

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. Theology puts God in a box.
  - b. Doctrine divides. Love unites.
  - c. Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.
  - d. Jesus is more loving and compassionate than the God of the Old Testament.
  - e. You shouldn't waste your life on temporal things.
  - f. My body is a temporary residence for my immortal soul.
  - g. All sin is the same before God.
  - h. You're not supposed to judge.
  - i. The safest place to be is in the center of God's will.
  - j. God won't give you more than you can handle.
  - k. Christianity is not a religion—it is a relationship.
  - l. I don't need church to have a relationship with God.

#### Notes

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III. Twelve misconceptions considered in light of biblical truth

B. Doctrine divides. Love unites.

1. What does this graphic communicate?



- a) So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith. Galatians 6:10
  - b) <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:44, 45
2. The assertion that doctrine divides while love unites arose out of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
    - a) “The Fundamentalists are driving in their stakes to mark out the deadline of doctrine around the church, across which no one is to pass except on terms of agreement. . . . Has anybody a right to deny the Christian name to those who differ with

him on such points and to shut against them the doors of the Christian fellowship?"  
Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" 1922, sermon

3. Division was a reality Jesus acknowledged as an effect of his first coming.
  - a) <sup>34</sup> Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Matthew 10:34-36
4. Holding clear doctrinal distinctives does not necessitate a spirit of animosity.
  - a) <sup>14</sup> so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. <sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ. Ephesians 4:11-15
  - b) <sup>24</sup> And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup> correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:24, 25
  - c) <sup>1</sup> Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. Titus 3;1, 2
5. Paul implies that doctrinal denial or distortion can require division.
  - a) I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. Romans 16:17
6. It should also be noted that doctrine unites.
  - a) Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel. Philippians 1:27
  - b) Weekly across the world, believers differing in race, ethnic background, nationality, political persuasion and socioeconomic standing gather together for worship around the biblical Gospel of Jesus.
7. Biblical unity is rooted in doctrine.
  - a) <sup>1</sup> I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, <sup>2</sup> with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, <sup>3</sup> **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**. <sup>4</sup> There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— <sup>5</sup> one Lord, one faith, one baptism, <sup>6</sup> one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. Ephesians 4:1-6
8. Like doctrine, love can also be a source of division.
  - a) <sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. <sup>36</sup> And a

person's enemies will be those of his own household. <sup>37</sup> Whoever loves father or mother **more than me** is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter **more than me** is not worthy of me. Matthew 10:34-37

9. Love is to characterize those who follow Jesus.

a) <sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thess. 3:12

b) Love and truth are inseparable components of Christian discipleship.

(1) “It is no coincidence that love’s climax is the cross of Christ, who embodies both “grace and truth.” Without truth, grace smooches into sappy sentimentality that is easily pushed around. . . . Without grace, truth turns into a stern taskmaster that is perpetually disappointed. . . . Grace and truth are not opposites. They are two sides of the same coin. Grace needs truth to effectively save people. Truth needs grace or no one is saved. Switch out grace and truth for love and doctrine and you will see that just as grace without truth isn’t grace and truth without grace isn’t the truth, so doctrine without love isn’t Christian doctrine and love without doctrine isn’t Christian love. Doctrine and love must never be pitted against each other. They are left and right wings that keep our faith aloft.” *Wittmer*

C. Jews, Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

1. In a 2007 interview, then-President George W. Bush said this: “I believe in an almighty God, and I believe that all the world, whether they be Muslim, Christian, or any other religion, prays to the same God. That’s what I believe.”

2. On December 10, 2015, Larycia Hawkins, a faculty member at Wheaton College, wrote a Facebook post saying, “I stand in religious solidarity with Muslims because they, like me, a Christian, are people of the book. And as Pope Francis stated last week, we worship the same God. . . . As part of my Advent Worship, I will wear the hijab to work at Wheaton College.”

3. “Philosophers break down ‘sameness’ into two parts: reference and sense. Reference indicates the object we are pointing to and sense is the content or meaning that we assign to the object.” *Wittmer*

4. Jews and Christians

a) The comparison being made here is between evangelical Christian belief (there are a wide range of beliefs within Christendom including Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox and many protestant groups) and orthodox Judaism (there are diverse beliefs among four branches of Judaism including, Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist).

b) **Common beliefs** between these two include that there is one creator-God who is infinite, omnipotent, omniscient and has revealed himself in the Old Testament Scriptures.

c) **Divergent beliefs** are most pronounced with regard to the nature of God and the identity, nature and work of Jesus.

