

**URBAN LEGENDS OF THEOLOGY (Part 3)****Dismantling common misconceptions about God, the Bible and the Christian life**

Fall 2024.1

Class Objective: To refine our faith and understanding by dismantling misconceptions regarding God, the Bible and the Christian life.

**Class Overview**

1. Introduce *Urban Legends of Theology* by Michael Wittmer
2. Clarify the meaning of the term urban legend as used in this class
3. Understand the degree of personal impact connected with various misconceptions
4. Elevate the pursuit of truth as the ultimate goal of analyzing error
5. Emphasize edification as the primary purpose of this study
6. Explore the following misconceptions in light of biblical truth:
  - a. The Bible is our only authority.
  - b. Satan is tempting me.
  - c. I should never feel shame.
  - d. We should not be motivated by fear.
  - e. All children who die before the age of accountability will be saved.
  - f. Christianity is not a religion—it is a relationship.
  - g. I don't need church to have a relationship with God.

**Notes****Review of last week**

- Scripture is not our only authoritative source for correct belief and practice but it is the ultimate authority by which all other resources are to be measured.
- Authoritative revelation about God and or what pleases him is manifest in creation, Scripture and the person of Jesus.
- We have significant limitations (reasoning and knowledge) and liabilities (sinfulness) in correctly understanding God's revelation through Scripture.
- God has therefore, in Scripture, authorized aids to assist us in our understanding through the example of the apostles and the gift of teaching in the church.
- The historical documents produced by two thousand years of teaching in the church give us valuable guidance and insight in understanding the meaning of Scripture, yet no human writing of any individual or council is equal in authority to Scripture but must ultimately be assessed by it.
- Therefore, we must exercise great humility in interpreting the Scripture by appreciating, respecting and using the aids that God has given us by the Holy Spirit through his church to correct and sharpen our understanding of his written Word.

**I. Urban legend #12: Satan is Tempting Me.**

- A. Sometimes believers describe their struggle with temptation by saying something to the effect that Satan is tempting them.
  1. This idea is partially true but potentially misleading in that it may suggest that we are being singled out by Satan for some kind of special attack. This notion, in turn, makes us

vulnerable to the thought that our particular temptation or spiritual attack is of special intensity and therefore something we cannot resist.

## II. Some things we know about Satan

A. Satan, also called the devil and the serpent, is presented as a created being who is the apparent head of a group of angels who rebelled against God. Scripture sometimes refers to the devil and his angels. Matthew 25:41; Revelation 12:9.

## III. What will his future be?

A. As a result of the cross, Satan and his angels will suffer eternal damnation.

1. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 1 John 3:8b

2. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil. Hebrews 2:14

3. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Romans 16:20

4. <sup>2</sup>And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. . . .<sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth . . . .<sup>10</sup> and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:2, 7, 8, 10

## IV. What is his nature?

A. He is a deceiver who is responsible for the fall of the human race into sin.

1. Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." Genesis 3:13

2. <sup>44</sup>You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44, 45

3. Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. 1 John 3:8a

B. He sought to tempt Jesus to disobey God.

1. Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Matthew 4:1 (see also through verse 11)

C. He sought to destroy Jesus through arrest and crucifixion.

1. <sup>2</sup>During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him. John 13:2

## V. Where is he now?

A. He is now at work throughout the world to deceive people and destroy the kingdom of God.

1. <sup>1</sup>And you were dead in the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup>in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— Ephesians 2:1, 2

2. The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders. 2 Thessalonians 2:9

## VI. What are some of his methods?

A. He influences believers to sin.

1. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? Acts 5:3

B. He tries to derail believers from devotion to Christ.

1. But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:3

C. He blinds unbelievers to the Gospel.

1. . . .<sup>18</sup> to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. Acts 26:18

2. <sup>3</sup>And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. <sup>4</sup>In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 2 Corinthians 4:3, 4

D. He distracts unbelievers who have encountered the Gospel.

1. <sup>11</sup>Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. <sup>12</sup>The ones along the path are those who have heard; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Luke 8:11, 12

E. He attempts to impair spiritual progress in Christians.

1. For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. 1 Thess. 3:5

F. He works to obstruct Christian ministry.

1. <sup>17</sup>But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, <sup>18</sup>because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:17, 18

G. He seeks to sow conflict among believers.

1. <sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs. 2 Corinthians 2:10, 11

2. <sup>26</sup> Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, <sup>27</sup> and give no opportunity to the devil. Ephesians 4:26, 27

VII. How should we understand our spiritual warfare?

A. The devil is described as our spiritual adversary.

1. <sup>8</sup> Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. <sup>9</sup> Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. 1 Peter 5:8, 9

B. We contend with unspecified spiritual powers connected to the scheming of the devil.

1. <sup>10</sup> Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. <sup>11</sup> Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. <sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Ephesians 6:10-12

C. Our temptation is not due to the direct activity of the devil.

1. The devil, like all beings other than God, is a finite, if powerful, creature.

a) This means he is not omnipresent as is God.

b) It is therefore not logistically possible for him to attend to the personal temptation of all people or even all believers.

c) Attributions of temptation to Satan are therefore likely figurative in nature meaning that he is named as the one ultimately responsible in some way for all temptation though not in every case directly responsible. Rather, demonic agents actively exert evil influence under his authority according to the hierarchy of the spiritual powers of which we know little.

- D. The nature of temptation exonerates and exalts God but not us.
1. God does not in any way tempt us to sin.
    - a) <sup>12</sup> Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. <sup>13</sup> Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. James 1:12, 13
  2. Our temptation is partly attributable to Satan's temptation in the garden of Eden which plunged the world under the judgment of God and resulted in our proclivity to sin.
    - a) <sup>14</sup> But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup> Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. James 1:14, 15
  3. Notwithstanding, God graciously limits our temptation and provides for our successful resistance.
    - a) <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:13
      - (1) We will never have temptation greater than anyone else.
      - (2) We will never have temptation greater than our ability to resist.
      - (3) We will always be provided with an escape route in our temptation.
    - b) The power of the Holy Spirit is God's provision to enable us to overcome temptation's allure.
      - (1) <sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. <sup>17</sup> For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. Galatians 5:16, 17
  4. What does James mean when he says "resist the devil and he will flee from you." (4:7)
    - a) He means we are to resist the work of the devil in the world ("the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life" 1 John 2:15, 16) and to resist the work of the devil in the nature we have received from Adam ("as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners" Romans 5:19)