingenious when they do not pay close attention.”

You have to be a good thinker in order to handle Scripture well. There is a science of thinking and reasoning, of discovering solutions to questions and putting those solutions forward cogently and honestly. The better we understand this process, the more effective we will be as teachers of God’s Word.

How familiar are you with the science of reasoning – logic – and the laws of disputation?

For reflection or discussion

1. Briefly outline your approach to studying a text of Scripture. What do you do first? Next? Etc.
2. Which tools do you find most helpful in getting at the Hebrew or Greek meanings of a text?
3. In what ways might a good understanding of creation help to make you a better student and teacher of God’s Word?
4. Do you agree that an understanding of history – and art, literature, politics, etc. – is useful for preaching and teaching? Why or why not?
5. What is your approach to making sure your preaching and teaching are carefully and clearly reasoned?

Week 4, Day 1

Observe the Pasch

Now concerning food offered to idols: we know that “all of us possess knowledge.” This “knowledge” puffs up, but love builds up. If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know. 1 Corinthians 8.1, 2

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“When the student of Holy Scripture, having been instructed in this way, begins to approach his text, he should always bear in mind the apostolic saying, ‘Knowledge puffs up; but charity edifies.’ Thus he will feel that, although he has fled from rich Egypt, he cannot be saved unless he has observed the Pasch. ‘For Christ our Pasch is sacrificed.’”

Augustine reminds us that merely knowing the Scriptures – content, themes, books of the Bible – is not the goal of reading, study, and meditation. The goal is to feast on Jesus, Who is the focus of all the Word of God. Thus, in all our interaction with Scripture, and in all our teaching and preaching, we must seek and display Him Who is the Source and Substance, not only of the Word, but of our very lives.

Have you seen Jesus in His Word today? If so, how will you show Him to others?

Week 4, Day 2

Gentle in Piety

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1.3-5

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“A man fearing God diligently seeks His will in the Holy Scriptures. And lest he should love controversy, he is made gentle in piety.”

Here is the true measure of our study and ministry of the Word: Do these increase piety – love of God and neighbor – in ourselves and those we serve? It is easy to become contentious over this or that doctrine or teaching of the Word. But such contentiousness does not make disciples, build the Church, nor further the Kingdom. The end of all instruction is love, or we’ve missed the point completely.

How do you monitor the effectiveness of your own preaching and teaching with respect to this one grand objective?

Week 4, Day 3

The Analogy of Scripture

And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.” 1 Corinthians 2.12, 13

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“...these also, unless the reader is weakened by too much carelessness, are to be corrected according to the rule of faith, or according to the context established by the preceding and following passages...:

The ESV marginal reading for our text should be preferred: “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Spirit, as Augustine is reminding us, teaches by comparing truths from various parts of the Scripture to help shed light on whatever we may be trying to solve at the moment. What he called the “rule of faith” we refer to today as the “analogy of Scripture.” It’s difficult to see how we could make much use of this apart from being widely read and deeply steeped in the whole of Scripture.

How would you explain your own practice of using the analogy of faith in your study and teaching?

Week 4, Day 4

Don’t (Always) Be Such a Literalist!

Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. Galatians 4.24

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“To this warning that we must beware not to take figurative or transferred expressions as though they were literal, a further warning must be added lest we wish to take literal expressions as though they were figurative. Therefore a method of determining whether a locution is literal or figurative must be established. And generally this method consists in this: that whatever appears in the divine Word that does not literally pertain to virtuous behavior or to the truth of faith you must take to be figurative.”

That’s a pretty general rule for knowing when to interpret a passage allegorically. Did I say, “allegorically”? We don’t really use that old method of trying to understand the Word, do we? Augustine did. So did Paul. There needs to be a bit of the “Alexandrian” approach in all our reading and study of Scripture, but we need to be careful not to take this further than the Scriptures themselves allow.

How do you determine when it is appropriate to read a text allegorically? How does this factor into your preaching and teaching?

Week 4, Day 5

Shaping the Minds of Men

“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him”? But we have the mind of Christ. 1 Corinthians 2.16

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“But Scripture teaches nothing but charity, nor condemns anything except cupidity, and in this way shapes the minds of men.”

These are two good general categories for thinking about the way Scripture affects a person’s worldview. Augustine will unpack them a little further along. But let’s not miss the main point: Scripture wants to shape our thinking – not just *what* we think, but *how*. Scripture is seeking to form every aspect of our worldview so that, increasingly, the mind of Christ which we possess becomes the mind we use each day.

What does Paul mean when he says we have the mind of Christ? Do we always operate out of that mind? Should we?

Week 4, Day 6

Charity and Cupidity

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4.7, 8

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“I call ‘charity’ the motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of God for His own sake, and the enjoyment of one’s self and one’s neighbor for the sake of God; but ‘cupidity’ is a motion of the soul toward the enjoyment of one’s self, one’s neighbor, or any corporal thing for the sake of something other than God.”

Solomon distinguished these two by the phrases, “under the heavens” and “under the sun.” Scripture is trying to shape us to think and live “under the heavens” – loving God as the context for all other loving and living. The world wants us to live merely “under the sun” – finding all our meaning within the framework of self and things. This is the Christian’s daily struggle.

How do you help your people to be aware of the constant pull of our unbelieving age and its desire to draw them away from the things of God?

Week 4, Day 7

The Reign of Charity

Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Acts 17.11

On Christian Doctrine

Augustine (354-430)

“Thus when the tyranny of cupidity has been overthrown, charity reigns with it most just laws of love for God for the sake of God and of one’s self and of one’s neighbor for the sake of God. Therefore in the consideration of figurative expressions a rule such as this will serve, that what is read should be subject to diligent scrutiny until an interpretation contributing to the reign of charity is produced. If this result appears literally in the text, the expression considered is not figurative.”

Now this is very good hermeneutics. We must examine the Scriptures carefully, looking for fuel to energize the engine of charity so that it can carry us through the arid regions of cupidity into the mind of Christ and the Christian worldview for all of life.

Do you teach your people how to study the Bible so that they grow in love for God and others?

For reflection or discussion

1. In studying the Word of God we need to make good use of the “analogy of Scripture.” What tools have you found helpful for this?
2. The “analogy of faith” requires that we compare our studies and conclusions with those of other reliable Christian teachers, past and present. How do you employ this practice in your preparation for preaching or teaching?
3. Explain the difference between cupidity and charity? How can we help those we teach to recognize the difference?
4. What do you take as the most important lessons from these readings from Augustine and Scripture?
5. How are you planning to incorporate those lessons into your own preaching and teaching?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at www.ailbe.org to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

Thank you.