

News Story Summary

The Catholic church has been in the news lately as Pope Francis prepares for a US visit. A new poll by the Pew Research Center reveals that Americans who identify as Catholic could be seen as "cafeteria Catholics" who pick and choose which tenets to follow. On the question of what's a sin, the researchers found:

- Cohabitation without marriage: 65 percent say it's not a sin, and 51 percent of regular church-goers.
- Homosexual behavior: 50 percent of all Catholics say it's not a sin, although that dropped to 36 percent among those who attend Mass regularly.
- Divorce: Seven out of 10 say it's not a sin; more than half of those who frequently attend services agree.
- Abortion: A third of Catholics say terminating a pregnancy is not a sin. Among regular church-going Catholics, one in five don't see abortion as sinful.

(For more on this story, search the Internet using phrases such as “Changing attitudes toward sin”)

Focus Attention

As the group gets settled in, read the following quote from the *Explore the Bible* leader guide (page 35): “Many people in Western culture wish to eliminate the categories of good and evil, right and wrong. They claim that actions that have always been sinful are merely preferences.”

Share the news story about changing attitudes about sin among US Catholics. Stress that the news article emphasizes Catholics simply because Pope Francis is preparing for his United States visit. Ask, “Which of these would change if the poll was focused on Protestants? Baptists? Our own church?” Allow for discussion, then state, “When it comes down to it, there really isn’t any point to taking a survey about what people consider a sin. The better question would be asking how people determine if something is a sin.” Share that as we study God’s Word during this session, we will see that four little words whispered by the serpent to the woman raised the question of who decides what is right and wrong: “*Did God really say...*”

Challenge

Write the subpoints for this session on a dry erase board or large sheet of paper: SHAM, SHAME, and SHAMBLES. Note that the sham is believing that human beings are the ultimate authority on determining what sin is. Shame is what happens when we are caught in our sin. And we can look at our world right now, not to mention the ruined lives of individuals, and see the

shambles that result in trying to re-define right and wrong according to any standard other than God's Word. Point to the survey results as evidence of the shambles. Be careful to explain that Catholic believers are not alone in turning to other authorities outside the Bible for defining right and wrong. Challenge your group members to return to God's Word and not public opinion as their ultimate authority on right and wrong.