

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
- Review
- I. Urban legend #7: All sin is the same before God.

A. Helpful books on sin include:

1. *Not The Way It Is Supposed To Be: A Breviary of Sin* by Cornelius Plantinga

2. *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate* by Jerry Bridges

B. To address this concept, we need to establish what sin is, what sin does and what sin looks like.

1. It is more important to know what sin is and does than knowing what sin looks like.

2. Definitions of sin (what sin is)

a) Biblical statements about sin:

(1) Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 1 John 3:4

(2) So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin. James 4:17

b) Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God, given as a rule to the reasonable creature. Westminster Larger Catechism, 1648

c) A sin is any act—any thought, desire, emotion, word, or deed—or its particular absence, that displeases God and deserves blame. *Not The Way It Is Supposed To Be*, Cornelius Plantinga
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### 3. Descriptions of sin (what sin does)

a) The Bible presents sin by way of major concepts, principally lawlessness and faithlessness, expressed in an array of images: sin is the missing of a target, a wandering from the path, a straying from the fold. Sin is a hard heart and a stiff neck. Sin is blindness and deafness. It is both the overstepping of a line and the failure to reach it—both transgression and shortcoming. Sin is a beast crouching at the door. In sin, people attack or evade or neglect their divine calling. These and other images suggest deviance: even when it is familiar, sin is never normal. Sin is disruption of created harmony and then resistance to divine restoration of that harmony. Above all sin disrupts and resists the vital human relation to God, and it does all this disruption and resisting in a number of intertwined ways.” *Not The Way It Is Supposed To Be*, Cornelius Plantinga

### 4. Lists of sins (what sin looks like)

a) Lists in Scripture:

(1) There are six things that the LORD hates,  
seven that are an abomination to him:

<sup>17</sup> haughty eyes, a lying tongue,

and hands that shed innocent blood,

<sup>18</sup> a heart that devises wicked plans,

feet that make haste to run to evil,

<sup>19</sup> a false witness who breathes out lies,

and one who sows discord among brothers. Proverbs 6:16-19

(2) <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. <sup>18</sup> But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. <sup>19</sup> Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup> idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, <sup>21</sup> envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21

(3) <sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. <sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Ephesians 5:3-5

(4) <sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10

b) Seven Deadly Sins: pride, greed, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, and sloth.

(1) Roman Catholic theology saw these “capital vices” or “cardinal sins” as the source of all other sins.

c) In *Respectable Sins*, Jerry Bridges list sins Christians commonly tolerate.

- (1) Ungodliness, Unthankfulness
- (2) Anxiety, frustration, and discontent
- (3) Pride and selfishness
- (4) Impatience, irritability, anger
- (5) Judgmentalism and sins of the tongue
- (6) Lack of self-control, envy and Jealousy

C. **Yes**, in some regards, all sin is the same before God.

1. All sin shares the same root: autonomy (self-law) over the authority of God. Gen. 3:1-6
2. All sin alienates people from God and will condemn them to eternal damnation.
  - a) The soul who sins shall die. Ezekiel 18:20
  - b) <sup>7</sup>For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup>Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:7, 8
  - c) <sup>8</sup>But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death." Revelation 21:8
3. All sin shares the same fruit (or result), it requires divine atonement in order to be forgiven.
  - a) The LORD is slow to anger and great in power, and the LORD will by no means clear the guilty. Nahum 1:3
  - b) Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Hebrews 9:22
4. All sin can be forgiven.
  - a) For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. Romans 3:22-25

D. **No**, in some regards, all sin is not the same before God.

1. Four ways sins are distinguished in Scripture:
  - (1) Nature (Some sins are described in comparative terms.)
    - (a) <sup>3</sup>Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? <sup>4</sup>Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? <sup>5</sup>You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5
    - (b) <sup>23</sup>"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>24</sup>You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! Matthew 23:23, 24

(c) <sup>18</sup> Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 1 Corinthians 6:18 (see also Romans 1:24)

b) Knowledge

(1) <sup>39</sup> Jesus said, “For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind.” <sup>40</sup> Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, “Are we also blind?” <sup>41</sup> Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains. John 9:39-41

(2) <sup>10</sup> So Pilate said to him, “You will not speak to me? Do you not know that I have authority to release you and authority to crucify you?” <sup>11</sup> Jesus answered him, “You would have no authority over me at all unless it had been given you from above. Therefore he who delivered me over to you has the greater sin.” John 19:10, 11

c) Intent

(1) <sup>15</sup> These six cities shall be for refuge for the people of Israel, and for the stranger and for the sojourner among them, that anyone who kills any person without intent may flee there. Numbers 35:15 (see verses 16-29 for full context)

d) Judgment

(1) <sup>20</sup> Then he began to denounce the cities where most of his mighty works had been done, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades. For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.” Matthew 11:20-24

2. “All sin has the same final fruit, but some intermediate fruits are worse than others. Jesus said anger and insults are in the same line as murder and lust is adultery of the heart. But though it is shameful to commit adultery with someone in our heart, it is worse to commit adultery with our body. I would rather you insult me than shoot me, assassinate my character than murder me. I would rather you covet my stuff than steal my stuff.” Wittmer

E. Since all sin is in one sense the same and in another sense different, we must do the following:

1. Exercise discernment regarding how sin is to be repented of and disciplined within us individually and among us corporately.

2. Exercise humility in acknowledging that our sins are not better than the sins of others.

a) No sin is good, even if it is our sin!

3. Exercise mercy toward those who fall into sin.

a) Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Galatians 6:1