

UNBELIEF

1. Unbelief is a special category of sin.

- a. This was true for Israel.
 - (1) **2 Ki 17:13-14** 13 ...Yahweh warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer saying, Turn from your evil ways, keep my commandments and my statutes in accordance with all the Torah that I commanded your fathers and that I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14 But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe (יָאֵס) in Yahweh their God.
 - (2) **Ro 9:31-32** 31 ...Israel who pursued a Torah that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that Torah. 32 Why? Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone.
 - (3) **Ro 11:20** 20 ...[The unbelieving Jews] were broken off because of their unbelief, but you [believing Gentiles] stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.
- b. This is true for all humanity.
 - (1) **Jn 16:8-9** 8 ...When [the Spirit] comes, he will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgment: 9 concerning sin, because they do not believe in me....
- c. Just as faith is a foundational virtue, so also unbelief is a foundational sin.
 - (1) **Ro 14:23** 23 ...Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.
 - (2) **Ti 1:15** 15 To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving (ἄπιστος), nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.
 - (3) **Heb 11:6** 6 ...Without faith it is impossible to please [God].
- d. Unbelief is the unforgivable sin. It is the only sin Jesus did not die for.
 - (1) **Mt 12:31-32** 31 ...Every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit [disbelief in the Spirit's testimony about the Son] will not be forgiven. 32 And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.
- e. The primary reason for unbelief is human pride.
 - (1) **Jn 5:44** 44 How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?
 - (2) **Jn 7:48-49** 48 Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in [Jesus]? 49 But this crowd that does not know the Torah is accursed.
- f. Lewis S. Chafer:
 - (1) "The sum total of sin in the present age is *unbelief* (John 16:9), as the sum total of human responsibility toward God in securing a right relation to God is *belief* (John 6:29)."¹
 - (2) "...[T]he sin of unbelief assumes a specific quality, in that it is man's answer to that which Christ wrought and finished for him when bearing his sins on the cross."²

¹ L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 3:197.

² L. S. Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1993), 3:198.

2. Final unbelief is the result of a lifetime of negative volition toward God.

- a. **Ac 28:24** 24 ...Some were convinced by what [Paul] said, but others disbelieved.
- b. **Ro 10:16** 16 ...They have not all obeyed the gospel [by believing in Jesus]. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?
- c. **1 Pe 2:7-8** 7 ...The honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, 8 and A stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were consigned (τίθημι) to do.
- d. As long as one is alive, there's always a chance he or she may turn to belief.
 - (1) **Mt 21:32** 32 ...John came to you [Israel] in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds (μεταμέλομαι) and believe him.
 - (2) Jesus' own brothers changed their minds.
 - (a) **Jn 7:5** 5 ...Not even [Jesus'] brothers believed in him.
 - (b) **Ac 1:14** 14 All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.
 - (3) Paul changed his mind.
 - (a) **Ac 9:20-22** 20 ...Immediately [Paul] proclaimed Jesus in the [Damascus] synagogues saying, He is the Son of God. 21 And all who heard him were amazed and said, Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called upon this name? And has he not come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests? 22 But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

3. There is no excuse for unbelief.

- a. God gave Moses words and works to convince Israel.
 - (1) **Ex 4:1-9** 1 ...Moses answered, But behold, [Israel] will not believe me or listen to my voice, for they will say, Yahweh did not appear to you. 2 Yahweh said to him, What is that in your hand? He said, A staff. 3 And he said, Throw it on the ground. So he threw it on the ground, and it became a serpent, and Moses ran from it. 4 But Yahweh said to Moses, Put out your hand and catch it by the tail—so he put out his hand and caught it, and it became a staff in his hand— 5 that they may believe that Yahweh, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has appeared to you. 6 Again, Yahweh said to him, Put your hand inside your cloak. And he put his hand inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, his hand was leprous like snow. 7 Then God said, Put your hand back inside your cloak. So he put his hand back inside his cloak, and when he took it out, behold, it was restored like the rest of his flesh. 8 If they will not believe you, God said, or listen to the first sign, they may believe the latter sign. 9 If they will not believe even these two signs or listen to your voice, you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground, and the water that you shall take from the Nile will become blood on the dry ground.
- b. Similarly, God gave Jesus words and works to convince Israel.

