In the last session, we considered factors contributing to Augustine's conversion according to his confessions. At present, we consider more systematically his case for both the God of general revelation and creation and then the God of special revelation in Jesus and the Scriptures.

Point B then in our outline having considered A: Augustine's conversion, the changeless mind of God, the source of all truth. Augustine could not long remain a skeptic because he found that position to be self-contradictory. He said long before Descartes, “I doubt, therefore, I am,” *dubito, ergo sum*. He could know something that conformed to experienced reality by immediate rational intuition his own existence as a doubter. He knew by immediate experience also that he was a changing being with a changing mind, changing affections, and changing purposes. Furthermore, he knew by immediate sensory experience that he lived in a changing world. Many objects of our knowledge are changing, but the truth that Augustine was not a white Western thinker but a North African pastor who wrote at about 400 AD will always be true.

Truth, even about changing things, is always true. Even if the earth should pass away it would remain true that it was destroyed, but Augustine then discovered that he knew some things that were changeless: the uniform laws of nature, changeless principles of ethics like justice, changeless values like love, and changeless principles of mathematics and logic. For example, he said he had intuitively to know the meaning of one before he could learn to count one stone or two marbles. Some universal and necessary knowledge is prior to knowledge of particulars in the Platonic tradition. Like Plato, he held that we know *a priori*, what justice is, and so when some person or society that is unjust, we see when we see some person or society that is unjust, we can make an accurate observation.
Without the absolute standard of justice, we would not be able to compare one person or state as more just than another. Changeless propositions as distinct from sentences reside in our minds but are not about our minds. But it is impossible to think of a proposition apart from the activity of a mind. A weakness in Plato was his imagining changeless ideas or forms not held by any mind. These ideas are not from us and do not reside in us, but they do reside in an active mind. They have to do with a changeless mind, one that always is and is always thinking. Changeless objects of truth have to do with the “I am,” with the changeless mind of God or the divine *logos*.

Whether we are aware of it or not every changing person lives, moves, and thinks in the presence of God’s unchanging truth. “God thus is closer,” Augustine said, “than a friend speaking to you.” Although active, God is unchanging in His character and purposes. When anyone knows any universal and changeless moral principles, one knows God’s mind. The *logos* of God is eternal with God and is God (John 1:1).

He enlightens everyone who comes into the world in a universal or general revelation. Eternal truths, laws, or principles are set forth publically for all to see. They are objective; that is, perceived by all perceiving, yet suffering no change or dissolution. Like Paul at Athens, Augustine’s logical starting point is the God who is. He argues that belief in the Creator Illuminator provides the knowledge of all changeless truths.

We can learn many things about an artist’s usual work from his many paintings in a museum, but if the artist should plan to come into the museum to offer himself in place of hostages held captive there, we would only know of that plan by a special verbal communication. Why is special revelation necessary in addition to the universal laws of nature, math, logic, and morality? Well, if God has unique inner plans for history we will not learn them from observation of the usual order. If there are such plans, we must consider the claim that they have been revealed.

Augustine then argues that belief in the God of Creation and Revelation provides the most coherent answer to the data of the world’s existence—the first century events related to Jesus Christ in Israel and the phenomena of the Bible.
Point C then – Augustine’s points of contact for reasoning with non-Christians. From our immediate rational intuitions of the laws of thought and morality and the sensory intuitions of the order of nature, all lovers of truth gain wisdom, changeless truths; the Latin term was *sapientia*. It is neither mine nor his nor hers but belongs to every thinking being. Mathematical truths are no more subjective than physical objects. Is not a moral truth, like justice, available everywhere? If we go to the east or to the west, justice is the same. It is not in any place but it is everywhere. If one chooses to abandon justice and sin, is justice diminished? Not at all. Augustine says one abandons it but leaves it whole. He is converted to it and finds it whole. Cognition of the changeless forms or patterns of the basic kinds of things and the categories of thought about them is common to non-Christians as well as Christians; theologically, both are created by God in His image.

