

The Tragedy of Unbelief pt 3

John 12:37-43

John 12:37–43 (NKJV)

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“Lord, who has believed our report?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

⁴¹ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of

the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

Introduction

Mark 6:1–6 (NKJV)

6 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. ² And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! ³ Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” So they were offended at Him.

⁴ But Jesus said to them, “**A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.**” ⁵ Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And He marveled because of their unbelief....

The Bible doesn't say that Jesus wondered (marveled) , or was astonished, or was amazed, except for two times: here, and on an occasion when He was amazed at the faith of a centurion – as recorded both by Matthew and Luke. The Bible tells us the people were constantly amazed at Him. They were astonished at Him. But only those two times was He amazed at them. Once with the centurion He was amazed at his faith. Here, He is amazed at the unbelief in His own hometown.

(When we think of faith, we know how important it is.

It is by faith that we are saved, it is by faith that we move move mountains. It is by faith that we persevere. It is by faith that we trust God with our Life and our soul. So we could say that faith powerful. But not powerful because it rest in itself, but rather because is finds its foundation and rest in God) italics added

But I want you to understand that unbelief is powerful as well. Unbelief is a great force. The power of unbelief is so great that it extends throughout all eternity. In fact, it has massive force, unbelief does.

For example, Eve exercised unbelief in the Word of God and brought the entire human race down into a curse and eternal judgment. In the days of Noah, Noah was a preacher of righteousness warning the world. The world would not believe, and the world of unbelievers brought down a flood upon their own heads that drowned all of humanity with the exception of Noah and his three sons and their wives and his own wife. Unbelief caused the destruction of the whole human race and all creatures and all life living on the earth.

It was unbelief on the part of Israel in the wilderness that caused them to die there before ever entering into the Promised Land. And the story of Israel's ongoing unbelief even after they entered the land of Canaan is clear for all to read in the Old Testament. They were judged again and again by God for their apostasy and their unbelief.

Being a little more individual and looking at the power of unbelief, we remember Aaron's unbelief led to three thousand people being slaughtered. We remember that Moses' unbelief kept him out of the Promised Land. We remember that Achan's unbelief, resulting in his disobedience, brought about the execution of himself and his entire family. You might remember Sennacherib's unbelief, the Gentile king, led to his assassination by his own sons after an

angel of the Lord had massacred 185,000 of his troops.

And, of course, then there is the unbelief of Judas, which led to his suicide and his everlasting punishment. The Pharisees and the scribes were unbelievers to the very end with few exceptions. And like all other unbelievers, their unbelief resulted in them dying in their sins, and forfeiting heaven, and gaining hell.

The New Testament has a lot to say about believing. It has a lot to say about faith. But it has an awful lot to say equally about unbelief. In the familiar words of John 3:16, “God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged, but he who does not believe is judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

It was unbelief that brought a curse on all of humanity. It was unbelief that broke up the fountains of the deep, and brought down the rain from heaven, and drowned the entire human race. And it is unbelief in the Son of God that catapults people into

eternal hell. Unbelief activates divine wrath. Unbelief activates divine judgment. It is a force, this unbelief.

In the eighth chapter of John's gospel, John has a lot to say about believing and not believing, that's why we find so many references there to this.

He said to them in John 8:21, "I go away, and you will seek Me, and will die in your sin; where I am going, namely into heaven, you cannot come."

So the Jews were saying, "Surely He will not kill Himself, will He? Since He says, 'Where I'm going you cannot come'?" And He was saying to them, "You are from below, I am from above. You're of this world, I am not of this world; therefore I said to you, 'You will die in your sins; for unless you believe that I am He, you will die in your sins.'"

The warning that our Lord gave many, many times: "Believe in Me or perish. Believe in Me or perish."

Second Thessalonians chapter 2 warns about the devastating, eternal consequence of unbelief.

Romans 11:20 talks about the horrible tragedy of Israel's unbelief. Revelation 21:8 talks about the fact that no unbelieving person will ever enter into heaven.

Review and Lesson

I. The Shock of Unbelief

II. The Seriousness of Unbelief

III. The Sign of Unbelief

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II. The Seriousness of Unbelief

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³⁸ that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke:

“Lord, who has believed our report?

And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”

³⁹ Therefore **they could not believe**, because Isaiah said again:

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

⁴¹ These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.