- (1) Contrary to foundational Christian doctrine, Jews do **not** believe in:
- (a) The New Testament as inspired, authoritative scripture
  - (b) The triune nature of God as Father, Son and Spirit
  - (c) The deity of Jesus as God's Son
  - (d) The redemptive power of Jesus' death
  - (e) The controlling hermeneutic of the Old Testament: The identity of Jesus as the promised messiah

(i) <sup>44</sup> Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**" <sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup> and said to them, "**Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead,** <sup>47</sup> and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. Luke 24:44-47

(ii) <sup>8</sup> Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, <sup>9</sup> if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, <sup>10</sup> let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Acts 4:10-12

(iii) As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, <sup>5</sup> you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. <sup>6</sup> For it stands in Scripture:

"Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,  
a cornerstone chosen and precious,  
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

<sup>7</sup> So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

"The stone that the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone,"

<sup>8</sup> and

"A stone of stumbling,  
and a rock of offense."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were

destined to do.

1 Peter 2:4-8

(iv) <sup>26</sup> “Brothers, sons of the family of Abraham, and those among you who fear God, to us has been sent the message of this salvation. . . . <sup>32</sup> And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, <sup>33</sup> this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

“You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you.’

<sup>34</sup> And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

Therefore he says also in another psalm,

“You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’

Acts 13:26, 32-35

(e) To reject the full revelation of God’s nature and plan in favor of a selective part of that revelation is to fail to believe in and worship the true and living God.

#### 4. Muslims and Christians

a) **Common beliefs** held by Islam and Christianity include that there is one God who is creator, ruler and judge, that Jesus was (at least) a miraculous prophet and that God inspired holy books.

b) **Divergent beliefs** in Islam accept the authority of the Koran as God’s revelation to Mohammed but believe the Bible is not reliable because its text has been corrupted. Islam denies the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the doctrine of the incarnation, the death of Jesus on the cross (and thus its redemptive power) and the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

(1) “The differences between Christianity and Islam are wide and deep. We disagree about the Bible, the Koran, the place of Mohammed, the person and work of Jesus Christ, what happened on the cross, what happens when you die, and how you get to heaven, to name only a few major differences. Christians worship a Triune God, one God in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19-20). In the Christian understanding, God is only truly known and truly worshiped when he is known and worshiped as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:18; 14:6-7; 9-11). The Christian God is the invisible God we behold as visible in the face of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4-6; Col. 1:15). On this side of the incarnation, all other conceptions of God are not merely incomplete, but idolatrous (John 8:39-59).” *Kevin DeYoung*

(2) “Muslims believe that ‘God is one.’ Allah has no partners and assigning partners to him is shirk, the highest blasphemy. Christians believe ‘God is one in three persons.’ Each person in the Trinity is fully and eternally God. Yet there is one God. Our Muslim neighbors believe Christians are guilty of the greatest sin—making partners with God.” *Thabiti Anyabwile*

- c) The glory of the nature of God is seen in Christ alone.
- (1) <sup>5</sup> For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. <sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 4:5, 6
- d) God receives only that worship that comes through the mediation of Jesus Christ.
- (1) <sup>23</sup> But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. <sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. <sup>25</sup> The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." <sup>26</sup> Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he." John 4:23-26
- (2) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. John 14:6
- e) What does this mean for our relationship with followers of Islam? (K. DeYoung)
- (1) Muslims are made in the image of God and deserve to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.
- (a) "We can assure them that we do not hold them responsible for the radical Muslims who terrorize the world." *Irwin Lutzer*
- (b) This does not mean that Muslims are our brothers and sisters.
- (2) Christians should look for opportunities to show love and compassion to our Muslim neighbors.
- (a) Studies in the 21st century suggest that, in terms of percentage and worldwide spread, Islam is the fastest-growing major religion in the world. There are presently more than 2 billion Muslims in the world.
- (b) "We can be good and helpful neighbors without sacrificing the very truths that bring sinners into the presence of God. Jesus affirmed "Love your neighbor," but He did not say that we had to agree with them doctrinally in order to do so." *Irwin Lutzer*
- (c) This does not mean the church has the responsibility to provide for all Muslims everywhere.
- (d) Christians should do good to all people as they have opportunity, especially to the household of faith (Gal. 6:10). The church's priority is the church, and the mission of the church is to make disciples and plant healthy churches (Acts 14:21-23; Rom. 15:19).