The difference between the temporal and the eternal is the difference between the changing and the changeless. Creatures are always changing. God remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. God is the great I Am, and whenever we know anything that is changeless, we know something about God’s thought. We know something of God. We know the mind of God, the *logos*, the Word or wisdom of God, for all truth is God’s truth wherever it may be discovered.

In the divine mind before Creation were the blueprints of all the things God would make. The essences of things are prior to their existence. Augustine’s position is just the opposite of existentialism that maintains that existence precedes essence. Things did not automatically emanate from the divine being. God freely chose to create others with whom to share His love. First, God made the raw materials or seeds of things, and then in six creative days freely formed the different kinds for a reproductive purpose. The words *idea*, *form*, and *species* are practically synonymous in Augustine. Biologists find classifiable forms in things still today. We observe not only intelligible forms but also intelligible relationships or laws of nature in the ordered fitness of things. These relationships include grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, music, geometry, and astronomy. It is because we are created in the image of God with a capability of knowing changeless natural laws—as well as observing physical things like the animals—that we can discover these relationships. The intellect must be used, however, to gain wisdom. *Sapiential* truths (changeless truths like the uniform laws of nature, math, logic, and morality) must be perceived not by the senses and the reason—the *ratio*—but by the
**intuitions** of the mind, the intellectus. By creation humans are endowed with an intuitive capacity for the immediate reception of changeless principles and a conceptual capacity for consciously remembering truths formerly seen. Contemplation simply requires the continuous undivided attention to eternal truth.

Because our intuitive, conceptual, and contemplative capacities are blinded by sin and at the whim of a perverse will, they are not used properly. Sinners need divine recreation and illumination to receive changelessly Spiritual things. The *logos* of God is the efficient cause of any seeing of changeless truth but often uses physical occasions such as visual or audible linguistic signs; the words of a teacher do not teach but their invisible reference, the things themselves, which God reveals to the soul. What God discloses are the changeless forms and laws in the mind of the *logos*. They are unconditioned by any changing factors in persons or cultures. They are, in contemporary language, absolutes by which we evaluate all that is relative. All scientists who know changeless laws, mathematicians who know an indivisible point such as one and a perfect circle, have not gathered these concepts from imperfect divisible objects or imperfect circles. We have to know how long a yard is before we can observe whether this or that piece of cloth is closer to a yard.

Such *a priori* standards are suggested and illumined by the *logos*. Ethicists who know moral laws like justice know God’s mind. Plato attained more knowledge of the universal and necessary truths than others in his time, but after extensive dialogue he intuited the existence of the eternal being. If some of God’s attributes and some of the forms and laws of His creation, the shining of light from the sun illuminates objects only for those who have visual capacity and use it. Although all are illumined, the knowing person is self-centered and conditioned by sinful inclinations and habitual choices; so instead of loving, knowing, and serving the Creator, we know, love, and serve the creation far more. Weighed down by sinful inclinations, the intellectus does not see eternal truths by its own efforts. General grace then illumines general revelation concerning creation, but it leaves people ignorant of eternal plans for history and redemption. “Plato,” Augustine said, “had discovered the truth of John 1:1; ‘In the beginning was the Word, the *logos*, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,’” but never did Augustine read in all the works of the Platonists the truth of John 1:14, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”
Consider further the distinctions now at point D in the outline: The distinctions between wisdom, knowledge, and faith. Augustine held that people can discover truth about both the eternal and the temporal realms. The eternal is the changeless; the temporal the changing. Our cognizance of the two realms differs in object, method, and end. The objects of our quest for changeless truth such as principles of logic and math and God's redemptive purposes are designated *sapientia* (wisdom). The capacity for knowing such changeless truths is the *intellectus* or understanding, and the end of its use is contemplation.

