



# UNIT: COMMON HERESIES

## LESSON 1 | GOOD DEEDS=GOOD STANDING

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO LEARN:** That our good deeds or works will never be enough to restore us to a right relationship with God. However, God has offered us a free gift of salvation in Jesus Christ.

**WHAT WE WANT STUDENTS TO DO WITH WHAT THEY'VE LEARNED:** Understand that they cannot and do not earn salvation by doing good deeds. From this understanding, students should counter any false claims about salvation with the truths found in Scripture.

**SCRIPTURE FOCUS:** Matthew 23:13-22, Romans 5:12-21, Luke 15:17-32.

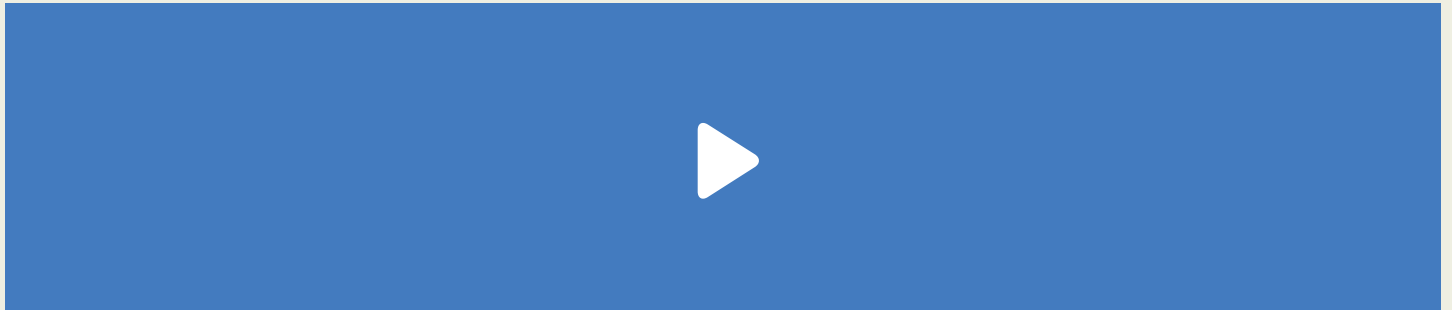
**ANCHOR STATEMENT:** No amount of good deeds will replace our need for a Savior. We require the work of Jesus Christ to fix our sin problem because we are incapable of being sinless on our own.

### OVERVIEW:

The Bible teaches that all humans are born sinful and in need of a Savior to fix this sin problem. No amount of good deeds can restore the broken relationship we have with God. We need forgiveness. Thankfully, Scripture tells us that we are offered a free gift of salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus! In this lesson, students will learn about the false gospel of a works-based faith and how what God offers us is so much better.

### TEACHER PREP VIDEO:

Each *Anchored* lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These short videos are designed to help you grasp the lesson's main point as you prepare to teach.



### BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is a focused, brief overview of some of the background info for the main passage you will be teaching.

- **WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "CONTEXT"?** In every YM360 Bible study lesson, you'll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By "context" we mean at the very least helping students know *who* wrote the book, *when* it was written, and *why* it was written.
- **WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don't get a "big picture" understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God's plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the *Bible Background* to help summarize the context.

## THE DETAILS

### Matthew

- *Author:* Matthew, a former tax collector, was a disciple of Jesus and a firsthand witness to the stories he relates in his Gospel.
- *Time frame:* Most people hold to Matthew's Gospel being written in the late A.D. 50s or 60s, though there are some who think it was written after the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70.
- *Purpose:* Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience to convince them that Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Messiah. But he was probably aware of a Gentile audience, as his Gospel makes the case that the saving truth of Christ is for all nations.

### Romans

- *Author:* Paul is the author of Romans.
- *Time frame:* Romans was probably written from Corinth in the winter of 56-57 AD.
- *Purpose:* Since the church in Rome had not received comprehensive theological teaching on salvation and other implications of following Christ, Paul wrote Romans to ensure a good understanding of such things. In addition, since many Jewish Christians were rejecting some of the new Gentile converts, it was essential that a level playing field be given to all Believers. This is what Paul was advocating for in Romans.

### Luke

- *Author:* Luke was a doctor, a Gentile Christian and a companion of Paul.
- *Time frame:* The Gospel of Luke was written around 60 AD.
- *Purpose:* Luke is the only Gentile author of the Bible. His entire purpose was to write an accurate account of the life of Jesus so as to present Jesus as Savior, fully God and fully man. It is one of the synoptic Gospels, having much in common with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.

## THE SETTING

In his letter to the Christians of Rome, the Apostle Paul outlines the truth of the Gospel as directly as possible. He takes some time to establish how man became enslaved to sin, thus explaining why Jesus had to die in order for man to be saved. Understanding this is paramount to our understanding of the difference between a works-based religion and faith in the grace of God.

