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Omnibus V Primary Section B

Let us consider the two cities of which Augustine speaks; their differences, their histories, their heroes, their fates.

Firstly, that which establishes the essential paradox between what Augustine terms God’s City and man’s is their loves. Their very center of existence and focus differs so drastically as to render them unable to commune together. Their respective loves focus in opposite directions; specifically, those citizens of the city of man direct their loves and attentions inward, unto themselves, while those citizens of God’s kingdom direct their single, unified love to their city’s founder and king.

Even by the standards of the city of man, it is God’s city that will function rightly. Jesus states something only too well known by the people of his day when he says in Mark 3:24 “if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand.” When a city’s inhabitants choose their own paths and loves, though their scattered interests may at various and sundry times by chance coincide, the city as a whole will have a disjointed and estranged love. And a city whose loves are so divided cannot help but have interests that conflict and cross swords. A city so divided is, as Christ says, unable to stand.

In contrast, the city ruled by the eternal God, who so moves and directs the city’s inhabitants as to render their attentions and loves undivided and focused solely upon him, will be a city built strong upon a rock, undivided and never failing; for the God of this city is the omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, merciful, just, and triune God of creation.

From this also we see a logical conclusion – that because of the placements of the loves of each city, we can determine the placement of love’s reciprocal; of hate. For the city of man, loving what it pleases, changing its passions at a moment’s notice, likewise hates what it pleases, always hating that other, more glorious city and often hating even its own city’s citizens.

The City of God, however, loves; though justly, even those who hate them, ever imitating its divine founder and King.

From whence, then, have these cities come? The heavenly city has always been, and always will be, for though even if none were to occupy it save God, it would exist, for God is eternal. The city of man, however, originated when our first parents chose to create the city of man rather than live with God eternally in his city. In this act of rebellion we see evident the truth expressed earlier – that those of the city of man are self-centered, and even when offered a citizenship in the kingdom of God they will turn it down in favor of establishing their own city. But not only was the city of man formed thus, but in the very action of forming it, its founders plunged their posterity into an inheritance of their citizenship. By this, the city of man secured for itself what it thought was the whole world for eternity.

If then by its creation the city of man lays hold of all men, who occupies that heavenly city? It is by the mercy of its creator that the City of God has its citizens, for God, by his divine hand, plucks out wretched citizens of the earthly city and brings them into his heavenly city. In this we see an important characteristic of the heavenly citizens, viz., that by no inherent power are the citizens of the City of God admitted, rather, they rely solely upon the grace of God. As a result the City of God is not puffed up with its own sense of accomplishment or inherent goodness, but, as shown, puts its love and affection – and hope – in its founder and God alone.

Think of Regulus, one who is lauded as a hero by the city of man. By giving up his life, he automatically scores a moralistic point in the city of man. For though given by God’s mercy (extended even unto the city of man!) a sense of justice, the city of man corrupts and so twists that sense of justice as to not consider all circumstances, thus deeming the actions of one such as Regulus most honorable. For Regulus, although he gave up his life, gave it up not for any honorable cause (though that is what he claims), but rather for his own glory. Because he knew that to not return to the Carthaginians would get him shame, he throws himself to his doom in the way he most considers honorable. And so it is that Augustine says of him, “If he thought that this course would be advantageous with respect to this present life, he was certainly much deceived, for he brought his life to a frightful termination.” (Augustine, 20) And in this Augustine means not his earthly life, for Regulus was well aware that he was losing that, but Augustine means that Regulus, having left the city of man by death, had forfeited all chance of entering the City of God. Thus has he terminated most fearfully his eternal and spiritual life.

But consider his counterpart in the City of God, not a contemporary, it is true, but one with a similar story and far greater ending. In Luke’s narrative in the book of Acts we see Paul suffering for, not his own glory, but the glory of God. Acts 14:19-22 says, “But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe. When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to *Lystra* and to *Iconium* and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” Disregarding even the great works Paul did of preaching the gospel, we cannot help but see the stunning reality that few would face – that Paul returned to Lystra, the city that tortured him. Unlike Regulus, Paul had no obligation to return; he would face no shame in going home the short route (for the way through Lystra was the long way back home). But Paul, desiring to “strengthen the souls of many disciples” and to “encourage them to continue in the faith,” returns, despite any persecution he had faced or knew he would face.

It is a stark contrast. Regulus, a hero of the city of man, suffers for his own glory and fame, while Paul suffers not for himself, but for his brethren and for his King.