In contrast, the object of our quest in the temporal realm is *scientia* (knowledge), the Latin term from which we get science. The capacity for knowing historical or changing data is the reason or the Latin term *ratio*, and the end of its use is action. This distinction between wisdom and knowledge is basic to the interpretation of Augustine. Unfortunately, many interpreters have missed it. It will be seen that faith in Christ then is not prior to knowledge although it is prior to wisdom. Another major distinction applies to both wisdom and knowledge, as some information in each realm is immediately known by the individual and some information is mediated to the individual through signs. In other words, some objects are seen and some are unseen; we learn about these from others who have discovered them. “Our knowledge therefore consists of things seen and things believed. Of the things which we have seen or now see, we are our own witnesses, but in those which we believe, we are led to assent by the testimony of others because of the things which we do not recall having seen or do not now see we receive indications, either by spoken or written words or by certain documents believed.”

If a person accepts only what he himself has experienced, he has a very small world. But to extends one’s knowledge beyond what one has directly experienced is to give up the autonomy of reason. Reason now depends on information mediated to it. Often there is little one can do to control what is presented to one’s consciousness, but it is within one’s power to accept or reject alleged testimony concerning unseen events.

When a person assents to the truth of a proposition conveyed from the experience of someone else, he is said to believe. “What is believing?” Augustine asks. But consenting to the truth of what is said and this consent is certainly voluntary. Assent is essential to faith, *fides* in Latin. If assent be taken away, faith goes too, for without assent there can be no belief. The skeptical academicians
sought to make no place for faith. But the most skeptical had to assent to the fact that he was alive to doubt. In practical life, it is impossible to suspend belief. “He, who gives assent to nothing,” Augustine says, “does nothing.”

Rational beings then finding it impossible to avoid giving assent differ only in the objects of faith. Keep that point in mind. Atheists have faith and people of all other different world views have faith. The only question is whose faith is well-founded. “For faith is not credulity,” Augustine says, “Indiscriminate faith is not good.” Accordingly, we find this caution, “Brethren, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.” Faith in Augustine is also distinguished from wishful thinking having joined the Manicheans because they claim to give a complete rational explanation for all their tenants independent of any faith whatsoever.

Augustine later admitted he had resulted that whatever they said I approved of as true not because I knew it to be true but because I wished it to be. So he warned his readers, “Indisputably, we must take care lest the mind believing that which it does not see ____ to itself something which is not and hoped for and love that which is false. He also distinguished faith from mere opinion. Those who have opinion instead of knowledge think that they know what they know not. This abstinence is never without fault he insists. Strength of conviction is no substitute for truth or credible authority. Assent to the truth of false propositions does not make them true.

Point E: Knowledge precedes belief in the Bible as history. Although Augustine taught total depravity affecting every part of our nature, a common illumination overcomes the depravity in relation to temporal things. We are not blinded to science nor is our will turned against it. Augustine’s arguments against the use of the intellect in the quest for redemptive wisdom are not applied to the use of the reason in the quest for historical knowledge. Knowledge of temporal things thus is prior to belief in general in three respects: One must recognize signs as signs, interpret the content conveyed, and see some evidence for assenting to the content as true.

As Augustine put it, “For who cannot see that thinking is prior to believing.” He is usually quoted for saying just the opposite, “For no one believes anything unless he has first thought what it is to be believed. For however suddenly, however rapidly, some thoughts
fly before the wheel to believe and this presently follows in such ways as to attend them as it were in closest conjunction. It is yet necessary that everything which is believed should be believed after thought has preceded. Although even belief itself is nothing else than to think with assent for it is not everyone who thinks that believes since many think in order that they not believe, but everybody who believes thinks, both thinks and believing and believes in thinking. If faith is not a matter of thought, it is of no account.”

Speaking of an analogous motion of the will, Augustine says, “No one man can love at all a thing of which he is wholly ignorant.” Again we could not believe at all if we did not have rational souls. On what criteria then will he judge historical records worthy of assent?

