

Belief: Its Power and Limitations

- I. Definitions.
- A. power: Ability to do or effect something or anything, or to act upon a person or thing.
 - B. belief: The mental action, condition, or habit, of trusting to or confiding in a person or thing; trust, dependence, reliance, confidence, faith. Const. *in* (*to, of* obs.) a person. b. *absol.* Trust in God; the Christian virtue of faith. 2. Mental acceptance of a proposition, statement, or fact, as true, on the ground of authority or evidence; assent of the mind to a statement, or to the truth of a fact beyond observation, on the testimony of another, or to a fact or truth on the evidence of consciousness; the mental condition involved in this assent. Constr. of a statement, or (*obs.*) a speaker; *that...*; **belief in** (a thing); persuasion of its existence.
 - C. believe: To have confidence or faith in (a person), and consequently to rely upon, trust to.
 - D. faith: Confidence, reliance, trust (in the ability, goodness, etc., of a person; in the efficacy or worth of a thing; or in the truth of a statement or doctrine).
 - E. trust: *intr.* To have faith or confidence; to place reliance; to confide. Const. *in, to* (†*of, on, upon*).
 - F. confidence: The mental attitude of trusting in or relying on a person or thing; firm trust, reliance, faith. Const. *in* (†*to, on, upon*).
 - 1. Confidence in Jesus Christ's satisfaction of God's justice opposes confidence in sinful man/self. **EPH 3:11-12 c/w PHIL 3:3-4.**
 - 2. Confidence in Jesus Christ must be held fast. **HEB 3:6, 14; 10:35.**
 - 3. There is a difference between confidence in Jesus Christ as the satisfier of God's justice and confidence in what the sinner does to procure Jesus Christ's satisfaction of God's justice. The Galatian churches had abandoned the former for the latter. **GAL 1:6; 3:1; 5:4.**
- II. Observations.
- A. Belief may be of something true and factual, or something false. **2TH 2:11-13; JER 7:8.**
 - 1. Therefore, one's belief is not of itself an objective authority synonymous with truth. Believing in Santa Claus does not make Santa Claus a reality.
 - 2. One's belief that his body will win a contest against the inertia of a speeding locomotive will not be validated by experience.
 - 3. By contrast, one's belief in established fact (and especially the facts of Scripture) will be validated by experience.
 - B. Neither belief nor unbelief of a truth or an error alters the truth or error. Eg's: God exists whether one believes that or not. Sin is evil whether one believes that or not. The wages of sin is death whether one believes that or not. **ROM 6:23.**
 - C. We commonly conflate *belief* with *opinion* or *persuasion*: "I believe this suit, sir, is just the one you have been looking for." This is an opinion based upon observation and circumstances, perhaps also bias.
 - 1. This does not mean that valid belief is utterly divorced from persuasion. **ROM 4:20-21; 2TI 1:12; HEB 11:13.**
 - 2. But persuasion itself must be qualified by its source and details. **GAL 5:7-8.**
 - 3. Abel and Cain were both *persuaded* concerning their offerings but only Abel's persuasion was according to faith in God's word. **HEB 11:4.**
 - D. Belief in God and His word may be based upon confirming evidences which appeal to man's natural senses. **MAR 16:17-20.**
 - E. Belief in God and His word may be based upon confidence that needs not experiential