III. The Signs of Unbelief

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

1. Momentary

2. Cowardly
3. Selfish

1. Momentary

42 **Nevertheless even** among the rulers many believed in Him,

42 **ὁμως μεντοι** και εκ των αρχοντων πολλοι επιστευσαν

Newberry, T., & Berry, G. R. (2004). *The interlinear literal translation of the Greek New Testament* (Jn 12:42). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

42 **ὁμως** *nevertheless*. **μέντοι** *despite that, however*

Zerwick, M., & Grosvenor, M. (1974). *A grammatical analysis of the Greek New Testament* (p. 327). Rome: Biblical Institute Press.

Nevertheless even (ὁμως μεντοι και [*homōs mentoi kai*]). For the old ὁμως [*homōs*] see 1 Cor. 14:7; Gal. 3:15 (only other examples in N. T.), here only with μεντοι [*mentoi*], “but yet,” and και [*kai*], “even.” In spite of what has just been said “many (πολλοι [*polloi*]) even of the rulers”

Robertson, A. T. (1933). *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Jn 12:42). Nashville, TN: Broadman Press.

[Young's Literal Translation](#)

Still, however, also out of the rulers did many believe in him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing, that they might not be put out of the synagogue,

Is this Genuine Faith. Is it Saving Faith, Did they really believe Jesus to be their Savior and Lord?

It is a serious question because of the rest of verse 42-43

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, **but** because of the Pharisees they **did not confess Him**, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for **they loved the praise of men** more than the praise of God.

If you have any biblical framework, you will immediately wonder as to whether the faith of these rulers is real.

Remember the context and the flow of the story.

John 12:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,

John 12:39–40 (NKJV)

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts,
Lest they should see with *their* eyes,
Lest they should understand with *their* hearts and turn,
So that I should heal them.”

*So they are being judged for there lack of faith,
lack of real belief in Christ as Messiah and Savior.*

And that is the point of the first word of verse 42

42 Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him,

They didn't believe
They couldn't believe
Yet they did believe?

It is important to not the tenses of the verbs in the text.

John 12:37 (NKJV)

³⁷ But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him, believe is **Imperfect Active**= they were continually not believing

John 12:39–40 (NKJV)

³⁹ Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again:

believe is **Present Active Infinitive**= they were continually unable to believe.

The we come to verse 42

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many **believed** in Him,

42 ομως μεντοι και εκ των αρχοντων πολλοι **ΕΠΙΣΤΕΥΣΑΝ**

Believed = Aorist active Ind. past completed event. Not on going, Not continuing

This belief is clearly different, in its tense and it fruit.

It is momentary and fruitless. It is temporary and terminal

It is clearly different from the next verses

John 12:44–48 (NKJV)

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out and said, “**He who believes ppt in Me, believes pi not in Me but in Him who sent Me.** ⁴⁵ **And he who sees ppt Me sees pi Him who sent Me.** ⁴⁶ **I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes ppt in Me should not abide in darkness.** ⁴⁷ **And if anyone hears aorist My words and does not believe aorist, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.** ⁴⁸ **He who rejects ppt Me, and does not receive ppt My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day.**

These verses clearly contrast the true faith of continued belief from momentary, temporary, one time belief.

John 2:23–25 (NKJV)

²³ Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed (aorist) in His name when they saw the signs which He did.

²⁴ But Jesus did not commit (imperfect act) Himself to them, because He knew all *men*, ²⁵ and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man.

John 6:60 (NKJV)

⁶⁰ Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?”

John 6:64 (NKJV)

⁶⁴ **But there are some of you who do not believe.”**(pi)
For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe(ppt), and who would betray Him.

John 6:66 (NKJV)

⁶⁶ From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.

John 8:30–31 (NKJV)

³⁰ As He spoke these words, many believed (aorist) in Him.

³¹ Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, **“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many **believed** in Him,

Contrast this

Acts 6:7 (NKJV)

⁷ Then the word of God spread, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests were obedient (imperfect active) to the faith.

Belief is not a one time event, but rather an on-going lifestyle, continuous

John 3:15–18 (NKJV)

¹⁵ that whoever believes ppt in Him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes ppt in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. ¹⁸ “He who believes ppt in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe ppt is condemned already, because he has not believed pfi in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

1 John 5:1 (NKJV)

⁵ Whoever believes ppt that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him.

Acts 8:36–37 (NKJV)

³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is* water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷ Then Philip said, “If you believe **pai** with all your heart, you may.”

