

# To Know To Believe To Live – Module 3 Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

Copyright 2021, Msgr. Michael Clay, All Rights Reserved.

Unauthorized copying or redistribution of this document in print or electronic format is strictly prohibited.

---

## ALTHOUGH WE ARE ALL MADE IN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS OF GOD, WE ALSO SIN

### I. Introduction:

- A. We have learned that 1) God is love, perfect love, and that 2) all of us, without exception, are made in the image and likeness of God (*imago Dei*), which mean we are made from love and made for love.
- B. And, there is another truth about ourselves: we choose, at a variety of levels of awareness and volition, to sin, even as “good” people.
- C. Romans 7 is a good illustration of this:
  1. “What I don’t understand about myself is that I decide one way, but then act another.” (Romans 7:15) (translation: *The Message*)
  2. “I realize I don’t have what it takes. I can will it, but I can’t do it.” (Romans 7:18)
  3. “I truly delight in God’s commands . . . but parts of me covertly rebel, and then just when I least expect it, they take charge.” (Romans 7:23)
- D. It is a both/and reality. We are endlessly loved by God; we are *imago Dei*; we are inherently created as good people; AND we also sin.

### II. What Is Sin, Its Triggers, and Its Consequences:

#### A. A Definition of Sin:

1. Thoughts, words, or deeds that are not in keeping with our identity as *imago Dei* that
2. we choose to varying degrees of culpability to think, say, or do or fail to think, say, or do,
3. either as an individual (personal) or as part of a group (social),
4. against God, another person, a group of people, or myself that
5. wound our relationships with God, others, and ourselves.

#### B. For any number of reasons we find ourselves falling into sin which negatively impacts us as God’s beloved children and wounds our relationships with God (**although not God’s relationship with us**), others, and ourselves.

1. Unaware of how we and/or the world we live in reduces sin to mistakes or reshapes the definition of something sinful to rationalize it (e.g., “It’s okay as long as nobody gets hurt and it’s done with permission of the other person;” “sin is religion’s way of keeping people under its thumb by keeping them fearful,” etc.)
2. Pride/Ego: all can succumb to protecting our ego (e.g., lying, rationalizing our misbehaviors), falsely trying to be more than we really are (e.g., inflating who we are by self-promotion), and/or being self-centered (e.g., It’s all about me).

# To Know To Believe To Live – Module 3 Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

Copyright 2021, Msgr. Michael Clay, All Rights Reserved.

Unauthorized copying or redistribution of this document in print or electronic format is strictly prohibited.

---

- a. Pride in this context does not include being justifiably proud of something we have accomplished (e.g., completing a difficult project, passing a difficult exam, receiving a bonus for good work we have done, etc.) or are (e.g., proud of my Irish heritage)
3. Temptations from without and within that regularly tell us that we're not good, smart, talented enough which lead to sin (inner/outer voice that falsely tells us not to be satisfied with who we are by placing us in constantly comparative situations where someone else is better equipped at something than we are or due to a flaw/imperfection/limitation we have). The temptations are not in themselves sins.
4. Compensations the world tries to seduce us or we seduce ourselves into accepting as alternatives to that which only God can give us (e.g., success, money, power, excessive gratification, more-is-better, you-can-have-it-all, you-deserve-it, etc.)

## C. Consequences of Sin:

1. Harder to experience God's endless love that is always knocking at our door waiting to be invited in.
2. Our *imago Dei* becomes cloudy to us and others (but never to God), something God never wants to see happen since sin is not of God. Yet when it does occur, God never wants it to become permanently affixed to us
3. By denying/ignoring/rationalizing sin, we constrict the flow of grace God always wants us to have. The flow of love from God is endless and consistent but the channel with a sin debris field slows/restricts the flow
4. Analogy: Eating foods that contribute to arterial plaque developing in arteries that constrict the flow of blood necessary for good health and life; consequence: other health issues, even premature death)

## D. Discussion Points:

1. What is your reaction to the definition of sin? Describe your reaction and why you might have that reaction.
2. There are many triggers that lead us to sin. Describe how one of the four presented (unawareness, ego/pride, temptations, compensations) can be/is a trigger for you.
3. When we succumb to sin, it has consequences which can often be seen through the lens of punishment. This presentation views those consequences through the lens of love. How does this lens help you reimagine how you might respond to a future trigger to sin?