confirmation by natural senses. **JOH 20:24-31; 2CO 5:7; 1PE 1:8.**

- F. Observation and reason can be useful adjuncts of belief but certain facts ultimately depend on faith alone. **HEB 11:3.**
- G. Scripture is filled with declarations of past events and people, with declarations about God, God's promises of blessing and even of cursing, what He has done and what He would/will do.
 - 1. Every bit of it is pure and should be believed. **PRO 30:5; REV 21:5.**
 - 2. The success of it depends on one being convinced it is God's word. Those who do so will find it produces in them the very things which it declares it will. **1TH 2:13.**
 - 3. It is believed more accurately and efficiently by rightly dividing it. **2TI 2:15.**
- H. Belief not applied is vain. **JOH 5:45-47; JAM 2:19-20.**
- I. Jesus Christ is the supreme believer.
 - 1. He believed everything the Father said concerning him and acted accordingly. **JOH 5:31-32; 8:29.**
 - 2. He trusted God when He could only submit, not act. **ACT 2:25-28; LUK 23:46.**
 - 3. The elect's righteousness before God is owing to His faith. **GAL 2:20; PHIL 3:9.**
 - 4. His obedient faith produced the righteousness of the elect. **2CO 5:21; ROM 5:19.**
 - 5. Those who truly believe in Him have faith that is *counted for* righteousness, their faith being proof that God deems them righteous in Christ (**ROM 4:3, 22-25**). This is the first and most valuable comfort of the gospel and the power of this knowledge should be transformative. **ROM 6:1-4; HEB 9:13-14.**

- III. There are good things which God intends for men which are conditioned upon their belief in His word. In such cases, man's unbelief *thwarts* the will of God which was to benefit them.
 - A. Israel, Moses and Aaron should have all made it into Canaan but God's designed blessing was thwarted by their unbelief. **NUM 20:12; HEB 3:18-19.**
 - B. Christ's power and willingness to do great works was in some places thwarted by unbelief. **MAT 13:58; MAR 6:5-6.**
 - C. There is great relief from unbearable burdens of the Law which is reserved only for believers in Jesus as Christ. **ACT 15:10-11; ROM 10:1-4.**
 - D. The bulk of N.T. promises of knowledge of salvation, peace, joy, rest, spiritual strength, victory over fears and doubts and temptations and trials, consolation, help, mercy, grace for times of need, liberty of soul, confidence, assurance of eternal life, hope, temporal deliverances, etc. are for the enjoyment of believers. Unbelief thwarts God's intentions in such cases.
 - 1. Those who have never heard the truth cannot obtain them. **ROM 10:14-15.**
 - 2. Those who have heard the truth but refuse it cannot obtain them. **ROM 10:16-18.**
 - 3. Those who have believed the truth but forsake it forsake them since the Spirit by Whom these things come has been quenched. **PSA 51:10-12 c/w 1TH 5:19; 1TI 1:19-20; HEB 10:38-39.**
 - 4. The same God Who promises manifold good things to believers also promises certain negative things to apostates. **MAT 5:13; HEB 10:23-31.**
 - 5. There is therefore power in both belief and unbelief.
- E. That man's unbelief *thwarts* the will of God in such examples as given above must be qualified.
 - 1. The thwarting is not of God's sovereign will to do as He pleases on His own terms. In that regard, God's will is never thwarted. **ISA 46:10-11.**
 - 2. The thwarting is only of God's promises of favors towards men *which are conditioned upon their belief*. Such promises carry with them a caveat that God is

