

URBAN LEGENDS OF THEOLOGY (Part 2)

Dismantling common misconceptions about God, the Bible and the Christian life

Spring 2024.6

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. Part 1
 - 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. Part 2
 - 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

Review

- I. Urban legend #10: **God won't give you more than you can handle.**
 - A. Clarifying the statement
 1. To what is this statement referring? God won't give more of what?
 - a) The main sentiment of the statement likely comes from 1 Cor. 10:13.
 - (1) 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
 - (2) The immediate context of this verse however is not about trials, afflictions or burdens but temptation (used two times in the text).
 - (a) This passage could be paraphrased this way:
 - (i) "You will never encounter superhuman temptation. Your temptations are just like those experienced by other people. God will not allow you to face anything greater. Instead he will meet you in your temptation by providing the grace and strength to resist it and thus endure until it is overcome."
 - (3) In any case, the thrust of this passage is **not** upon individual personal

capacity to resist temptation but upon God's faithfulness to provide sustaining grace in the face of temptations which all believers encounter.

(4) Thus, taking the phrase "beyond your ability" out its context here and applying it more broadly to other aspects of the Christian life is not a legitimate use of this text.

B. Exploring the implications of the statement

1. Christians may use this expression because it seems only fair that God would not allow us to be burdened beyond our capacity.

a) The work of God in us proceeds according to his purposes not according to our cultural standards of fairness. If we were to receive "fair" treatment by God we would not receive the benefits of Jesus' death and resurrection. According to the book of Hebrews God deals with us as sons.

(1) ⁷It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:7-11

(2) God cares about what happens in us not just what happens to us.

2. To assert that God limits our testing and trials to **our** capacities turns our focus inward. This is not how the biblical writers encouraged us to think. Instead the Bible directs us to think from a Godward perspective. The question is never, "How much can I handle?" but, "How can I trust God more fully."

a) ¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

²Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,

³though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Psalm 46:1-3

b) ¹I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?

² My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth. Psalm 121:1, 2

c) He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength. Isaiah 40:29

C. God does give us more than we can handle!

a) ⁸ For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. ⁹ Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again. ¹¹ You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. 2 Corinthians 1:8-11

(1) The affliction Paul and his team experienced caused them to be “utterly burdened beyond our strength” (8).

(2) Paul recognized that God had a clear purpose in allowing this situation. “to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead” (9).

(3) This encounter with peril resulted in the expansion of Paul’s faith. Paul believed that since God had delivered them (10a), he would deliver them “again” (10b).

b) ⁷ So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. ⁸ Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. ⁹ But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10

(1) Paul recognized that this “thorn,” was “given” to him (7).

(2) God’s response to Paul’s request for deliverance from this was based on his intention to magnify his glory in Paul’s life. The glad result would grant Paul a new measure of strength rooted in the sustaining grace of God not in Paul’s capacity to cope with difficulty.

c) An additional reason for divinely ordered affliction is that in some mysterious way, something eternal takes place through the difficulties God allows into our lives.

(1) ¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

(a) The Apostle understands that our present afflictions are, comparatively speaking, momentary and light.

(b) Paul is trying to maximize our perspective from immediate, short-term comforts to incomparable eternal glory!

D. God gives us more than we can handle but **never** more than **he** can handle!