

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 cause, negate nor alter a reality and belief in a lie does not purify the lie to make it profitable. **JER 7:8.**
- VI. Consider some things that God's word says about Jesus Christ and ask yourself whether man's belief or unbelief of these things has any bearing on their reality.
- A. He is of the seed of David. **ROM 1:3.**
 - B. He was conceived by God in the womb of the virgin, Mary. **MAT 1:18-20.**
 - C. He is therefore the Son of God, uniquely so. **LUK 1:35; JOH 1:18.**
 - D. He is God Incarnate. **JOH 1:1-3, 14, 1TI 3:16.**
 - E. He is fully man, the Son of man: this is the nature He took upon Himself. **MAT 16:13; 1TI 2:5; HEB 2:16.**
 - F. He is the God-Man, fully God and fully Man. **COL 2:9.**

- G. He is Abraham's seed to Whom the promises were made. **GAL 3:16.**
- H. He is holy, harmless, sinless, undefiled, separate from sinners. **HEB 7:26; 1PE 2:22.**
- I. He was baptized and entered public ministry at the appointed time, being about thirty years old. **LUK 3:23; GAL 4:4.**
- J. He was approved of God by good works and miracles but was falsely convicted and crucified unto death. **ACT 2:22-23.**
- K. He was buried but resurrected and showed Himself alive to men for forty days. **1CO 15:4; ACT 1:3.**
- L. He ascended bodily into heaven to take David's throne in heaven. **ACT 2:29-35.**
- M. He is therefore Lord and Christ (Messiah), the promised One. **ACT 2:36; 7:52; 17:2-3.**
- N. He is therefore the Judge of all. **ACT 17:31; 10:42.**
- O. He is King and Priest for ever. **ISA 9:6-7; REV 11:15; HEB 7:17.**
- P. He is coming back with and for His people. **1TH 4:14-18.**
 - 1. Mark the wording, "For if we believe that..."
 - 2. This is obviously not setting up a condition for His return, as if man's unbelief would forbid Him from returning and raising the dead.
 - 3. It rather sets forth a logical progression: the return of Christ to raise the dead should be as certain in our belief system as His own life, death, burial and resurrection.
- Q. None of the above declarations of God's word concerning Jesus Christ are validated by man's belief nor thwarted by man's unbelief. They are facts of history, the present and the future that the whole creation must ultimately concede. **PHIL 2:5-11.**

VII. Consider some things that God's word says about Jesus Christ's mission and ask yourself whether man's belief or unbelief of these things has any bearing on its realities.

- A. He shall save His people from their sins. **MAT 1:21.**
 - 1. He has a people: they are His.
 - 2. He *shall* (not "try to," "could," "make possible," etc.) save them from their sins.
 - 3. Their sins shall not persist with them. **1JO 3:2.**
- B. His people were chosen in Him before the foundation of the world by God's will. **EPH 1:3-6.**
- C. His people were given to Him by the Father to utterly save. **JOH 6:37-39.**
- D. He gives (not "offers") them eternal life and they shall never perish. **JOH 10:27-29.**
- E. His task of eternally saving them was completed by His obedience unto death. **JOH 17:2-4 c/w JOH 19:30; PHIL 2:8.**
- F. His blood was shed to remit their sins and redeem them to satisfy the terms of God's everlasting covenant with them. **MAT 26:28; EPH 1:7; HEB 13:20.**
- G. He took His people's sins and gave them His righteousness instead. **2CO 5:21.**
- H. The mission and its fulfilment are declared facts of His purpose, method and performance for saving His people.
 - 1. This Jesus is truly the Savior. He actually saved His people as designed. He should not be believed on if He did not do the Father's works. **JOH 4:34 c/w JOH 10:37.**
 - 2. There is preached *another Jesus* (**2CO 11:4**) who saved *nobody* by his works; he only made salvation a *possibility conditioned upon the sinner's belief*.
 - a. The actual savior there, therefore, is the sinner's will, not Jesus.
 - b. Ironically, this is the very kind of Jesus that should not be believed in, per **JOH 10:37.**
- I. Again, man's belief or unbelief of the stated facts of the biblical Jesus and His work cannot cause, validate, alter or negate them.

- VIII. Consider that Scripture consistently describes the *eternal* salvation of sinners from the *possibility, presence and final penalty* of sin (the lake of fire, **REV 20:15**) by Jesus Christ as a completed part of history as much as it declares Jesus Christ's conception, birth, life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven as historical realities. He came to take away sin. **HEB 9:26; 1JO 3:5.**
- A. **(1PE 2:24)** Who his own self bare our sins in his own body...
 - B. **(HEB 1:3)** ...he had by himself purged our sins...
 - C. **(ROM 5:8)** ...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.
 - D. **(ROM 5:9)** ...being now justified by his blood...
 - E. **(ROM 5:10)** ...we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son...
 - F. **(ROM 5:11)** ...by whom we have now received the atonement...
 - G. **(ACT 13:39)** And by him all that believe are justified...
 - H. **(ROM 3:24)** Being justified freely by his grace...
 - I. **(ROM 8:30)** ...whom he did predestinate, them he also called...justified...glorified.
 - J. **(TIT 3:7)** ...being justified by his grace...
 - K. **(GAL 3:13)** Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law...
 - L. **(1PE 1:18-19)** ...ye were not redeemed with corruptible things...But with the precious blood of Christ...
 - M. **(REV 5:9)** ...hast redeemed us to God by thy blood...
 - N. **(EPH 1:7)** In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins...
 - O. **(COL 1:14)** In whom we have redemption through his blood...
 - P. **(HEB 9:12)** ...he entered in once..., having obtained eternal redemption for us...
 - Q. **(2CO 5:18)** ...hath reconciled us unto himself by Jesus Christ...
 - R. **(REV 1:5)** ...Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.
 - S. **(COL 1:20-21)** And having made peace through the blood...yet now hath he reconciled...
 - T. **(1CO 1:30)** ...Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.
 - U. **(HEB 10:10, 14)** By the which will we are sanctified... by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified.
 - V. **(2TI 1:9)** ...hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling...
 - W. **(1PE 5:10)** ...hath called us unto his eternal glory...
 - X. **(EPH 2:6)** ...hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places...
 - Y. **(TIT 3:5)** ...according to his mercy he saved us...
 - Z. Consider the paradox created by those who hold that eternal salvation is conditioned upon the belief of the sinner (Jesus Christ's work is futile unless/until believed).
 - 1. They assume that none of the above declared facts about eternal salvation's accomplishment are true: they require one to NOT believe these things!
 - 2. Thus, while touting the power of belief for procuring eternal life, they are (albeit unwittingly in most cases) promoting *unbelief* of God's words as the means to procure eternal life! This is a form of *doing evil that good may come*. **ROM 3:8.**
 - 3. They will even sing, "Jesus Paid It All" while holding that He didn't, that He only made a down-payment and the sinner must come up with the balance.
 - 4. They may say, "But all of these things (above) are written to those who made a decision for Jesus Christ and that's what made them effectual for themselves." But then righteousness would not be by the *obedience of one* (**ROM 5:19**) but at least by two since believing Jesus Christ is a commandment to be obeyed. **1JO 3:23.**
 - 5. Boasting is excluded by biblical faith. **ROM 3:27.**
 - 6. It behooves men, that if they are persuaded that someone has paid off their debt for them, that they should not assume the transaction was invalid until they pay it off themselves, and so walk as free men. **GAL 5:1.**