Hello again. I hope all is going well with you with your studies and your life, your relationships, and your relationship with the Lord and your service to Him. Today we're going to talk about a fantastic work called *On Christian Doctrine*, and you'll be reading that work following this lecture. And so I’m eager to get into it because it's very important, both to the life of the church and I think practical as it applies to our own life today. But as our habit’s been, we’ll begin with prayer and then turn to our subject matter.

With regard to prayer, we’ve been thinking a little bit about Augustine's devotional work *Soliloquies* and the beginning matter or series of prayers that he offers up to the Lord, and I’m going to quote from book 1, chapter 3, at the beginning of that chapter, in invocation and then we’ll pray along those lines.

Augustine says, “Thee I invoke, O God, the truth in whom and from whom and through whom are all things that are true which are anywhere.” Let’s turn in prayer as we contemplate that. Father, we do come to You as the only true source of truth and knowledge. Father, we exalt You above all vain speculations and vain pursuits of our own. Above our studies we exalt You, above our pursuit of degrees and achievement, and we pray that our focus, our desire, our quest would be not merely for knowledge but for relationship, for virtue, for changed life, and for service, and that it will all be motivated out of gratitude to You. So, now unto the one who is indeed the way, the truth, and the life, we offer these things up in His name. Amen.

Today we’re going to discuss *On Christian Doctrine*, a very important work, but let me summarize briefly what we talked about last time to get our train of thought here. Remember, in the last lecture we began talking about Augustine's works, and we looked specifically at a handful of his earliest works with the exclusion of one called *On the Freedom of the Will*. I’ve decided to include that one in our
discussion on the Pelagians because it’s so important with regard to the Pelagian movement and the Pelagians and Augustine’s own development of thought. But you’ll remember that with the main works that we looked at, we looked at works that Augustine wrote right after his conversion, prior to and just following his baptism, and they reflect strong philosophical themes. There is a kind of growing interest in theology. There’s a growing sophistication of his Christian dialogue, and yet it’s not the sappy stuff of a seasoned bishop or pastor. And I mean that semi-sarcastically for you to think about it.

We’ve got here a converted pagan on the line who is just beginning to think about the Christian life. Isn’t it interesting that the first work that he writes is a contemplation on the good life? Here is a person who fulfilled the classical quest of self-expression, of individuality, of search and thirst for knowledge, for success in his life, for achievement, and everything that a Roman from the backwaters of the northern provinces of Africa would lust for in provincial governmental life, and he found these things unexpectedly, surprisingly fulfilled in the crucified carpenter from Galilee.

He abandons everything and with the kind of compelling draw that he has, his mother and brother and nephew and friends and students follow him into retreat, and he writes on the essence of the good life, and remember the thing that he contrasts is the life of a person with virtue over against the life of a person with worldly success. While the two may sometimes join together, if one lives their life for the satisfaction in this world, then they’re living their life for temporal things and there will be no satisfaction. And he notices that those who live though by virtue oftentimes don’t experience their heaven on earth, but yet they experience a transcending and abiding joy that comes from knowledge of God. That is very meaningful to me, and it’s interesting as he’s thinking about these things early on.

We also noticed his work Against the Skeptics. We looked at his works on the Manichaeans and the problem of evil. In each of these areas he’s going to be dealing with questions of authority, with questions of truth, with questions of whether the individual can come to truth or not. He’s going to be taking on his philosophical background, he’s going to be taking on his background and experiences with the Manichees, and so forth. And then we also looked at his Soliloquies briefly and his great devotional work and some of the themes that are developed in it,
and we’ve been thinking about these profound prayers and other spiritual thoughts that have been developed in this work.

And finally we began working at some of his works on the nature of the soul. Again, this harkens back to both his background in the neo-Platonic school and with the Manicheans. The question of was the soul material or immaterial? What is the soul being self? What is its relationship to time? What is its relationship to will and determination, to sin, to pleasing God, and working out of this, he begins to develop also a theme of pedagogy. He wrote a tract on teaching. This plays into what we’re going to talk about today. The final work that I would fit into this if we wanted to look comprehensively at his early works would be *Freedom of the Will*, but we’ll, again as I said, pick that up when we talk about the Pelagians because it’s so important as it relates to the Pelagian movement.

We have a nice transition with his work *On Teaching* as we move into *Concerning Christian Doctrine*, because they’re both works that deal with pedagogy. It is very interesting to note that Augustine is a teacher, and he’s interested in questions concerning how one learns, what is the essence of knowledge, and what kind of effect does it have on us, and furthermore how do we relate that to others, and so his works abound in pedagogy.