- therefore not obliged to extend the favor in the case of unbelief.
- a. His will is still done. His government of men and situations is unfazed.
 - b. The thwarting, therefore, is really the individual thwarting his own welfare by unbelief which discharges God of any responsibility to keep His promise. **HEB 3:19 c/w NUM 14:34.**
 - c. Our problems are our own where we refused to hearken to promises of good. **MAT 23:37.**
 - d. The “all things” which work together for good (**ROM 8:28**) definitely don’t include sin like unbelief. **JER 5:25; ROM 3:8.**
3. The flip-side of many of God’s promises of good and favor is that the same unbelief which thwarts one’s own good also invokes the judgment of God against us.
 4. Unbelief both deprives us of a blessing and brings a curse, and this applies in *spiritual* things. Example:
 - a. Active belief of the gospel is rewarded with the gift of the Holy Ghost: the Spirit baptizes one into the local church where He abides to teach and comfort. **ACT 2:38-41 c/w 1CO 12:13.**
 - b. Inactive response to the gospel (unbelief) doesn’t just cause one to miss out on spiritual blessing, it puts one under judgment as an *informed* sinner. **LUK 12:47-48 c/w JAM 4:17 c/w 2TH 2:10-12.**
 5. Unbelief both deprives us of a blessing and brings a curse, and this applies in *carnal* things. Example:
 - a. Faithfulness in giving is promised blessings. **PRO 3:9-10; LUK 6:38; ACT 20:35; HEB 6:10.**
 - b. Infidelity in giving is promised cursings. **HAG 1:5-10.**
 - c. Unbelief is the root cause here: you don’t believe God will honor His word to bless and reward, or that He is really watching your heart and actions, or that He won’t chastise you for delinquency, or you falsely believe that you somehow have a special exemption, or (worse!) that you are prospering in spite of your disobedience and this is somehow to you a proof that you are good and right when God’s word says otherwise. This latter is the error of “gain is godliness” where prosperity is self-destructive. **1TI 6:5 c/w PRO 1:32.**
 6. Unbelief in those promises of good that are conditioned upon your personal faith in action has incredible power: power to deny yourself good, power to invite to yourself trouble, power to justify God in dealing with you negatively. Such cases make us to be *straitened in our own bowels*. **MIC 2:7 c/w 2CO 6:12.**
 7. This is a critical area in which your belief that you truly have God’s word (**1TH 2:13**) will be tested. It should have an effectual working in you to do what Scripture says is pleasing to God for the blessing, for the avoidance of a missed blessing, and for the avoidance of a curse. **LUK 14:15-24.**
- F. Active belief can turn God from His determined destructions whereas unbelief only justifies His destruction. **JON 3:10.**
1. Nineveh had a forty-day window and they made the best of it. **JON 3:4-9.**
 2. Had they not believed and acted accordingly by repentance (**MAT 12:41**), God would have overthrown them according to His word or He would be a liar.
 3. Had they determined to make no changes until Day 41, changes would have been impossible. Once God shuts doors, too late. **LUK 13:25-27.**
 4. We do not know the length of our space of repentance so why tarry? **REV 2:21 c/w HEB 3:7-9.**

- G. In conditional promises of God, belief has power to move God in your favor according to His promise of blessing. Unbelief has power to move God against you according to His promise of cursing. So choose wisely. **DEU 30:19.**
- IV. Remember, though, that unbelief has no power in *unconditional* matters in which God has declared certain things in His word.
- A. It cannot change the past.
 - B. It cannot negate a truth/fact.
 - C. It cannot negate a lie/error.
 - D. It cannot make God a liar.
 - 1. John twice says unbelief makes God a liar. **1JO 1:10; 5:10.**
 - 2. God cannot lie. **TIT 1:2.**
 - 3. Unbelief rather is tantamount to saying that God is a liar, a false accusation. This was and is Satan's tactic. **GEN 3:4-5; MAT 3:17; 4:1-3.**
 - E. It cannot thwart His purpose and prevent Him from doing what He has promised.
 - F. It cannot dethrone Him.
 - G. It cannot in any way damage Him.
 - H. A failure to distinguish between God's promises which are *conditioned upon belief* and God's doings and promises which *do not depend on the sinner's belief* is the source of much confusion concerning eternal salvation.
- V. Consider some things that God's word says about natural man and ask yourself whether man's belief or unbelief of these things has any bearing on their reality.
- A. All men are made sinners by Adam's sin. **ROM 5:12.**
 - B. All men have sin and have sinned. **ROM 3:23.**
 - C. All men are by nature dead in trespasses and sins deserving wrath. **EPH 2:1-3.**
 - D. All men by nature are depraved (corrupt, wicked). **ROM 3:9-19.**
 - E. All men by nature cannot receive/believe spiritual things of God. **1CO 2:14.**
 - F. All men by nature are condemned before God and cannot dwell with Him, no matter how good they are. **PSA 5:4-5; ISA 64:6; GAL 3:10.**
 - G. These are hard realities about sinful/natural man which are declared by God's word.
 - 1. If you believe them, you are on the same page as God concerning natural man. But your belief of these things is not their cause nor does it validate them.
 - 2. If you don't believe them, they do not therefore cease to be realities.
 - 3. Ironically, there are professing Christians who hold that not believing these things actually negates their realities while also holding that belief of the gospel is the only way to negate them.
 - H. Do not forget this: belief or unbelief of a reality does not negate nor alter a reality and belief in a lie does not purify the lie to make it profitable. **JER 7:8.**