

## URBAN LEGENDS OF THEOLOGY (Part 2)

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

Spring 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. 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.

Part 1

Part 2

#### Notes

- I. Review
  - A. *Urban Legends of Theology* by Michael Wittmer, B&H Academic, 2023
    1. Wittmer covers 40 myths or legends.
  - B. The Meaning of urban legend.
    1. General meaning
      - a) Urban legend, also called urban myth, contemporary legend, or modern legend, in folklore, a story about an unusual or humorous event that many people believe to be true but that is not true. *Britannica*
    2. Wittmer's use of urban legend
      - a) "Something popularly believed—in the church or in culture or both—that is not true."
- B. The Potential Impact of Various Myths or Urban Legends
  1. "Some legends are more wrong than others, and some are more damaging than others. Some legends will rob you of peace and joy while others will damn you to hell. We must discern one from the other so we know how to handle each. Briars and wolves are both detrimental to sheep, but not in the same way. Wise shepherds gently guide sheep away from dense thickets, where as they shoot wolves dead. Likewise, some of these legends will merely scratch you faith,

while others will have you for lunch. Still others are setups, meant to slow your walk so you are easier to catch.” Wittmer

C. The pursuit of truth is the ultimate goal of analyzing error.

1. “Deconstruction [of error] is only the first, and by far easiest part, of following Jesus. Anyone can deconstruct, even those who do not believe in him. As we tear down these legends, we must give ourselves wholly to the truth that supplants them, lest we become wise as demons (James 2:19).” Wittmer

II. Urban legend #5: **You shouldn’t waste your life on temporal things.**

A. Popular statements that might lead to this conclusion:

1. “God warns us not to get too attached to what’s around us because it is temporary. . . . Realizing that life on earth is a temporary assignment should radically alter your values. Eternal values not temporal ones, should become the deciding factors of your decisions. . . . You will not be in heaven two seconds before you cry out, ‘Why did I place so much importance on things that were so temporary? What was I thinking? Why did I waste so much time, energy and concern on what wasn’t going to last?’” Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*

2. “I will tell you what a tragedy is. I will show you how to waste your life. Consider this story from the *Reader’s Digest*: A couple ‘took early retirement from their jobs in the Northeast five years ago when he was 59 and she was 51. Now they live in Punta Gorda, Florida, where they cruise on their 30-foot trawler, play softball and collect shells. . . .’ Picture them before Christ at the day of judgment: ‘Look, Lord. See my shells.’ That is a tragedy.” John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life*

B. Scripture that might lead to this conclusion:

1. <sup>19</sup>“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup>but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup>For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19-21

2. <sup>1</sup>If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. Colossians 3:1, 2

3. <sup>15</sup>Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. <sup>16</sup>For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. <sup>17</sup>And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever. 1 John 2:15-17

4. <sup>24</sup>Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup>For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup>For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? . Matthew 16:24-26

## C. Biblical truths that provide theological perspective.

## 1. God created a material world and humans with material bodies.

a) Adam and Eve were given work as stewards of the material creation by which they were to be nourished.

(1) <sup>15</sup> The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup> And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden . . . " Genesis 2:15, 16

## 2. God cares about our material needs.

a) <sup>9</sup> "Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.

<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread,

<sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.

Matthew 6:9-13

b) <sup>25</sup> "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:25-33

## 3. God intends to be glorified through the life of our material bodies.

a) <sup>19</sup> Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, <sup>20</sup> for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20

4. Motive matters most in all our pursuits.
  - a) <sup>22</sup> Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. <sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. Colossians 3:22-24 (cf. Eph. 6:5-8)
  - b) So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 1 Corinthians 10:31
5. Living as God's material creatures in a material world means living within a hierarchy of values.
  - a) <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33
  - a) "Here is the tension of life: All things matter but some things matter more. . . . This tension of life belies broad generalizations such as we must "not get too attached to what's around us because it is temporary." Good luck with that! We will eat something, read something and wear something. . . . We are finite, temporal creatures living in a finite, temporal world. Temporal things are the furniture of our lives. The Bible nowhere, tells us to avoid things that are temporary simply because they are temporary. . . . God commands us to avoid sin, not what is temporal. Avoid the temporal and you will miss many of God's gifts which often come in temporal form. Check your prayer list. Much of what we ask for are temporary blessings—a clean scan, passing grades in chemistry, and daily bread." Wittmer
5. The new creation work of God through Jesus gives ultimate meaning to all we do in this "temporal" world.
  - a) "What you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or work; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter one's fellow nonhuman creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make." N. T. Wright