- (1) **Jn 8:45-47** 45 ..Because I [Jesus] tell the truth, you [Jewish leaders] do not believe me. 46 Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? 47 Whoever is of God hears the words of God. The reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God.
 - (2) **Jn 10:24-26** 24 ...The Jews gathered around [Jesus] and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. 25 Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify about me, 26 but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep.
 - (3) **Jn 10:37-38** 37 If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. 38 But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father.
 - (4) **Jn 12:37** 37 Though he had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in him.
 - (5) **Jn 15:22-24** 22 If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. ...24 If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin. But now they have seen and hated both me and my Father.
- c. We also have:
- (1) Old Testament testimony.
 - (a) **Lk 16:31** 31 ...If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.
 - (b) **Lk 24:25** 25 ...[Jesus] said to [the two disciples on the road to Emmaus], O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!
 - (c) **Jn 5:46-47** 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. 47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?
 - (2) New Testament testimony.
 - (a) **Mk 16:14** 14 Afterward [Jesus] appeared to the eleven themselves as they were reclining at table, and he rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen.
 - (b) **1 Co 14:22** 22 ...Tongues are a sign not for believers but for unbelievers, while prophecy is a sign not for unbelievers but for believers.
- d. God is looking for a reasoned faith, not a blind faith.
- (1) **Lk 24:11** 11 ...These words [of the women] seemed to [the eleven] an idle tale, and they did not believe them.
 - (a) God isn't asking for us to believe an idle tale.
 - (2) **Lk 24:36-43** 36 As [the disciples] were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace to you! 37 But they were startled, frightened, and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved (*ἀπιστέω*, pres.) for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

- (3) **Jn 20:27** 27 ...[Jesus] said to Thomas, Put your finger here, and see my hands. And put out your hand and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.
- e. Because the evidence is so clear and convincing, unbelief makes God a liar.
- (1) **Jn 5:37** 37 ...The Father who sent me has himself testified about me.
- (2) **1 Jn 5:10** 10 Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son.
- f. Beware of saying, "I need just one more sign. Then I'll believe."
- (1) Don't be like the Jewish leaders.
- (a) **Mk 15:29-32** 29 ...Those who passed by derided [Jesus], wagging their heads and saying, Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, 30 save yourself and come down from the cross! 31 So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another saying, He saved others. He cannot save himself. 32 Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe. Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.
- (b) **Lk 22:67** 67 If you [Jesus] are the Messiah, tell us [the Jewish Sanhedrin]. But he said to them, If I tell you, you will not believe.
- (2) Don't be like Thomas.
- (a) **Jn 20:25** 25 ...The other disciples told [Thomas], We have seen the Lord. But he said to them, Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.

4. In God's economy, unbelief often blocks the supernatural from occurring.

- a. **Mt 13:58** 58 ...[Jesus] did not do many mighty works there [Nazareth], because of their unbelief.
- b. **Mk 6:4-6** 4 ...Jesus said to [the residents of Nazareth], A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household. 5 And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief.

5. At some point, God permits Satan to blind and harden people toward final unbelief.

- a. **Lk 8:12** 12 The ones along the path are those who have heard. Then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved.
- b. **Jn 12:40** 40 [God] has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.
- c. **2 Co 4:3-4** 3 ...Even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Messiah, who is the image of God.
- d. **2 Th 2:9-12** 9 The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power, false signs, and wonders, 10 and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, 12 in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

- e. Similarly, at some point, believers must withdraw from unbelievers.
 - (1) **Ac 19:9** 9 ... When some [Jews at Ephesus] became stubborn and continued in unbelief, speaking evil of the Way before the congregation, [Paul] withdrew from them and took the disciples with him, reasoning daily in the hall of Tyrannus.
 - (2) **2 Co 6:14-15** 14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Messiah with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?
- f. As history closes, unbelief will become more and more common.
 - (1) **Lk 18:8** 8 ... When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith (πίστις) on earth?

6. Final unbelief results in condemnation, wrath, and hell.

- a. Condemnation.
 - (1) **Mk 16:15-16** 16 Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.
 - (2) **Jn 3:18** 18 Whoever believes in [the Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.
 - (3) **Jn 8:24** 24 I told you that you would die in your sins, for unless you believe that I Am (ἐγώ εἰμι) you will die in your sins.
- b. Wrath.
 - (1) **Ps 78:21-22** 21 ... When Yahweh heard, he was full of wrath. A fire was kindled against Jacob. His anger rose against Israel, 22 because they did not believe (אמן) in God and did not trust (אמץ) his saving power.
 - (2) **Jn 3:36** 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son [by believing in him] shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
- c. Hell.
 - (1) **Re 21:8** 8 ... As for the cowardly, the disbelieving (ἄπιστος), the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.
- d. This is not something we are to be happy about.
 - (1) **Ro 11:20** 20 ... [The unbelieving Jews] were broken off because of their unbelief, but you [believing Gentiles] stand fast through faith. So do not become proud, but fear.

7. For the believer, the price of unbelief is also very costly.

- a. Phase zero unbelief differs significantly from phase two unbelief.
 - (1) The consequence of unbelief for an unbeliever is condemnation, wrath, and hell.
 - (2) The consequence of unbelief for a believer is divine discipline and loss of rewards at the judgment seat of Messiah.
- b. Phase two unbelief results in:
 - (1) Double-mindedness, instability, and unanswered prayer.
 - (a) **Jas 1:5-8** 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that

is driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord. 8 He is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

