

Unbelieving Children of God

- I. Defining the terms.
 1. Unbelief *n.* - Absence or lack of belief; disbelief, incredulity. a. In matters of religion.
 2. Belief *n.* - 1. The mental action, condition, or habit, of trusting to or confiding in a person or thing; trust, dependence, reliance, confidence, faith.
 3. Unbeliever *n.* - One who does not believe; spec. one who does not accept a particular religious belief, an infidel.
 4. Believer *n.* - One who believes. a. One who has faith in the doctrines of religion; esp. a Christian, Christian disciple.
- II. The word "believer" and its cognates are only used twice in the entire Bible, and in both instances it refers to people who were baptized church members (Act 5:14; 1Ti 4:12).
 1. Shortly after the day of Pentecost, "*believers* were the more added to the Lord" (**Act 5:14**).
 - A. Being "added to the Lord" is to join oneself to the church (**Act 5:13**).
 - B. This pattern is shown in **Act 2:41-42,47**.
 - C. Since the local church is the body of Christ, being baptized into it is being added to the Lord (**1Co 12:13,27**).
 2. Timothy, who was the pastor of a church, was supposed to be an example of the *believers* (**1Ti 4:12**).
 3. Church members are simply referred to as them "which believe" because a true believer will be baptized and joined unto the church (**Act 16:4-5 c/w Act 21:25**).
- III. Unbelief is a sin (**Joh 16:9**).
 1. Sin is the transgression of the law (**1Jo 3:4**).
 - A. It is a commandment (the law) to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (**1Jo 3:23; Mar 1:15**).
 - B. Therefore, to not believe the gospel of Jesus Christ is to commit sin.
 2. Like any other sin (**Rom 6:23**), unbelief will condemn a person to hell (**Rev 21:8**).
- IV. Some have the idea that unbelief is *the only sin* which will condemn a man to hell.
 1. This idea is built on the following false premises and reasoning.
 - A. Jesus died for the sins of the entire human race.
 - B. One must in turn believe the gospel to be saved.
 - C. If one doesn't believe the gospel, he will be damned to hell.
 - D. Therefore the only reason that people are in hell is because they didn't believe the gospel.
 2. This false doctrine was succinctly refuted by John Owen in his writing: "For Who Did Christ Die?":

The Father imposed His wrath due unto, and the Son underwent punishment for, either:

All the sins of all men.
All the sins of some men, or
Some of the sins of all men.

In which case it may be said:

That if the last be true, all men have some sins to answer for, and so, none are saved.

That if the second be true, then Christ, in their stead suffered for all the sins of all the elect in the whole world, and this is the truth.

But if the first be the case, why are not all men free from the punishment due unto their sins?

You answer, "Because of unbelief."

I ask, Is this unbelief a sin, or is it not? If it be, then Christ suffered the punishment due unto it, or He did not. If He did, why must that hinder them more than their other sins for which He died? If He did not, He did not die for all their sins!"

V. Like any other sin, God's children struggle with unbelief.

1. Every child of God has likely uttered the words that the devil-possessed boy's father did: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." (**Mar 9:24**)
2. Interestingly, every instance of the word "unbelief" in the Bible is either explicitly or implicitly referring to children of God. Here they are:
 - A. The people of Jesus' own country whom he had grown up with didn't believe in Him and therefore He did not many mighty works there (**Mat 13:58**).
 - i. Their unbelief caused Jesus to *marvel* (**Mar 6:6**).
 - ii. Marvel *v.* - 1. *intr.* To be filled with wonder or astonishment; to be struck with surprise.
 - iii. Astonishment *n.* - 1. Loss of physical sensation, insensibility; paralysis, numbness, deadness.
 - iv. In that, 1) the gospel is foolishness to natural men (**1Co 2:14**), 2) not all men have faith (**2Th 3:2**), and 3) Jesus knew all men and what was in man (**Joh 2:24-25**); why would the fact that wicked natural men didn't believe in Him cause Jesus to marvel?
 - v. The only reasonable explanation is that these were children of God who didn't believe in Christ despite the miracles He did in front of them, which would naturally cause astonishment in Jesus.
 - B. Jesus called His own disciples a *faithless* and perverse generation and charged them with *unbelief* (**Mat 17:14-20**).
 - C. Believers struggle with *unbelief* (**Mar 9:24**).
 - D. Jesus upbraided His own apostles for their *unbelief* of the testimony that He was risen from the dead (**Mar 16:14**).
 - E. God's faith still accomplishes its intended effect even if His children don't believe (**Rom 3:3**).
 - F. Many of the elect Jews with whom God had made a covenant to take away their sins (**Rom 11:26-27**) and who were beloved according to God's election (**Rom 11:28-29**), who were natural branches of the olive tree (God's church), were broken off because of *unbelief* (**Rom 11:20,23,30,32**).
 - G. The apostle Paul obtained mercy, not because of his belief, but because of his *unbelief* (**1Ti 1:13**).
 - H. Paul, writing to *holy brethren* who were *partakers of the heavenly calling* (**Heb 3:1**), warns them to take heed that they fall not into *unbelief* (**Heb 3:12**).
 - I. The Israelites whom God brought out of Egypt died in the wilderness because of *unbelief* (**Heb 3:16-19; Heb 4:6**).

- i. Many of those Israelites were partakers of Christ (**1Co 10:1-5**).
 - ii. In other words, they were unbelieving children of God.
 - iii. Paul exhorts believers in the NT to be diligent that they fall not into *unbelief* like the Jews of old time did (**Heb 4:11**).
 - J. Abraham is the model we should follow who didn't stagger through unbelief, but was strong in faith (**Rom 4:20**).
- 3. Consider the Old Testament saints who fought with bouts of unbelief:
 - A. Abraham
 - i. He lied and said that Sarah was his sister because he feared being killed (**Gen 12:11-13**)....twice (**Gen 20:2,10-11**).
 - ii. God promised Abraham a son (**Gen 15:2-6**), but when the son didn't come fast enough, he went with "plan B" (**Gen 16:1-4**).
 - iii. He laughed when God told him he was going to have a son in old age (**Gen 17:15-17**).
 - B. Moses believed not God and was barred from the promised land for it (**Num 20:8-12**).
 - C. Gideon had to test God before believing him (**Jdg 6:36-40**).
 - D. Israel were children with no faith at times (**Deu 32:18-20**).
 - i. They didn't believe God could furnish a table in the wilderness (**Psa 78:17-19**).
 - ii. They didn't believe they could conquer the land of Canaan which God said they could (**Num 13:1-2 c/w Num 13:26-14:4**).
- 4. Consider the NT saints who fought with unbelief:
 - A. Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, didn't believe God's angel Gabriel when he told him he would have a son in his old age (**Luk 1:11-20**).
 - B. John the Baptist doubted whether Jesus was the Messiah when he was put in prison (**Mat 11:2-3**).
 - C. Peter struggled on multiple occasions with unbelief.
 - i. Peter denied Jesus three times (**Mat 26:69-74**).
 - ii. Peter didn't believe Jesus when he said he was going to be crucified (**Mat 16:21-23**).
 - iii. Peter started to sink into the water because of doubt when he saw the wind and the waves around him after having walked on the water by faith (**Mat 14:28-31**).
 - D. Paul doubted when the Lord told him to leave Jerusalem to preach the gospel (**Act 22:17-21**).
- 5. It's for this reason that we need to hold fast to the profession of our faith (**Heb 10:23**) and be steadfast and grounded in the faith (**1Co 15:58**).