## THE MAIN POINT

Every human being is born as a slave to sin; we cannot know God as long as we remain slaves to sin. Our sin is so attached to us that we cannot do enough good to undo the sin that covers us. But Jesus lived a perfect life and died a death that serves as the punishment for our sins. This sacrifice was our only hope of salvation. It is only by the grace of God that we are forgiven of our sins and restored to proper standing with God.

# LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: an introductory activity called *The Lead In*; the Bible Study section called *The Main Event*; and an application-focused segment called *The Last Word*.

## THE LEAD IN

- *Goal*: Get students thinking about determining what is true and what is not true.
- *Set-Up*: Depending on the size of your room, you may want to move a few chairs so students can spread out and move around during the game below.

FIRST, have the students stand up from their chairs and get them ready to move around. Explain that you are about to play a game called “FACT OR FICTION?” Designate one side of the room as the FACT side and the opposite side as FICTION. (Or, you can have students hold up their right hand for FACT or their left hand for FICTION.) Explain that you will call out a statement, and students have five seconds to answer FACT or FICTION. If they pick the wrong answer, they must sit down. Do a warm-up round for them to grow familiar with the concept of the game.

(Feel free to use your own prompts that are relevant to your groups or use any of the following questions.)

- **Warm up: There are 50 states in the United States. FACT OR FICTION?**
  - *Answer*: FACT

THEN, ask students all or a variety of these questions:

- **An Octopus has three hearts. FACT OR FICTION?**
  - *Answer*: FACT
- **Sloths can hold their breath for 40 minutes. FACT OR FICTION?**
  - *Answer*: FACT
- **Most orange cats are female. FACT OR FICTION?**
  - *Answer*: FICTION
- **Animals can be allergic to humans. FACT OR FICTION?**
  - *Answer*: FACT

Once you have wrapped up your FACT OR FICTION? game, say something like:

- **Today, we’re going to begin a unit on false claims about our faith. There are things in this world that are true and things that are not. The same is true about our faith; we can know the truth through what the Bible teaches. Whenever you need to know whether something said about God is true or not, the Bible is the ultimate and true authority. Let’s get started!**

*FINALLY*, if there are no questions, transition into the Main Event.

## THE MAIN EVENT

- *Goal*: To help students understand why Pelagianism (Good Deeds=Good Standing) is a false doctrine and how humanity has a sin problem that only Jesus can solve.
- *Set-Up*: Make sure students have a Bible or Bible App.

FIRST, explain to students that the lesson today is going to cover a common heresy found in and out of the Church. But before we go any further, let’s define the word heresy! **Say something like:**

- **If you tried to define heresy by the world’s terms, it would say that heresies are simply a difference of opinion.**

**In fact, common definitions of heresy imply that people who believe them are free thinkers that go against the grain, or don't follow the status quo. And while that may be true in non-Christian circles, I want you to understand the seriousness of believing heretical things when it comes to God. Heresies are not creative thoughts or innovative new ideas. They are essentially doctrines that are designed to draw you further away from God.**

THEN, to give a good example of what heresy looks like, read or have a student read Matthew 23:13-22. **Say something like:**

- **In this passage, we see Jesus calling out some of the heretical teachings of the Pharisees. The Pharisees mostly held views that were correct. The Pharisees were an influential group of Jewish religious leaders during the time of Jesus. They believed that there was one true God, and they studied God's Word. However, we can see that Jesus was unhappy with their emphasis on personal works as a means of righteousness (or godliness). In fact, Jesus accuses these men of leading others astray and even making them 'children of hell.' That doesn't sound very good!**

Explain to students that when it comes to our faith in Jesus, it rests on believing the claims about who He is, what He has done, and what He has said. When we chase after things that are opposed to these biblical truths, it is at the cost of our faith in Jesus. This may be a little upsetting for students to hear, but it's important they know that believing and following heresies are detrimental to our relationship with God. **Say something like:**

- **Today, we are going to talk about a common heresy that says we can earn good standing with God by doing enough good deeds. As we just read in Matthew 23, this heresy is as old as the Church itself. This heresy is often attributed to a man named Pelagius. Pelagius was a fifth-century monk and teacher who believed that the Fall of Adam and Eve did not actually impart sin to the rest of us. In other words, Pelagius and his followers believed that as long as you kept doing 'good deeds,' you didn't really need a Savior. Today, we are going to talk about this dangerous belief that is opposed to what we read in Scripture and how that sort of thinking is still damaging today.**

NEXT, have your students turn to Romans 5:12-21 and prepare to read the passage as a group. While they're searching, give the context for the book using the *Bible Background*. Then, read or have a student read verses 12-21. Then **ask:**

- **What is this passage talking about when it says sin came through one man?**
  - *Answer:* Paul is referring to the Genesis 3 account of the fall of man, where Adam and Eve choose to disobey God's commands, and how all men since Adam have been cursed with sin and are separated from God as a result.

