

THE CITY OF GOD
BOOK I

For, in the same fire, gold gleams and straw smokes; under the same flail the stalk is crushed and the grain threshed; the lees are not mistaken for oil because they have issued from the same press. So, too, the tide of trouble will test, purify, and improve the good, but beat, crush, and wash away the wicked. So it is that, under the weight of the same affliction, the wicked deny and blaspheme God, and the good pray to Him and praise Him. The difference is not in what people suffer but in the way they suffer. The same shaking that makes fetid water stink makes perfume issue a more pleasant odor.

—Chapter 8, ¶ 3

VOCABULARY

1. I shall consider it both in its **temporal** stage here below (where it journeys as a pilgrim among sinners and lives by faith) and as solidly established in its eternal abode – that blessed goal for which we patiently hope “until justice be turned into judgment,” but which, one day, is to be the reward of excellence in a final victory and a perfect peace.
— Preface, ¶ 1
2. To this both the shrines of the martyrs and the basilicas of the Apostles bear witness: amid the city’s devastation, these buildings gave refuge not only to the faithful but even to **infidels**.
— Chapter 1, ¶ 2
3. Yet, if they only had sense, they would see that the hardships and cruelties they suffered from the enemy came from that **Divine Providence** who makes use of war to reform the corrupt lives of men.
— Chapter 1, ¶ 2
4. Let the **pagans** read these chronicles, and then adduce one single instance of a city falling into the hands of a foe disposed to spare men seeking refuge in the temples of their gods.
— Chapter 2, ¶ 1
5. For, although some who reflect on these truths repent and are converted from their wickedness, others, according to the words of the Apostle, despise “the riches of His goodness and long-suffering, in the hardness of their heart and **impenitence**” and treasure up to themselves “wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the just judgment of God Who will render to every man according to his works.”
— Chapter 8, ¶ 1
6. The fact is that everyone, however exemplary, yields to some promptings of **concupiscence**: if not to monstrous crimes, abysmal villainy, and abominable impiety, at least to some sins, however rarely or – if frequently – however venially.
— Chapter 9, ¶ 1
7. For, his example shows that the gods are utterly useless to secure temporal **felicity** for their worshipers.
— Chapter 15, ¶ 2
8. To my **cogent** argument to this effect, some may venture to take exception.
— Chapter 19, ¶ 1
9. Since the agent of authority is but a sword in the hand, and is not responsible for the killing, it is in no way contrary to the commandment, “Thou shalt not kill,” to wage war at God’s bidding, or for the representatives of the **State’s** authority to put criminals to death, according to law or the rule of rational justice.
— Chapter 21, ¶ 1

Write the vocabulary word on the first line (a help for spelling) followed by the definition.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

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7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. In Chapter 1, Augustine is criticizing the enemies of the City of God. What is the criticism he is leveling against them?

2. Summarize Augustine's point about suffering in Chapter 8.

3. In Chapter 9, Augustine criticizes Christians for not reproving the wicked. Why, in Augustine's opinion, have Christians failed to do this?

4. In Chapter 19, Augustine presents the case of Lucretia, who committed suicide. What reason does Augustine give for her suicide?

5. According to Chapter 21, does Augustine ever see a justifiable reason for killing another human being. If so, what is the reason or reasons?

6. In Chapter 27, Augustine says there may be only one justifiable reason for suicide. What is that reason, and does he ultimately agree with it?

7. In Chapter 33, Augustine gives a strongly worded reason for why Rome suffered the humiliation of defeat. Describe what Augustine has to say.

Book I, Chapter 3, ¶ 6

These men, I say, hold Christ responsible for the evils which they deservedly suffer for their wicked lives. They have not the slightest appreciation of the fact, that, when they deserved to be punished, they were spared for Christ's sake. On the contrary, with impious perversity and bitterness, they attack His Name with those very tongues which falsely invoked that Name to save them. The very tongues which, like cowards, they held in check in the sacred places when safe, protected and unharmed by the enemy for Christ's sake, they now use to hurl malicious curses against Him.

Book I, Chapter 8, ¶ 2

However, there is a vast difference between the manner in which men use what we call prosperity and adversity. A good man is neither puffed up by fleeting success nor broken by adversity; whereas, a bad man is chastised by failure of this sort because he is corrupted by success. God often shows His intervention more clearly by the way He apportions the sweet and the bitter. For, if He visited every sin here below with manifest penalty, it might be thought that no score remained to be settled at the Last Judgment. On the other hand, if God did not plainly enough punish sin on earth, people might conclude that there is no such thing as Divine Providence. So, too, in regard to the good things of life. If God did not bestow them with patent liberality on some who ask Him, we could possibly argue that such things did not depend on His power. On the other hand, if He lavished them on all who asked, we might have the impression that God is to be served only for the gifts He bestows. In that case, the service of God would not make us religious, but rather covetous and greedy. In view of all that, when good and bad men suffer alike, they are not, for that reason indistinguishable because what they suffer is similar. The sufferers are different even though the sufferings are the same trials; though what they endure is the same, their virtue and vice are different.

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Book I, Chapter 21

The same divine law which forbids the killing of a human being allows certain exceptions, as when God authorizes killing by a general law or when He gives an explicit commission to an individual for a limited time. Since the agent of authority is but a sword in the hand, and is not responsible for the killing, it is in no way contrary to the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill," to wage war at God's bidding, or for the representatives of the State's authority to put criminals to death, according to law or the rule of rational justice.

Thus, Abraham was not only free from the guilt of criminal cruelty, but even commended for his piety, when he consented to sacrifice his son, not, indeed, with criminal intent but in obedience to God. One may well ask, also, whether it was not at God's command that Jephthah killed his daughter when she met him after he had vowed that he would sacrifice to God the first thing he encountered, if he returned victorious from battle. Samson crushed himself and his enemies to death beneath the ruins of a building. He can only be excused on the grounds that the Spirit of the Lord, who wrought miracles through him, had bidden him to do so. But, apart from such men excepted by the command of a just law in general or of God, the very Source of justice, in a special case, anyone who kills a human being, himself or another, is guilty of murder.

Memorable Quote

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—Book I, Chapter 8, ¶ 3

CHAPTER SUMMARIZATION

Preface

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3
