

## 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. **temporal**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
earthly; having to do with the things of the world  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **tempus** - time  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. **infidel**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
an unbeliever; one who doubts a particular religion or religious belief  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **fidelis** - faithful  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. **Divine Providence**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
the care, guardianship, and control offered by God  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **providere** – to provide for  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. **pagan**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
a follower of polytheistic religion  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **paganus** – country-dweller  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. **impenitence**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
the trait of refusing to repent  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **paenitere** – to repent  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. **concupiscence**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
a strong desire  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **cupere** – to desire  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. **felicity**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
great happiness  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **felicitas** – fortunate  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. **cogent**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
appealing to intellect or reason  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **cogere** – to force  
\_\_\_\_\_
9. **State**  
\_\_\_\_\_   
the government  
\_\_\_\_\_   
Latin: **stare** – to stand  
\_\_\_\_\_

## 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?

Augustine is criticizing these individuals because they sought safety from the invaders in the sanctuaries of Christian churches, and now they are attacking Christianity itself. They did not hesitate to claim they were Christian in order to be saved, but once they were saved from the attackers, they failed to show gratitude for their safety.

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

Suffering has a twofold purpose:

1. It serves as a punishment for the unrighteous.
2. It teaches the good to be patient.

The difference, Augustine says, is “not in what people suffer but in the way they suffer.”

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

Because of the effort required to do so, because of the fear of antagonizing them, waiting for a more opportune moment, or for fear that a rebuke may actually make them worse.

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

She was unable to bear the burden of shame. The shame comes from a fear that people would think she was a willing participant, and the only way she could prove her innocence was to take her own life.

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?

Yes. When God authorizes killing by a general law, when He gives an explicit commission to an individual for a limited time, or when the State punishes criminals.

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?

To keep one's self from falling into sin. Augustine does not agree with this reason.

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

He says it is because Rome was already declining from within. He cites the examples of spiritual disease, degeneration, and a decline into immorality and indecency. He asks the opponents of the City of God why they take no responsibility for the tragic situation. Instead of learning from their adversity, they remain in sin.

### **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.*

*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.*

### **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**

*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.*

—Book I, Chapter 8, ¶ 3

# CHAPTER SUMMARIZATION

---

## Preface

In the preface, Augustine sets out his purpose for writing the book, which is *“the task of defending the glorious City of God against those who prefer their own gods to its Founder.”* (§ 1) Those who prefer their own gods to the City of God are full of pride and arrogance.

He will also speak about the Earthly City and its desire to dominate the world.

## Chapter 1

Among those who hate and attack the City of God are many who were saved because they claimed to be followers of Christ. These individuals fled to find sanctuary in churches and were spared by the attackers, and now these same individuals who were saved by claiming the name of Christ are blaming Christ for what happened to Rome. The fact that they were spared by the attackers for the sake of Christ should cause those saved to give credit to Christ, as they would never have been spared from death had they not falsely claimed the name of Christ. Now, they are working against the very name that saved them. Though they received mercy, in Augustine’s opinion they “deserve the penalty of eternal darkness.” How is it, Augustine asks, that the Romans could so harshly criticize what saved them from the invaders? In his typically powerful words, Augustine writes: *“For, many of those whom you see heaping impudent abuse on the servants of Christ would not have escaped the ruin of massacre had they not falsely paraded as servants of Christ. Now, with ungrateful pride, impious madness, and perversity of heart, they work against that Name.”* (§ 3)

## Chapter 2

Augustine makes a powerful point by asking if the gods of Rome would have offered such protection. Not only would they not have offered protection for others, neither would they have offered protection for their own followers. Referring to the history of these gods, Augustine demonstrates the vastness of his knowledge of history.

## Chapter 3

Not content to criticize the Romans for their behavior, Augustine now turns his criticism to the Roman gods. Throughout the book, Augustine will attack the idea of polytheism – the foundation for Roman religion – and he will write in language so critical of Rome and her religions that he no doubt angered many of the Romans and perhaps put his own safety at risk. In this chapter he uses Roman history to demonstrate the weakness of the gods and goes so far as to say the Roman gods could never have survived *“had not Rome made every effort to save them.”* (§ 1)

## Chapter 7

That Rome would suffer the humiliation of invasion was difficult enough for her citizens, but for the invading army to demonstrate compassion would add insult to injury. The Romans, so civilized and just in their own eyes, would find it humiliating that after suffering invasion they would then be upstaged in character by their invaders. It would be doubly humiliating because, as Augustine has been arguing, it was a victory of Christianity over paganism.

## Chapter 8

Augustine is dealing with the expected response of why, then, was God's mercy given to those who are both impious and ungrateful. Shouldn't people receive their just rewards? Augustine's response is to quote Matthew 5:45 – that God "maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust." There is impartiality in God in demonstrating His goodness and grace, and He is patient in order that people would come to repentance.

As God's patience is an invitation to the wicked to repent, so too is His scourge a school of patience for the good.

There is, though, a very great difference in how people respond to either prosperity or adversity. A person who is good is not made arrogant by his prosperity nor broken by adversity; a bad man is broken because he is corrupted by success and unable to see that he can learn from adversity.

Augustine seeks to find a balance between adversity and prosperity. Every sin cannot be punished for its due reward, but if there was no punishment, people would assume there was no involvement on the part of God in the affairs of mankind.

He continues with the delicate balance by saying that if God gave everything that was asked, then people would come to believe that God is to be served only because of what one can receive, making the service of God not religious but covetous and greedy.

He then discusses the issue of how suffering can either strengthen or break a person.

❁ **Application Question:** Is suffering always a sign that God is trying to teach a person/persons a lesson?

## Chapter 9

Augustine seeks to find the benefit for Christians in what they suffered in the attack on Rome. He says they are not entirely undeserving of what they suffered, even though they are far from being criminals and godless men. Here, Augustine is continuing to deal with the larger question of why people – in particular, good people – must suffer. How could this suffering work for their good?

Everyone, Augustine says, yields to some kind of desire, however small those desires may be. He laments the fact that these desires and sins are not challenged. There is a hesitation to instruct and correct because either it is tiresome, there is a fear of offending them, or there is a fear of antagonizing them.

Because the good overlook the sins of the wicked, the good must suffer in this life some afflictions that are common to all, although they will be spared the eternal. So when God's judgment falls upon them as much as on the wicked, it is so they will feel the result of being afraid to reprove and correct.

❁ **Application Question:** How would you answer the question of why people suffer?

## Chapter 14

Augustine says that despite the fact that Christians have been led into captivity, they are never out of the reach of God or in a place where they cannot find their God. This reminder hearkens back to the Babylonian Captivity, when many of the Israelites were carried off into captivity in Babylon. It was in Babylon that they learned they were never outside of God's care or in a place where they could not call upon His name and be heard.