First, the scholar must not limit his research to those sources which agree with him or to those written by believers. Neither can one believe all that profane historians have written for they contradict themselves. When the records contradict, no content is left for assent.

Two, in addition to consistency, accounts worthy of belief come from reliable sources. The informants are not intentional deceivers.

Three, furthermore the writer’s character must be trustworthy. Intellectual honesty is respected.

Four, special caution is in order when the record includes accounts of miracles. Religious cults are noted for “Traveler’s tales and fictitious romances,” such as the story of the temple of Venus alleged to have an indistinguishable lamp. The biblical records are not exempt from the examination of any history. Authority demands belief and prepares for reason but reason is not entirely absent from authority for we have got to consider whom we have to believe. Again, it is our duty to consider what men or what books we are to believe in order that we may rightly worship God wherein lies our sole salvation.

In his consideration of biblical history a fifth criterion of credibility comes out. The Manicheans denied the virgin conception of Christ challenging the birth narratives of Matthew and Luke. Augustine countered with an emphasis upon the contemporaneity of the disciples to the people involved in the alleged event. Augustine
also appealed to the continuous body of testimony from the first generation to his time, a phenomenon far more impressive in his day than ours.

A seventh criterion is the authenticity of the text. Augustine berated the Manicheans for manipulating the readings to suit their purposes when there were not varied readings in the manuscripts or translations. He challenged the Manicheans to produce one manuscript with a reading they preferred showing his awareness of the problems of textual criticism and his respect for the evidence as it is.

Augustine’s acceptance of the Bible as a reliable historical source can hardly be called a mere *a priori* assumption. While the events described are beyond direct observation the basis for believing them is subject to critical scrutiny. If in the face of these critical considerations the biblical narratives are rejected as history, Augustine argues, the utter overthrow of all literature will follow and there will be an end to all books handed down from the past. If what is supported by such a strong popular belief and established by the uniform testimony of so many people and so many times is brought into such suspicion that it is not allowed to have the credit and authority of common history. In fine, he added, “What can you quote from any writings of which I may not speak in this way if it is quoted against my opinion and my purpose?” Augustine then believed that the Bible was a good history book not by wishful thinking but according to critical criteria applied to any allegedly historical sources.

Point F in the outline: Knowledge precedes belief. Knowledge precedes belief in the Bible and Jesus as mediators of God’s eternal plans for history. It is one thing for the Bible to speak truly when it says a person’s name was John the Baptist who traveled in the wilderness. It is another thing to say that he was a prophet sent from God. How can we know beyond the realm of changing knowledge eternal changeless wisdom? Well, just as we have written records of unobservable events in the past so we have linguistic signs in Scripture and visible signs in the incarnate Christ indicating the eternal significance of redemptive events. We were too weak by ___ reason to find out the truth and for this cause needed the authority of holy writings. The words of the Bible like events of history are temporal but they convey wisdom nevertheless because temporal and visible to the senses, the words of the Bible even as they speak of invisible eternal things are known by the capacity for rational cognizance.
The study of the Bible is explicitly called *scientia* or critical knowledge and a step toward actual intuition of wisdom itself. The Bible is God’s Word but God’s Word expressed in temporal signs not God’s Word as the eternally begotten *logos*. Augustine decries the bibliolatry of those in bondage to the signs without knowing what they signify. The writers of Scripture received the gift of inspiration to supply defects in their knowledge. The authors of the (sounds like “cononecal”) books alone were completely free from error.

In his classic argument with Jerome, Augustine denied that there could be any falsehood in Scripture, not even a single well-meant falsehood. Is this claim to complete verbal inspiration and inerrancy, an unsupported bit of wishful thinking? Why did Augustine assent to the Bible not only as a good history book but also as a communique of unverifiable eternal truths? The primary signs that the biblical authors had seen God’s eternal plans for a lost world are their miracles and fulfilled prophecies. By the miracles God awakened the soul which is immersed in things visible to worship Himself the invisible. Those who deny the miraculous events assert that in such matters, no records whatever can be credited and may also say that there are no gods who care for human affairs.