- (2) Wavering concerning God's promises.
 - (a) **Ro 4:20** 20 No unbelief made [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.
- (3) Spiritual impotence.
 - (a) **Mt 17:19-20** 19 ...The disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out? 20 He said to them, Because of your little faith.
- (4) Fear.
 - (a) **Mk 4:39-40** 39 ...[Jesus] awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, Peace! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. 40 He said to them, Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?
- (5) Being blocked from Jesus' more advanced teaching.
 - (a) **Jn 3:12** 12 If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?
- (6) Being blocked from the faith-rest life.
 - (a) **Heb 3:16-19** 16 ...Who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief (ἀπιστία).
 - (b) **Heb 4:1-3** 1 ...While the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened. 3 For we who have believed enter that rest....
- (7) Divine discipline.
 - (a) **Lk 1:20** 20 ...Behold, you [Zachariah] will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time.
- (8) Falling away from God.
 - (a) **Heb 3:12** 12 Take care, brothers and sisters, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving (ἀπιστία) heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.
- (9) Sin unto death.
 - (a) **Nu 20:12** 12 ...Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.
 - (b) **Ps 78:30-33** 30 ...Before [the Israelites] had satisfied their craving, while the food was still in their mouths, 31 the anger of God rose against them, and he killed the strongest of them and laid low the young men of Israel. 32 In spite of all this, they still sinned. Despite his wonders, they did not believe (ἠμα). 33 So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror.

8. The Exodus generation is the ultimate object lesson of phase two unbelief.

- a. We know the Exodus generation were all believers because:
- (1) **Ex 4:29-31** 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and gathered together all the elders of the people of Israel. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that Yahweh had spoken to Moses and did the signs in the sight of the people. 31 And the people believed. And when they heard that Yahweh had visited the people of Israel and that he had seen their affliction, they bowed their heads and worshiped.
 - (2) **Ex 12:27-29** 27 ...The people bowed their heads and worshiped [as Moses' instructions for Passover]. 28 Then the people of Israel went and did so. As Yahweh had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. 29 At midnight Yahweh struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt....
 - (3) **Ex 14:31** 31 Israel saw the great power that Yahweh used against the Egyptians, so the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and in his servant Moses.
 - (4) **1 Co 10:1-5** 1 ...Our fathers were all under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptised into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Messiah [these are all images of faith in Jesus]. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased [in phase two], for they were overthrown in the wilderness [divine discipline].
- b. Several biblical authors refer to the phase two unbelief of the Exodus generation.
- (1) Moses:
 - (a) **Dt 9:23** 23 ...When Yahweh sent you from Kadesh-barnea saying, Go up and take possession of the land that I have given you, then you rebelled against the commandment of Yahweh your God, did not believe him or obey his voice.
 - (2) Asaph:
 - (a) **Ps 78:17-22** 17 ...[Israel] sinned still more against [Yahweh], rebelling against the Most High in the desert. 18 They tested God in their heart by demanding the food they craved. 19 They spoke against God saying, Can God spread a table in the wilderness? 20 He struck the rock so that water gushed out and streams overflowed. Can he also give bread or provide meat for his people? 21 Therefore, when Yahweh heard, he was full of wrath. A fire was kindled against Jacob. His anger rose against Israel, 22 because they did not believe (אמן) in God and did not trust (בטח) his saving power.
 - (3) Unnamed psalmist.
 - (a) **Ps 106:24-25** 24 ...[Israel] despised the pleasant land, having no faith in his promise. 25 They murmured in their tents, and did not obey the voice of Yahweh.
 - (4) Author of Hebrews.
 - (a) **Heb 3:16-19** 16 ...Who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? 17 And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient? 19 So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief (ἀπιστία).
 - (5) Jesus' brother Jude.

- (a) **Jud 5** 5 ...I want to remind you...that Jesus, who saved a people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe.
- c. The Exodus generation were believers who failed to keep believing in phase two. They are warning to us.

9. As believers, we must not let honest doubt turn into unbelief.

- a. Even spiritual heroes sometimes doubt, like John the Baptist.
 - (1) **Mt 11:2-6** 2 ...When John heard in prison about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent word by his disciples 3 and said to him, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? 4 And Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. 6 And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.
- b. Jesus welcomes our cries to help our unbelief.
 - (1) **Mk 9:24** 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief!
- c. Along our Christian journey, Jesus delights to reassure our faith.
 - (1) **Mt 11:4-5** 4 ...Jesus answered them, Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.
 - (2) **Lk 24:36-43** 36 As [the disciples] were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, Peace to you! 37 But they were startled, frightened, and thought they saw a spirit. 38 And he said to them, Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have. 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved (*ἀπιστέω*, pres.) for joy and were marvelling, he said to them, Have you anything here to eat? 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

10. The unbelief (*ἀπιστία*) of man never nullifies the faithfulness (*πίστις*) of God.

- a. **Ro 3:3** 3 What if some [Jews] disbelieved (*ἀπιστέω*)? Does their disbelief (*ἀπιστία*) nullify the faithfulness (*πίστις*) of God?
- b. **2 Ti 2:13** 13 ...If we are disbelieve (*ἀπιστέω*), he remains faithful (*πιστός*)—for he cannot deny himself.

Bibliography

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