Today the main objectives that I’d like to get at, I’d like to kind of provide an introduction to *On Christian Doctrine* so that as you read it, you’ll feel that you’re on familiar ground and you’ll have some background to it, some background understanding as you then respond to some of the questions that we’ll ask you to think about. I’d also like to indicate the importance of this work both to the medieval church and to the Renaissance humanists. This had a profound impact on the Christian church and still does in many ways. I also want to try to provide a historical background for various themes that are developed in the work, particularly backgrounds in the development of exegesis or hermeneutics and the history of the interpretation of literature, but especially of Christian literature, because this will be a major emphasis in this work. I want to place it in its historical stream of consciousness. Also, to look forward to see what kind of influence it had in those areas to the medieval church, the Renaissance church, and even today.

I would like to also evaluate in light of this work some contemporary approaches to exegesis and hermeneutics, and finally, I’d like to
try to foster some critical thinking concerning issues that relate more broadly to worldview and how we approach pedagogy. How do we approach teaching and learning? What’s the essence of all of that? And these are things that are very much the major themes of this very important work.

So let’s begin with some introductory material and think together along some of these lines and begin with the idea of the development of Augustine’s thinking. It is interesting, as I mentioned above, that Augustine seems to always be preoccupied with this question of teaching and learning. His works can be categorized a number of ways.

We are approaching his works semi-chronologically, but we’re also approaching them organized around certain themes.

There are basically four chronological stages to Augustine’s works, and his most important pedagogical works, works on teaching and learning, were done in the first stage, his earliest development, and in the last stage of his life. What is interesting with his view on pedagogy over against his view, for instance, on the will is that when we compare the earliest thoughts with the later thoughts, they don’t change. In fact, he’s almost at his best in the earliest. It’s something that’s an overarching theme, that’s part of the marrow of his Christian soul from the beginning of his Christian walk. It’s something that works out of his background as a classical teacher and is transformed as it’s infused by the Spirit in some deep, rich, spiritual contemplation that takes place both between him and himself and with those who are in his small circle of friends and his early walks in grace. And this is the fruit of it, and so it’s interesting that this will be a major driving theme in his life and yet we find such rich stuff in the early periods.

It is also important to realize always with Augustine and with ourselves that it’s very difficult to remove ourselves from backgrounds and influences and trends and so forth, and so he’s going to be heavily influenced by his own philosophical and classical background, and yet he’s going to respond to it in a new and Christian way. This is again, it gets back to a couple of lectures ago where we were trying to place Augustine in the development of the medieval church, and Augustine marks a turning point. It’s the place where man is removed from the center of classicism and the Spirit is infused in and the quest of knowing one’s self is replaced by the quest of knowing not that eternal one, but God and knowing Him intimately and Him knowing us and being
motivated by a virtue which has care for others, being a virtue of faith, hope, and love, looking not for temporal fulfillment but an eternal fulfillment.

This all sounds rather sermonic to you, but it was profound in Augustine’s day because what it did was it gutted classicism of its driving impetus and baptized it in a new spiritual understanding. This is important to keep in mind, and we’ll pick up on some of these themes as we move along here.

Let me briefly outline to you the importance of this little work in later thought, and I’ll try to do it simply chronologically by taking those who developed on it in the medieval period and then those Renaissance thinkers who developed on it. Just very briefly in a cursory way, it had tremendous impact on the way later thinkers thought about Christian education. We live in a day and age where there’s a whole movement called Christian education, and it’s influenced by all kinds of ideas, and it’s a catch-22 in some ways. There are all kinds of fish in the kettle. In Augustine’s day, he was involved in conceiving the earliest notions on paper about what it meant to be Christianly educated. This is closely tied to issues that relate to worldview and so forth, and we’ll talk about those in a moment, but the medieval world, so heavily dominated by in the West the Roman Church, and in the East by the church at Constantinople, these things would be taken very much for granted, and they’ll be developed as it becomes inculturated in medieval society. So later works on pedagogy by Cassiodorus, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Peter Lombard all drew material directly from this little work.

In Peter Lombard’s *Sentences*, which formed the framework for theological education in the later church, it’s formulated over against Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*. So plagiarism is a form of flattery, and in this case all are standing on the shoulders of Saint Augustine and his theory of Christian education.