Consider now the brothers Cain and Abel, the one of man’s city, the latter of God’s. Cain, angered at his brother – a resident of the City of God, kills him. It is simply because, Abel was a member of God’s kingdom and offered right sacrifices that Cain killed him. He killed him because he was jealous. And here we see another trait of the city of man; namely, that it is discontent and jealous. Yet also evident in the story is the City of God – that God had mercy upon Cain and let him live upon the earth after his brother’s murder. Thus in this story we see jealousy, hatred, and misplaced love contrasted with a right love – Abel’s acceptable offering evidences this, and mercy from God.

What then is the end of these cities? What is the frightful termination of which Augustine spoke? And what is the equivalent of that termination for those in the City of God?

Romans 1:18 says “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.” The city of man – that city which, because it is the result of rebellion against God, is full of ungodliness – is handed over from God’s left hand of mercy to his right hand of justice. Though God spares them for the life of this world, giving them every chance to accept the citizenship of a better kingdom, they refuse, and are handed over to his justice and wrath. For it is because the city of man is a shadow, a copy, and a fake that it is destroyed in eternal fire. It is the kingdom of God, which, as the “truth,” will live on into glorious eternity, while the city of man, which is man’s crude copy, is cast into eternal hell because they reject this “truth” “by their unrighteousness.”

Paul goes on in Romans 1 to say “For [God’s] invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So [the city of man is] without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.” The city of man rejected the City of God and as a result will spend eternity in separation from that city. And an eternity in separation from God’s City means an eternity separated from God, who is the only good and just being, and so an eternity separated from God means an eternity of hell. C.S Lewis says, “They [the city of man] enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved: just as the blessed [the City of God], forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.” (Lewis, 130) Lewis puts it very aptly indeed. Those of the city of man, desiring to be free, broke away from God and formed their own city, and for it, they will suffer forever in Hell – the ultimate fulfillment of all their loves, passions, desires, motives, and thoughts. Elsewhere Lewis says “everyone gets what he wants, but it is not always what he expected.” Ultimately, those of man’s city get what they want – separation from God, while those of the City of God get what, by God’s grace, they have been made to want – communion with God. The city of man “exchanged the truth of God for a lie,” and in doing so exchanged a life eternal for a hell eternal.

Paul gives evidence for this exchange of truth for a lie in verse 26-27 of Romans 1, “For this reason,” because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie, “God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.” In exchanging God’s truth for a lie, the city of man exchanges God’s word and law for their own laws and choices. The word Paul uses translated “nature” or “natural” refers to the laws of nature, that is, the laws set down by God since the beginning of time. In rejecting God and creating a new city, man rejects the marriage covenant, the very cornerstone of human relationships. Thus the city of man sets up homosexuality as a preference to the divine command. In worshipping and serving “the creature rather than the Creator,” (Romans 1:25b) the city of man sets up this preference as an idol. By perverting the commands of God and worshipping that twisted creation, they set up homosexuality as an idol in preference of the “Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.” (Romans 1:25c)

And thus it is that Augustine has chosen this verse to illustrate the city of man, because it highlights the essential crux point – that man “exchanged the truth about God for a lie.” It is because of this that the city of man has formed, continues to exist, and will be plunged into Hell.

Likewise, Augustine chooses 1st Corinthians 15 to exemplify the City of God:

“For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins… But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep… For as in Adam all died, so also in Christ shall all be made alive… For God has put all things in subjection under his feet.” (1st Corinthians 15:16-17,20,22,27a)

In this verse is the key of the City of God. Paul puts it plainly: without the resurrection of Christ, we would still be in sin, and if still in sin, then still in the city of man. This is, as “exchanging the truth of God for a lie” is for the city of man, the cornerstone point upon which the City of God stands or falls. Notice the comparison here – “as in Adam all die”- this is the beginning of the earthly city, “so in Christ shall all be made alive” – this is the heavenly city. “For God has put all things in subjection under [Christ’s] feet.” This verse shows clearly God’s role in the founding of the City of God. It is not man that does, or did, or will do. It is God. The only times in these verses that man forms the subject noun is in a derogatory sense. “…you are still in your sins.” Or in verse 15: “We are even found to be misrepresenting God.” It is God, and God alone, who founds, establishes, upholds, and carries on the City of God. It is when everything is placed under his feet that true love, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and all virtue are perfectly manifest, for it is God alone who perfectly possesses these virtues.

And so Augustine chooses this passage, because it so faithfully establishes the crucial point of the City of God while contrasting with the city of man. And yet it does this all with a God-centered tendency.

In conclusion then, the city of man exchanges the “truth” of the City of God for a lie, preferring its own path. As a result the city of man, getting what it desired, will be plunged into an eternal hell, and the City of God will continue into eternity in blissful communion with God.

Works Cited

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