

Urban Legends 2

Sin Legends

In an article titled *Why Atheism?* published in the Atheist Files, the author lists his reasons for the superiority of atheism over religion.

“You become personally responsible for your own deeds and actions — no god or devil made you do something. You did it yourself. This is tremendously empowering...when you finally realize that what you do is your own responsibility, that you can't pin the blame for it on some spiritual entity sitting on your shoulder, you begin to realize that your actions affect other people, for good or worse.”

“You have freedom from unnecessary guilt, with Atheism; sin is a myth. The only crimes are hurting others or on the statute books. The invisible goblins of original sin or innate evil never existed; no man or woman is born evil, we can only *become* evil through our own choices.”

Are those things true? Is getting rid of God personally freeing and empowering? Is sin a myth?

It's appealing to want to rid ourselves of authority but the truth is, no one would want to live in a world where every choice of right and wrong was left up to the whims of individuals.

Even the famous 18th century French atheist Voltaire said, “I want my lawyer, my tailor, my servants, even my wife to believe in God, because it means that I shall be cheated and robbed and cuckolded less often.”

The truth is, we all believe in general areas of right and wrong. Even the *Why Atheism?* article says, “The only crimes are hurting others or on the statute books.”

Of course that's the author's opinion. If there is no absolute law because there is no absolute lawgiver then who's to say that hurting people is wrong?

If we are all just accidents of some materialistic events, then to say anything is right or wrong is foolishness. Accidents don't have meaning and purpose. If there's no one to give us the standards, then our little existential grab for pleasure and self-worth is all that ultimately matters.

Who's to say that Mother Theresa is good and Jeffery Dahmer or Charles Manson are evil. Who says? Society?

Most people who argue that sin doesn't exist don't want everyone to really live that way, they just want to be free of personal responsibility themselves. That doesn't mean they want to do every evil in the world. They just want to be free to do what they want to do.

We all inherently know down inside that there's such a thing as right and wrong. The question is, are we going to let God define right and wrong or are we going to do it by our own personal opinions?

This is week 4 of a series we're calling Urban Legends. We're tackling some of those false spiritual ideas that circulate around that everybody just knows have to be true.

So far we've debunked the false ideas that there are many ways to God, that God wants us all to be happy, and that God won't give us any more than we can bear.

In each of those cases we saw that we totally miss what God has for us when we just buy into these spiritual urban legends.

Today we're going to take on 3 more legends. In this case they all have to do with this thing called "sin."

Here's how I want to approach this. This morning we're going to look at the Bible to see what it says. The reason we're going to look in the Bible is because it makes the claim that it comes from God.

Four hundred and eighteen times it uses the phrase "this is what the Lord says." Forty seven times it calls itself "the word of God." Two hundred fifty nine times it calls itself "the word of the Lord."

Speaking of itself it says, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* (II Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is clear. And not only does it make the claim that it comes from God but it validates that claim with specific, clear, verifiable prophecy. Actually, with hundreds of definitive, detailed, and explicit predictions that we can look back on historically and verify.

So today we want to use the Bible to unpack 3 serious spiritual myths about this misunderstood thing we call sin.

I. I'm Really A Pretty Good Person

Here's the truth. Are you ready for this? You're not a good person at all. Either am I. We're a bunch of bad people.

You say, "Ed, I come to church to feel better. Life beats me down at every turn and I come here and you just add to it!"

Let me just get something out of the way real quickly here. I'm not one of those guys who likes to use the pulpit for a whipping post. I'm not about to stand up here and pontificate about how bad you are. I'm just being honest with the Bible.

If you don't know there's a problem you won't look for a solution.

Listen to this: *There is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.* (Ecclesiastes 7:20)

That's pretty all inclusive!

Turn to **Romans 3** page **1106** **Read verses 9-12**

Those are really strong words. You might say, "Wait a minute Ed, I'm seeking after God. I haven't turned aside."

But now think about these words of Jesus. *For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.* (Luke 19:10)

Sometimes you'll hear people say, "I found the Lord." Remember it isn't God that's lost and needs to be found. It's us.

That's the whole message of the Bible. From the Garden when Adam sinned and God said "Where are you?" to Jesus who said He came "to seek and to save that which was lost," God's been pursuing us.

The only reason it feels like we're looking for God is that His Holy Spirit is drawing us. Our nature isn't to seek God, it's to do what Adam did and run from Him.

Here's how the Bible puts it.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him. (I Corinthians 2:14) For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. (I Corinthians 1:18)

You might think, "Wait a minute, aren't people looking for God? What about all the people who spin prayer wheels, or pray to Mecca, or lay on beds of nails, or crawl on bloody knees across church court yards like I've seen in Mexico and Nicaragua? Aren't they sincerely trying to seek and worship God?"

They're seeking a god but not the God of the Bible because the God of the Bible doesn't ask us to do those things. In reality if we try to get to God by doing things it shows that we think we're better than we really are. It shows that we think that if we just make ourselves a little bit better, or a little bit more acceptable to God that He'll receive us.