You’ll see that one of the themes that’s developed, an important theme, relates to the question of exegesis or hermeneutics. How do I interpret writing? Augustine’s ideas that are articulated in this work will be developed later by many theologians and by many church fathers. It will have a profound influence on the medieval interpretation of Scripture. *On Christian Doctrine* in some ways provides the lens through which the medieval church understood God’s revelation. And that’s not an overstatement. It really truly did affect the way they read and understood the text.
The Bible in the Middle Ages, the later Middle Ages, was surrounded by patristic commentary. The manuscripts were copied and chains of interpretations and quotations and insights were carried along by the scribe in the marginal references, and this became standardized and was called the *glossa ordinaria*. This interpretive framework for the Word was heavily dependent on Augustine's approach to Scripture. Many of Augustine's ideas can be seen in the margins and certainly people who are depending on his approach to Scripture, Saint Bonaventure, Erasmus, two later writers who also were heavily influenced by this spiritual approach to the text. They're two of many who could be listed, and we may have opportunity to pick up on some of their ideas a little bit later.

So, the world of the Middle Ages looked at Scripture differently and in part because it was looking through the lens provided by Augustine, and we’ll talk about that lens in a minute here. Let me say beyond the written page, let’s talk about other symbols of Christianity. You see, Augustine in this work will be talking about ways of infusing understanding into symbols and signs. For those of you who were not raised in an orthodox tradition or not from an orthodox tradition, you might find it somewhat mystical, paranormal this kind of spiritualization of the Christian liturgy and icons and everything that is part and parcel with the drama of those apostolic church traditions, but in a very real sense, they’re intimately tied to Augustine's ideas on how symbols and signs in and of themselves can fall flat on their face, that it’s infusing in them spiritual understanding that brings meaning.

Let me give an example in the medieval period. The whole development of art and architecture in some ways should be viewed through the same lens as those medieval theologians view the Scriptures; that is, the whole Gothic, paranormal, spiritual kind of architecture that developed had spiritual meaning, and it had meaning that the stonemasons who labored away in the cathedral in Koln, Germany, understood in some sense. They realized they were working on a work that had mystical significance, that would have profound meaning to the worshiper, whether it’s the exaltation of Mary in one place or the scowl of a gargoyle peering over a stone in another.

In the same way, the art had symbols and signs that signaled to the devotee, to the worshiper, things that related to the Christian faith. In a world of growing illiteracy, these symbols and signs became ever the more important. If you’re in a world in a decline
in education which results in reading and you have more and more people illiterate, Christian faith is taught weekly by and through the beautiful pieces of art, the stained glass windows showing the stations of the cross in a church, in multicolor splendor, screaming forth the teachings of the gospel to those who couldn’t read. A child could sit and understand that as they interpreted it while they were bored in a Latin Mass they couldn’t understand. There’s a close connection between the emergence of medieval art and architecture and Augustine’s work here on the spiritual interpretation of sign and symbol.

In terms of the Renaissance, if we move away from the medieval period and we look at the rebirth of learning, a new interest in antiquity that took place in the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, again, while there were many superstitious things, the church would be apt to turn away from, to look more critically at, and in some ways some of these things were intimately tied to unchristian doctrine, yet at the same time unchristian doctrine will survive through into the Renaissance and become an important work that now is transformed and is used as a basis for understanding classical works. The Renaissance was a rejuvenation of the classical spirit, and yet in some ways this work by Augustine still was used as their lens for understanding the classical works.

It almost justified their quest to explore classical rhetoricians or the classical poets, for instance.

We could move forward, and I’ll do this by way of introduction, and we’ll in conclusion try to wrap it up, looking at what kind of impact might this work have today. My experience, I’m given personally to a focused view of the texts of Scripture, its historical backgrounds, the archaeological settings, I’m very interested in textual criticism and textual accuracy. I love language and language study. I am in some ways a product of those forces of education that produced me and the times in which I lived. There is a danger in our era of scientism and postmodernism to deify knowing the specifics about the text and to miss altogether knowing the person of the text and having it impact our own lives. And, you see, that’s what Augustine was interested in getting at.

I guess I could be more poignant by pointing it out this way. I have friends who teach language classes, some of which you may be in, and they teach their students that if you outline the flow of a text, you’ll get its essential meaning. I think Augustine would respond
to that by saying, “Yeah, but no.” If it could be that simple, then the mind of reason, not infused by faith, hope, and love, could get it, couldn’t they? It’s a simple scientific formula, and sometimes we reduce things to that and miss the fact that it’s the sword of the Spirit and it’s a sword that first cuts to the marrow of our being before cutting to the marrow of others.

That’s kind of a way of introduction. Let me give you a little bit of historical background to this work, and what I’d like to do is look at its philosophical setting and then some of the hermeneutical developments, and then we’ll give you a brief overview of this work itself.