Explain to students that sin and its consequence of death is the inheritance of all people. Sin is not simply the bad things we do, but it's tied to our very being from the moment we are born. **Say something like:**

- **No matter how much good we do in this life, we will never be spotless when it comes to sin. In this letter to the Romans, Paul reminds them of the Fall of Adam and Eve. This narrative in Genesis 3 is not just about how Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden, but about how all of humanity has been separated from God through sin. Contrary to what Pelagius taught, we are ALL in need of a Savior, even those of us who seem to be doing more good deeds than a whole troupe of Girl Scouts!**

THEN, ask students:

- **But what is this Free Gift that Paul talks about?**
  - *Answer:* Salvation in Jesus! (Feel free to jump to Romans 6:23, where Paul explains that death is the payment for our sins, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.)

**Say something like:**

- **It seems pretty simple, right? If we know that we have a sin problem that we can't solve on our own, then surely we wouldn't turn away an offer from the Almighty God to save us from the very thing that is killing**

**us! But Pelagius had an issue with this. Like many who pride themselves on what they believe is their inherent goodness, he didn't like the fact that others who he believed to be more sinful than him were getting off scot-free. At least... that's how he viewed it. He was frustrated that people weren't doing all the good things he was doing, and yet they seemed to be loved by God no less. He kind of sounds like someone from one of Jesus's parables!**

Read or have a student read Luke 15:17-32. (This is the second half of the Prodigal Son parable. If your students are not familiar with the parable, you may want to give a brief explanation.) Then **ask**:

- **In this parable, the father is meant to represent God. What similarities do you see between the eldest brother and the views of Pelagius?**
  - *Answer:* There is a sense of pride in their good deeds and an apparent disagreement with the grace given to others who they view as lesser.
- **Do we still see examples of this attitude within some people in the Church today?**
  - *Answers will vary.* Help students see that, yes, this attitude is still present in certain people today.

NEXT, explain that we can't earn God's forgiveness. All we can do is receive His forgiveness and repent from our sin- just like the prodigal son. Remind students that we can never do enough good to wipe away the sin that we are slaves to. But Jesus loves us so much that even while we were enslaved to sin, He died for us, and His resurrection now proves to us that our debts have been paid, and we are now free from our enslavement to sin. And that is even true for those who the world might say are too far gone!

Remind students of their Anchor Statement:

**NO AMOUNT OF GOOD DEEDS WILL REPLACE OUR NEED FOR A SAVIOR. WE REQUIRE THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST TO FIX OUR SIN PROBLEM BECAUSE WE ARE INCAPABLE OF BEING SINLESS ON OUR OWN.**

Say something like:

- **There are people who think that as long they've done more good things than bad, they will be judged as good by God. There are also those who believe their good deeds will elevate them before God as more worthy of salvation or more entitled to God's love. But this is not what the Bible tells us. And that is wonderful news for those of us who know we can never earn our salvation! Everyone needs Jesus.**

FINALLY, remind students that part of having Anchor Statements each week is the hope that when others attempt to lead us astray, we can remain anchored in God's truth. Whenever pride slips in and tries to convince us that we will be saved by our own ability to 'do good' or that others aren't worthy of God's love, we can cling to our Anchor Statement and remember that God is the only One worthy of any praise! He is the only One who was able to do THE good deed that would save us from our sins.

*Ask if anyone has any thoughts or questions, then transition to the Last Word portion of your lesson.*

## THE LAST WORD

- *Goal:* Review some of the truths covered in this lesson.
- *Set-Up:* Revisit the game from the Lead In, this time with a twist.

FIRST, explain to students that we are going to play one more round of "FACT OR FICTION?" but this time, all the prompts have to do with the lesson. If a prompt is FICTION, a student can get bonus points by explaining what the truth is!

NEXT, instruct the students to think carefully about each prompt as you begin.

- **I can fix my sin just by doing nice things for others. FACT OR FICTION?**  
     *o Answer:* FICTION. No amount of good works will save you from your sin.
- **Jesus is the only way for my sins to be forgiven. FACT OR FICTION?**  
     *o Answer:* FACT. 1 John 2:1-2.
- **I need to be a perfect person for Jesus to die for me. FACT OR FICTION?**  
     *o Answer:* FICTION. He died for us while we were still sinners.
- **Jesus has offered forgiveness to the whole world, not just a select few. FACT OR FICTION?**  
     *o Answer:* FACT. (For clarity: Salvation has been offered to everyone. This prompt is not trying to imply that everyone is saved no matter what/universalism.)
- **God loves me more than others because I'm a good person. FACT OR FICTION?**  
     *o Answer:* FICTION. God sent His Son to die for us out of love, even when we were still His enemies! His love is given to us because of how good He is, not because of how good we are.

FINALLY, once you have wrapped up your final round of FACT OR FICTION, remind students that this is only the first heresy in our unit on Common Heresies. There are many more conversations waiting for your group regarding what is fact, and what is fiction!

If there are no more questions, close the lesson in prayer.

- Don't forget to remind students about their devotions this week. If you're posting them on Social Media or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.