The writers of Scripture are also known to be mediators of wisdom by their awareness of God’s redemptive plans in advance. Biblical predictions differ from those of the wise people and soothsayers which were founded either on foresight or subsidiary causes. The biblical prophets knew and often predicted such things as could not be detected by human observation nor be readily verified by experience.

Augustine argues that the prophecies cannot be explained away as ambiguous written after the events or mere coincidences, so on the basis of critical knowledge he accepts the Bible’s teaching on the wisdom of the gospel and its eternal plan.

A second form of mediated wisdom is not linguistic but living the incarnate Christ. Though He is everywhere present to the inner eye that is sound and clear, He condescends to make Himself manifest to the outward eye of those whose inward sight is weak and dim. The evidence? The miracles He performed and particularly His own resurrection from the dead. Augustine lists the empirical data of the scars taking food and drink showing the reality and identity of the physical body. Then he points to the
universal conviction of the early church. If the resurrection is an incredible thing, he argued, then this also is an incredible thing that is incredible should have received such credit.

What then is the wisdom accepted on faith through this knowledge of Christ and the Bible? It does not include such things as knowing the exact location of the Garden of Eden, where Elijah and Enoch are at present, the nature of the third heaven, why Old Testament patriarchs lived to such an old age or when with such a lifespan they reached the age of puberty or whether Methuselah died before the flood or was preserved somewhere during it. In questions like these, uncertainty and even error is possible among interpreters without heresy, but the irreducible minimum of doctrinal content to which assent must be given includes the incarnation, death for our sins, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Now without this faith, Augustine said, that is to say without a belief in the one mediator between God and men the man Christ Jesus without faith I say in His resurrection by which God has given assurance to all men and which no one could of course truly believe were it not for His incarnation and death. Without faith therefore in the incarnation and death and resurrection of Christ, the Christian verity unhesitatingly declares that the ancient saints could not possibly have been cleansed from sin and so as to have become holy and justified by the grace of God.

Now faith in Christ involves more than assent to these doctrines of Jesus as we would believe in the apostles. It means to believe on Christ as well. That means “to love Him, to esteem Him highly.” Faith on Christ is likened to the highest good of marriage; the mutual trust of one person in another. As early as the soliloquies, Augustine exhorts, “Believe steadfastly on God and insofar as you can, entrust yourself wholly to Him.” This total commitment to Christ is not based on wishful thinking. Knowledge of history, knowledge of biblical criticism, knowledge of Jesus comes first.

Point G in the outline: Holistic Faith precedes wisdom. We have emphasized this point, that knowledge precedes belief. Then that belief and trust in Jesus Christ precedes the reception of further wisdom. Faith is not prior to historical investigation. It is prior to immediate intuition of eternal truths of wisdom. Although an unbeliever cannot direct the changeless intentions of God, his newly experienced faith frees his will and intellect to investigate them. Augustine, long before John Dewey, recognized that a spirit of inquiry must precede genuine learning. Inquiry is the desire of
finding or what is the same thing of discovering the will to know. Faith overcomes the indifference that hinders the hedonist’s quest for wisdom. Faith also challenges the pride that presumes things unknown to be known. A person may be so impressed with one’s attainments in knowledge and wisdom through general grace that one begins worshipping and serving the creature rather than the Creator.

As faith motivates us to inquiry of redemptive truth, let us therefore so seek as if we should find, and so find as if we were about to seek. There is a kind of chain reaction between knowledge and belief, belief and faith, and faith and the desire for greater wisdom. We must first believe if we are to see redemptive truth that what we are commanded to do we cannot do. The will which is free in evil things because it takes pleasure in evil is not free in good things for the reason that it has not been made free. God acts upon us to will and to believe externally by evangelical exhortation and internally where no man has in his control what shall enter into his thoughts although it appertains to his own will to consent or dissent.