As far as the philosophical background, you’ll remember that the aim of classical learning was knowledge, and it would be knowledge that would lead to an ethical life. It was to lead to a satisfying, enjoyable life, to self-fulfillment. Humankind was set as the central focus of this quest, and somehow if you were Platonic or in neo-Platonic schools, knowing that divine being of some sort, but it would never be a personal kind of way, nor it would be absolutely unthinkable that He would come to us to reveal Himself to us. But these are important. The incarnation, for instance, is so alien in some ways to the classical mind, as is the resurrection, that it turns classical thought on its head. And with Augustine, issues relating to the incarnation, the Trinity, the resurrection, God’s city versus man’s city, these themes will be important themes that permeate all of his teachings and writings. They’re central to his theological thinking and understanding.

You’ll keep in mind this classical development. We’ve looked at the development of philosophical schools and Platonic schools, for instance; they sought to reach an ideal in the elevation of man and of knowledge and a kind of vainglorious virtue, but it was devoid of a spirit of love. And what Augustine will infuse into the classical spirit is a spirit of love, which is central to Christian teaching. Very important in his works the themes of faith, hope, and love, and he’ll write a work on that, and this will be a dominant theme throughout and is dominant in this work, as well, as you’ll notice.

Now a crisis took place in the early Christian era, in the fourth century. You’ll remember back we talked about the crisis between the old learning (classical thought) and this new learning, the new academy in Jerusalem, Christian thought, and we’ll see that for a brief moment in the fourth century, Julian the Apostate will
try to shut down Christian teachers, persecution, kind of general persecution of the church and the church as school, and he would insist on installation of classical education of ancient religions and this typifies a kind of emerging pressure, crisis, trend that’s taking place. A conflict between the old system and the new system, as they both collide. Augustine’s just following it and he’s thinking about what is the nature then of Christian education? And we see that he’s thinking about risky topics. These are issues that are of profound importance to the church and day in which he lives.

Individual Christians, as well, had a crisis with the classical world, and many Christians who had the privilege of education, their education was rooted in classical mythology, and as we look at these things we say, well, you know, it’s just myths, it’s kids’ stories that are read, but to them it was religion, it was systems that were supported by sacrifice and devotion and led people in blindness to destruction. How do you take your past learning, some of which things may be useful to you, and use them as a Christian? How do you use those things? Do you leave them all behind? And this is this crisis of worldview.

The most poignant example would be Jerome, who in his period when he’s in Palestine and he’s off learning Hebrew and he’s living as an ascetic, he brings his entire library with him and he has this dream where God speaks to him and asks him, “Are you a Ciceronian or a Christian? I mean, what motivates you, Jerome?” And being smote and convicted by that, he put away his entire library; but, alas, later he has it again. And good for us with his academic and scholarly use were very useful, but this crisis of how do we incorporate our non-Christian learning with our Christian learning? And Augustine will think about that and address that, because Augustine very much is a product of the old system, and what he will do first and foremost is that he will say, as we’ve said before, that authority is necessary for faith and for knowledge, and authority is found in the Word. He has a strong response against the Manicheans and skeptics. Authority is found in faith, which not only means an asset of belief but also means an embracing of the teachings of the church. A lot of Protestant, evangelical types, because they don’t have a good sense of church tradition and the history of the church and because they are influenced by American ideals of reckless individualism, priesthood of the believer gone mad, the Babylonian captivity of the priesthood of the believer, so to speak. Faith to them means it’s an individual assent. It doesn’t matter what anyone else thinks. It doesn’t matter what anyone
else is taught. It’s me and the Spirit. That’s it. And there’s a real
danger with that, and the controls are the controls of authority
and faith. Augustine would say the tradition to be accepted is
tradition based on proper exegesis of Scripture, and I find that
hard to disagree with.

Augustine would also say that faith, hope, and love should
be the motivation behind all and that these things will lead to
knowledge, but knowledge will lead to wisdom, which will affect
our lives and result in joy because we’re seeking eternal things
and not temporal things. That’s where true joy is found.

What about the old system? Well, Augustine’s for transforming
it. He’s not for just turning your back on the world, and he’s not
a dualist where you have Christian things and you have non-
Christian things and I live my Christian life and then I’ve got
my non-Christian life over there. He sees, and it’s because he’s
motivated by a very famous adage which is that all truth is God’s
truth. You see, that was the theme of that prayer in Soliloquies
that
we began our thinking with today, that all truth is God’s truth, that
if it’s truth, it is intimately related to God Himself and belongs to
Him. And so whether it’s found in the mouth of Homer or in some
other classical work of some sort in or in like being trained as a
teacher or as a rhetorician, these things can be transformed, but
they need to be self-consciously transformed by a sensitive and
Spirit-filled individual.