When we say, "I'm not that bad of a person," we're comparing ourselves with the wrong standard. The first place we tend to compare ourselves is with other people.

We'll watch the news and say, "Those people I'm seeing who commit all those crimes, they're really bad. They're a mess." We read the police beat in the paper and say, "Can you believe what that woman did? She's bad. I'm not that bad."

When we compare ourselves to people, we don't feel so bad. It's always easy to find someone who seems worse than us. But when we compare ourselves to a holy God, all of a sudden we realize something about ourselves.

We're like the prophet Isaiah who caught a glimpse of God on His throne. He didn't say, "Hey, look, awesome, it's God. Hey God" He cried out, *Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.* (Isaiah 6:5)

Our best attempt at righteousness in the eyes of God falls incredibly short. We want to think I'm not a bad person but God says compared to Me you're a very bad person. We are very, very sinful in the eyes of God. I don't say that to beat you down but think about it. As long as we think we're OK we won't know we need a Savior. Unless we recognize that we're undone, we aren't going to see our need for Jesus.

I. I'm Really A Pretty Good Person

II. All Sin Is The Same

Here's a sin legend that almost everyone believes. Here's what you'll hear people say. "Who are you to tell me something I'm doing is wrong. You're a sinner too. All sin is the same, so my sin's no worse than your sin. Doesn't God say all sin is the same?"

Here's what the Bible says, *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23) Sin is universal and all sin separates us from our Creator.

Then it goes on to say, *The wages of sin is death.* (Romans 6:23) The sin that we've all committed brings eternal death.

There are no venial sins. In light of eternity, all sins are mortal. The punishment for all unforgiven sin is the same, and regardless of what Rob Bell has written the punishment is hell. All sin separates us from God. Christ died for all sin which is why all of us need a Savior.

That is crystal clear in the Bible, but the consequences, on earth and in eternity for our actions are not the same.

When God gave Israel His law through Moses He laid out specific punishments for specific crimes. If you stole you had to make restitution. If you injured somebody accidentally there was a consequence but if you injured someone on purpose there was a greater consequences.

A lot of people misunderstand. They read passages like Exodus 21 which says *But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.* (Exodus 21:23-25)

They read that as retaliatory and harsh. Actually what God was doing was providing a layer of protection for His people. If you purposely injured someone you were injured back but only to the level of the injury you caused. One Israelite couldn't kill another because he wounded him.

So there were different consequences for different actions in the Law of God. God was clearly saying in an earthly sense all sin is not the same.

Let's say I'm having a rough day and I speak harshly to my wife. That's a sin and she has

every right to biblically challenge me on it. But we can deal with that, I ask forgiveness and we move on.

But what if I violated my marriage vows by having an inappropriate relationship with another woman? I wouldn't say, "Please forgive me. That was wrong. Let's move on." There wouldn't be any just moving on because all sin is not the same.

Not only that but different sins impact our eternal existence differently. Here's what I mean by that.

Turn to II John, page 1199

There are rewards in heaven for faithful service here on earth. We can't earn a place in heaven. The Bible says, *not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.* (Titus 3:5)

It says, *But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

You can't earn heaven. There's no boasting in heaven. But you can earn rewards in heaven.

Read verses 4-8

We need to walk in truth, and that means follow His commandments, especially to love one another, and we need to believe the doctrinal truth of who Jesus is.

If we don't we won't receive our full reward.

How I live here on earth won't get me to heaven but it will affect what heaven's like once I get there. Again, suppose I'm not paying attention and I go over the speed limit and get a ticket. You'll forgive me. God will forgive me. And my reward in heaven won't be affected.

But suppose I went out and got drunk, smashed my car into another vehicle and killed

someone. I'm out of here, right? I'm no longer pastor of FCC and I shouldn't be. But my eternal rewards have just gone down the tubes because all my chances for serving you guys have been wiped out and I have brought disgrace to the name of Christ.

So different sins not only impact our lives here and now differently but they can even impact eternity.

Let me give you a third reason why all sin isn't the same. There are degrees of punishment in hell.

Turn to Matthew chapter 11

While you're turning there listen to these words of Jesus from Luke 12, *And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.* (Luke 12:47,48)

If you knew it was wrong and you did it anyway the judgment is greater.

Read verses 20-24

Hell is for those who reject the Son of God but I believe the Bible teaches that in some way hell is even worse for those who knew truth but rejected it. That's the greatest sin of all.

I. I'm Really A Pretty Good Person

II. All Sin Is The Same

III. Since I've Already Sinned, I Might As Well Keep On

When I share my testimony with teens I always make a point of stressing how dangerous it was for me to get as close as possible to my "lines in the sand." I want them to see how easy it is for them to do the same thing if they're not careful.

We all have those lines we think we won't step over. We say, "I might do this and that but I would never do... (you fill in the blank). I'm not going to cross this line."