So we become awake towards God, and love for God is increasingly shed abroad in our hearts. We must first believe in order; even to seek to understand the priority of faith is argued also, because the intellectus created in God’s image to know Him, as well as the will, has been disabled by sin. To imagine that we can see all eternal truths before believing is to be greatly unmindful of our limited capacities of the shortness of life which remains to us, for there are innumerable questions, the solution of which is not to be demanded before we believe.

The priority of faith is argued from what Augustine calls an analogy to nature. Action should be the result of contemplation but, in actuality, people are called upon to act before they are capable of contemplating. Hence, principles of action must be taken on authority. In childhood when education begins, there must be reliance upon the trustworthiness of the textbooks and teachers before there can be original work done in the field for one’s self. In the order of nature, when we learn anything, authority precedes reasoning. Clearly, this authority is merely provisional until we mature and discover these truths for ourselves.

The Roman Catholic uses Augustine’s statements on the authority of the church to overlook this merely temporary nature of the church’s authority. In advising a religious inquirer to begin with
the Catholic Church, Augustine explained, “I do not wish any prejudgment to be formed from this fact, but I accounted a most favorable commencement for inquiry. At any rate, it is perfect happiness if the truth may be found there. In case it cannot, then at length at whatever risk we must go and search some other where.

So Augustine’s presentation of the case for Jesus and the Bible on the authority of the church is merely provisional until people mature in their experience and are able to ____ see through elimination wisdom for themselves. Augustine did genuinely put his faith to the test and acknowledge possible failure. His test is therefore hypothetical. His apologetic approach is not merely presuppositional nor is it merely inductive. He proposes faith in the God revealed in Jesus and history. The priority of faith then does not mean blind trust even in the undivided Catholic Church of St. Augustine’s day. The priority of faith is necessary as a provisional authority in areas one has not yet been able to investigate. It is also prior because the Holy Spirit uses it to purify the mind and enable it again to see eternal truth.

In Augustine’s writings, then, faith is prior to direct understanding of redemptive plans because faith in the unseen stimulates inquiry; it also defeats pride, is the instrument of receiving the ability to do what ought to be done, saves time, supplies a provisional authority, promotes harmonious relationship to God, and initiates the restoration of the intellectual capacity.

However, faith is not an end in itself. Faith is understanding step and understanding faith’s attainment. Understanding is the direct intellectual cognizance of eternal things through the visible signs of the Scriptures or the incarnate Christ. Against a believer who belittled the attempt to directly intuit what he believed, Augustine wrote, “God forbid that he should hate in us that faculty by which he made us superior to all other living beings. A person who fails to desire understanding and is satisfied with belief only fails to grasp the advantage of faith.

Well, how do we stretch through knowledge to wisdom? We are admonished by the transitory sounds of the voice thus direct your thoughts to the teaching of Christ and ye shall arrive at the Word of God.
But why cannot we bypass faith in the incarnate Christ and have a direct disclosure of spiritual realities? This quest for immediacy is the one great craving of the rational soul in the pursuit of truth, and it’s the great craving of mystics in the east and west today. Augustine’s answer is, “What you desire is excellent and well worthy of your love, but Leah is to be married first and then Rachel. The proper effect of your eagerness is to lead you to submit to the right method instead of rebelling against it for without this method you cannot attain what you so eagerly long for. Acceptance of Scriptural teaching then keeps the philosopher and historian from wasting time on useless questions. There is no point in discussing whether human nature could be corrupted by sin, etc. Sin has already corrupted it. Rather than believing from inspired Scripture that it’s corrupted by sin, let our inquiry be how this could possibly have come about.

Acceptance of Scripture, then, did exclude some questions but it raised many others. Augustine did not exhaust the inexhaustible treasury of Scripture teaching throughout a lifetime of ministry, study, and writing. I trust that you will follow his example as you give yourself to what can be known. Believe what is credible and trust the Christ of whom the gospel speaks, and then come to know Him better in your personal experience.