## III. Some Reasons Why We Recoil From/Disengage From/Deny/Rationalize Sin:

- A. Fearful of it, fearful of punishment (experienced in the past, present), fear of pain that comes from looking at the truth about ourselves, fear of the unknown future
- B. Fearful of it, especially if it challenges the façade we try to maintain of being perfect, being good, having it together, everything is fine, etc.
- C. Our desire to be the arbiter of our life (e.g., tied to ego, philosophical perspectives wherein we are masters of our destiny, etc.)

# To Know To Believe To Live – Module 3 Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

Copyright 2021, Msgr. Michael Clay, All Rights Reserved.

Unauthorized copying or redistribution of this document in print or electronic format is strictly prohibited.

---

- D. Rationalize: everyone does it; eye for an eye
- E. Objective truth about right/wrong replaced by “your opinion/my opinion are the same”
- F. Unawareness of/doubt about God’s ceaseless love for us
- G. God as judge outweighs God is love (*apagao*)
  
- H. Discussion Points:
  - 1. What makes wrestling with my sins, personal and/or social, so challenging?
  - 2. Name an excuse you or someone you know used in justifying/denying/ignoring/rationalizing a sin. What was going on inside of you or perhaps was going on inside the person you thought of that prompted that reaction/behavior?
  - 3. Sometimes people have a hard time forgiving themselves when they sin. How might that impede them from growing stronger in their awareness that they are *imago Dei*?

## IV. Some Things That Make It Possible To Face Sin:

- A. Realization that Christianity is a salvation religion: we cannot save ourselves, we cannot fix ourselves and everything around us on our own and that’s okay (Robert Barron, p. 73)
- B. God’s grace is always stronger/more powerful than sin
- C. There is NOTHING we could ever do that would stop God from loving us
- D. God is totally invested in helping us become the person we’ve been created to be as *imago Dei*, to be saints
- E. God responds to every rejection of Him through sin with a counteroffer of love made visible in Jesus and today through the sacraments that bring us into union with Him. John 3:16 is a one line summary of Jesus’ mission as the personification of that counteroffer of love (adapted from Mary McGlone, *Relax and Rejoice*)
- F. In Catholicism: four sacraments of forgiveness (baptism, eucharist, reconciliation, anointing of the sick)—the majority of our sacraments because forgiveness is the antidote God wants us to be assured is always ours
- G. In sacraments of forgiveness we ritualize the cosmic battle between death and life (sin and salvation); they affirm that life/salvation are always stronger than death/sin (adapted from Irwin, 48)
- H. Sacraments are the antibodies to evil and sin; evil and sin do not define us just as our diseases and infections do not define us as *imago Dei* (Pope Francis, Homily on Feast of Body/Blood of Christ, 06/14/20)
- I. In Christ and through His sacraments of forgiveness/healing we stare down all that is deadly, sin and even death itself (adapted from Irwin, 61)
- J. Discussion Points:
  - 1. Name one thing from this part of the presentation that encourages you to accept, confront, and/or reduce sin in general or a particular sin in your life?
  - 2. What does it look/feel like be courageous in accepting sin as a part of your life? What might make being courageous easier for you?
  - 3. The Sacrament of Reconciliation is infrequently celebrated in the lives of many Catholics. Why might that be? How might this presentation help your perspective about this sacrament?

# To Know To Believe To Live – Module 3 Official Handout

02.13.21 Version

Developed by Msgr. Michael Clay

Copyright 2021, Msgr. Michael Clay, All Rights Reserved.

Unauthorized copying or redistribution of this document in print or electronic format is strictly prohibited.

---

## V. Optional Post-Session Reflection (For Group Discussion at Start of Next Module):

Reflect on where you are currently in knowing, believing, and living that although you/we are made in the image and likeness of God you/we also sin **AND** how you might be invited to take another step forward growing in this area of faith.

## VI. A Prayer:

Father, you have the power to soften the hardest of hearts.  
Grant us the grace to receive your forgiving love,  
allowing it to wash over the impurities of our hearts and minds and take root,  
as we struggle with sin and temptation. Amen.

-INQprayers (adapted)

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barron, Robert. *The Strangest Way*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002.

Irwin, Kevin. *Liturgy and Sacraments in a COVID World*. Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2021.

McGlone, Mary. "Relax and Rejoice." In *National Catholic Reporter*. 03/14/21.  
<https://www.ncronline.org/news/opinion/scripture-life/fourth-sunday-lent-relax-and-rejoice>