

URBAN LEGENDS OF THEOLOGY (Part 2)

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 #9: **The safest place to be is in the center of God's will.**

A. What does it mean to be safe?

1. We can conceive of safety as external or temporal.

a) Given that we live in a world that was cursed by God as a consequence of sin (Genesis 3), we will experience natural disasters, the effects of the sins of others (directly or indirectly), illness and ultimately death.

(1) God does not promise us exemption from the effects of a fallen (unsafe) world but rather grace to respond to it.

2. We can conceive of safety as eternal.

a) ²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. ²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. John 10:27-29

b) ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. John 11:25, 26

3. Being a follower of Jesus can be a threat to our temporal safety but **not** our eternal safety.
- a) ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:12, 13
 - b) ¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. ¹⁴ If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. 1 Peter 4:12-14
 - c) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Romans 8:35
 - d) Persecution has often been part of the experience of those who believe.
 - (1) ³² But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, ³³ sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. ³⁴ For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Hebrews 10:32-34
 - (2) ³⁶ Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— ³⁸ of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. Hebrews 11:36-38
 - (3) ¹¹ “Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11, 12
4. God may deliberately put us in an unsafe situation in order to grow our faith.
- 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

b) ²³ And a windstorm came down on the lake, and they were filling with water and were in danger. ²⁴ And they went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we are perishing!” And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm. ²⁵ He said to them, “Where is your faith?” And they were afraid, and they marveled, saying to one another, “Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?” Luke 8:23-25

5. God may deliberately put us in an unsafe situation in order to bring glory to Him.

a) “But if you do not worship, you shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace. And who is the god who will deliver you out of my hands?” ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.” Daniel 3:15b-18

B. What is the center of God’s will?

1. The center of God’s will at any point in time is a state of full obedience to the revealed will of God.

a) Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not lean on your own understanding.

⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths. Proverbs 3:5, 6

2. Obedience to God says nothing about safety.

a) Jesus description of the Christian life does not include reference to comfort or safety.

(1) ²⁴ Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Matthew 16:24, 25

3. Obedience to God may lead to dangerous circumstances.

a) The obedience of Jesus led to suffering and death.

(1) Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:5-11

b) The obedience of Paul led to great suffering and ultimate death.

(1) . . . imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

2 Corinthians 11:23-28

c) The obedience of the Thessalonian believers led to suffering not safety.

(1) ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind.

1 Thessalonian 2:14, 15

C. Other ways we might express truth about being in the will of God.

1. What word or words would you add to the following sentence?

a) The center of God's will is the _____ place to be.