One needs to realize the system from which these things come
and skillfully take them and baptize them to Christian use. And
the great analogy is the analogy of the spoiling of the Egyptians.
He will look allegorically at the Hebrew people, the children of
Israel, when they’re leaving Egypt and how the Egyptians gave
them their gold and said, “Get out of here,” and they passed
through the Reed Sea and into the Sinai wilderness. He would
then go on to say that the jewelry, the precious stones, and gold
that Egyptians gave them were put to use in the building of the	

Indeed it’s true. Actually first, the golden calf, and they drank it,
didn’t they? But other portions of it, indeed, God’s intention was
to use it for Christian use.

The idea, though, is this, that those things that we’ve been blessed
with in our pagan past can be transformed in a way. They don’t
need to be just left behind in a state that can’t be used, and he
would see and others also that this is how the New Testament approaches classical literature. Quoting from it when it’s useful and necessary, so these things, it gives meaning and purpose to things that are outside the realm of biblical truth but yet are within the realm of God’s truth.

Now let me briefly say something about hermeneutical development, and this is important to give you a background to the work that you’re going to read and the development of allegorical interpretation in particular. We have to go back to classical literature and classical mythology and realize that in the sixth and fifth centuries BC, there was a huge crisis, politically and economically, in Greece. This crisis led to a general religious apathy and to skepticism, much like the 1960s in America, and it resulted in a decline in faith and the traditional classical gods and goddesses.

They also had a new approach to classical literature. As they looked at the myths of Zeus and his bad behavior and other gods and goddesses and their bad behavior, they began to reject these myths outright, and there was a decline in literary education. I’ve said this adage before, but one to keep in mind that the essence of theism is humankind made according to God’s image, but not like God, as the text would say. The essence of polytheism is that humankind makes gods in their image, and so we see mankind’s image, the image of man, worked out in their theology and classical mythology.

There was a response to this that developed, though, and it was a response in Pythagorean schools, which were a philosophical cultic group, and the Stoics then followed suit, as did the Platonists, and they began to look at the ancient myths and reinterpret them along spiritual lines. They say, “No, no, no.” You see, when Zeus is doing this ugly deed, he shouldn’t understand it literally, one should give it a new understanding. The word *understanding* in Greek is *logos*. The new understanding or a different understanding is *allegoria*, or allegory, and so allegorical interpretation was a new spiritual understanding to something that couldn’t be understood literally, and this became a very popular approach then to the text. In the Hellenistic period, it was particularly popularized by thinkers from Alexandria. It impacted the Jews, the Hellenized Jews in Alexandria.

Philo, especially in the early Christian era, and via Philo and these philosophical schools, it found its way into the Alexandrian
church and church fathers, and eventually into Christian exegesis and became an approach.

Now excesses were condemned. When one went too far with spiritual interpretations, they were condemned, but for one to think about spiritual insight, I think today the church would call it application maybe, was not only permissible but encouraged and was an approach to understanding Scripture. These ideas would find their way into the church, and it’s Augustine who will be one of the strongest proponents of it in his work *On Christian Doctrine*. It is his work here that will lay the foundation for medieval approach to Scripture.

We will talk in greater length next time about the development of these ideas and other approaches to Scripture. You should understand that with Christian exegesis with someone like Augustine, there was a fourfold approach to Scripture. You had a literal approach which was encouraged; you had the allegorical approach; you had an eschatological approach, looking at it through a lens of end time; and finally, you had a more ethical approach and analogical approach to the text. If we added to this also earlier thinkers that thought Christologically went in an allegorical way to look for Christ in all the Scriptures, that’s another approach. These would be the foundation, though, for medieval interpretation, and they are played out in this very important work as they’re described in this work *On Christian Doctrine* or on Christian education that we have set before us.

You’ll be reading this work *On Christian Doctrine*, and we’ll gather together again and talk about some of the important themes that you encountered in the work. But this gives you some kind of a setting or background to some of the major themes that develop in it, in particular his interpretation of signs, the motivation for learning, and in book 4, it’s how one teaches the rhetorical principles. We’ll summarize these things next time that we have opportunity to talk together, but enjoy reading this book and think about how it may apply the principles to the way you understand Scripture and to the way you teach others and will teach others.

Blessings. Look forward to talking with you about this next time. Bye–bye.