

## 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.**
  - 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.
- 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; 1CO 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.