Then we inch our way up to the line till our toes are right there and what happens? We get

used to where we are so we move the line. And the more we move the line the farther we're willing to go.

And after a while we look back and say, "Wow, I didn't realize how far I'd gone but at this point why go back?" We get complacent and comfortable.

Now, I'd love to be able to say that that only happens to unbelievers. I'd love to be able to say that Christians would know better. But it's not true. They may know better, but they don't live it out.

You figure out a way to beat the system at work and end up with a few extra bucks in your pocket. The first time you do it you feel really guilty. But the next time it gets easier. And soon you think, "What's the difference I've done this a bunch of times. I've already blown it so why stop?"

A guy and a girl are dating and they say, "We're going to be pure till marriage." But then temptation is strong and they give in. Soon, that which was going to be just for marriage is a regular part of their relationship because once you've crossed the line it's so hard to go back.

Here's what the Bible says, *They promise liberty, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.* (II Peter 2:19,20)

There's some key words in those verses that we need to really highlight. "overcome," "bondage," "entangled." That's the deceitfulness of sin. We think we're in control of our lives when we do whatever we want. God says we're ensnared and don't even realize it.

Turn to Romans 6 page 1108

Romans 6 is one of the most practical and powerful passages on dealing with sin that you'll find anywhere in the Bible.

It tells believers in Jesus that since Jesus died in our place, spiritually it's as if we have died and been raised to a new life.

So the commands of the chapter are know the truth of your death with Christ, consider it to be a reality in your life, and then present yourself to God instead of to sin.

Read verse 14

The law of God can show us our sin but it can't free us from sin's power. The grace of God in Jesus Christ is what sets us free.

So since we're under grace and can't lose our salvation why don't we just sin up a storm.?

Read verse 15-16

Think about that. What ever you yield to becomes the master of your life.

If I lie once, lies number 2, 3, and 4 will roll out pretty easily. In fact it will get easier and easier to lie.

There was a European blacksmith who lived during the middle ages. He broke the law, was arrested, and chained in prison. Since he was a blacksmith, the first thing he did was start to check out the chain. He went link-by-link looking for some defect or flaw so he could exploit it and get free.

He went up that chain link by link until he came to the link stamped with his own insignia. At that point he just gave up. He had always prided himself in the perfection of his work so when he saw his own stamp he just dropped the chain and groaned. He was bound by a chain that he had made!

That's exactly the point you and I get to when we say, "Since I've already sinned I might as well keep on."

If I've sinned I need to confess that sin to God. Not yield to it and let it enslave me. If we get real with sin and realize it's deadly power to control us, and call it what God calls it, here's The Bible's promise to us... *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

That word translated "confess" literally means to say the same thing. If we say the same thing about our sin that God says about it we'll experience the daily cleansing of God in our life.

Maybe this morning you've realized some things for the first time. You aren't good compared to God, none of us are. All sin isn't the same and we don't excuse our sin because of other people's failures. And finally, we don't have to be under sin's rule.

Spiritual maturity isn't determined merely by how much we know about God, but by how much we obey what we know. It's been said that most Christians have more Bible knowledge than they ever plan to apply. I pray that's not true of us in this church.

So let me ask you this morning what biblical truth do you know that you don't obey? I'm guessing that all of us could come up with at least one or two things.

I'd like to encourage you today to confess that thing before God. Call it what He calls it. It may be pride. It may be greed. It may be rebellion. It may be lust. It may be anger. It may be unforgiveness. It may be a rebellious heart. It may be a critical attitude. It may be the desire to control. Give a biblical name to it.

Give a name to it, and we are going to take that to God this morning, and we're going to humbly thank Him for His forgiveness. We are going to worship Him for forgiving us, and then we are going to ask Him to take that away, remove that barrier so we can be more intimate with Him, and more faithful to Him in this world.

Every head bowed, every eye closed, no one looking around. What's your besetting sin today? If you've just identified one or two, if you've just given them a biblical name, I want you to just raise your hand. This isn't about anybody else but you. Just raise your hand. I've got mine up.

Now join me in a prayer of confession.

"Father, we thank you that because of Jesus and His death payment for our sin on the cross that You are faithful and just to forgive us for these sins. God, we thank You that, in Christ, there is forgiveness, and God, we owe You all of our life because of Your grace. God, we confess this to You.

Now, God, we ask that You would set us free from these sins. In fact we thank you that in Christ we're already set free. Help us to believe its true. Forgive us for buying into sin legends that just minimize the awfulness of sin. Thank you for the beautiful freedom that we have in you."

"God help us today. We live in a culture that laughs at wickedness and treats sin like a joke. Sometimes we've even slipped in to wrong attitudes ourselves.

Thank you that Your great desire for your church is that you might sanctify and cleanse her

with the washing of water by the word, that You might present her to Yourself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.”

“God, we don’t want to be bound by the chains that we have made. We commit our lives to You today. As Christians we celebrate Your enduring faithfulness to all of us. We celebrate Your freedom.”