And he answered and said, “I believe **pai** that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

Romans 10:9–11 (NKJV)

⁹ that if you confess **arist** with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe **arist** in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes **ppi** unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “*Whoever believes **ppt** on Him will not be put to shame.*”

Continuing to believe is a major evidence of genuine faith

Colossians 1:23 (NKJV)

²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Psalm 92:12–14 (NKJV)

¹² The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,
He shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

¹³ Those who are planted in the house of the Lord
Shall flourish in the courts of our God.

¹⁴ They shall still bear fruit in old age;
They shall be fresh and flourishing,

Matthew 24:13 (NKJV)

¹³ **But he who endures to the end shall be saved.**

Luke 8:13–15 (NKJV)

¹³ **But the ones on the rock *are those* who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.** ¹⁴ **Now the ones *that* fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.** ¹⁵ **But the ones *that* fell on the good ground are those who, having heard the word with a noble and good heart, keep *it* and bear fruit with patience.**

Romans 2:7 (NKJV)

⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;

1 Corinthians 15:1–2 (NKJV)

15 Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ² by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

in which you stand, **Perfect Act I to stand (maintain)** v. — to hold one's ground; maintain a position; be steadfast or upright.

The bible clearly teaches that saving faith is a continuing faith. A persevering faith. Not a momentary temporal faith.

It should be clear to all of us that we have a culture saturated with easy-believism.

A momentary movement toward God that has no lasting value.

An intellectual belief in the facts with no fruit.

An acknowledgment of the Savior with Submission to Him as Lord.

We have Religion without relationship

Works without worship
Faith without Following.

In fact, I'm sure that many of us know friends and loved ones who at some time made some statement of belief in Christ, only to have nothing to do with Him or His Church to this day.

The more modern battle that occurred in the 1980s regarding the Lordship debate, that placed men like John MacArthur at odds with many within dispensational circles, particularly Dallas Theological Seminary.

MacArthur, argued for a faith that was a faith of commitment to the Lordship of Christ, that included confession and Repentance, and an on going active obedience to the commands of Christ.

While others on the opposite side of the argument said you only have to believe. No commitment, and some argued that you can believe and have no change whatsoever in your life. One author argues that you could become and unbelieving believer.

“Charles Ryrie says, “The message of faith plus commitment of life cannot be the gospel.”

And Zane Hodges says, “Saving faith is nothing more than a response to a divine invitation.” He

further says, “It is widely held in modern Christendom that the faith of a genuine Christian cannot fail. But this is not an assertion that can be verified from the New Testament. There is nothing,” he says, “to support the view that perseverance in the faith is an inevitable outcome of true salvation.” Absolutely incredible statement – amazing – “there is nothing to support the view that perseverance in the faith or continuing faith is an inevitable outcome of true salvation?””

The Nature of Saving Faith John MacArthur

- *Sermons Selected Scriptures 90-21 Jan 17, 1988*

Dave Gass posted: on twitter.

I’m not a Christian anymore....After 40 years of being a devout follower, 20 of those being an evangelical pastor, I am walking away from faith. Even though this has been a massive bomb drop in my life, it has been decades in the making.

I was raised in a hyper-fundamentalist family, and it felt good to be in a system that promised all the answer and solutions to life. The problem is, the system didn’t work. The promises were empty. The answers were lies As an adult my marriage was a sham and a constant source of pain for me. I did everything I was supposed to - marriage workshops, counseling, bible reading

together, date nights every week, marriage books - but my marriage never became what I was promised it would be

I was fully devoted to studying the scriptures. I think I missed maybe 12 Sundays in 40 years. I had completely memorized 18 books of the bible and was reading through the bible for the 24th time when I walked away.

I devoured all the “christian apologetics” books that came out, and none of them answered my questions regarding the nature of god and the problems I found within the Scriptures. I found these books to be trite, dismissive, and full of pseudo science and evidence. The more I read and studied the scriptures the more questions I had. Literally from the first chapter to the last, so many problems. And the more I learned about how the scriptures were canonized, the less I could believe in the “inerrancy” model that I had to espouse. In 40 years I never witnessed a single event that was supernatural. Not one. Time and again I watched people die of cancer. I did funerals for 47 people from the age of 4 to 96. I prayed in faith with hundreds of people for healing to no avail. God didn't answer prayers

My devoutly christian parents were abusive, my marriage was a sham, prayer was never answered, miracles were never performed. People died, children rebelled, marriages failed, addictions occurred - all at

the same rate as non believers. The system just doesn't work.

I pastored mega churches & tiny churches. I did college ministry, camp ministry, youth ministry, music ministry, preaching ministry, church planting - everything in the church except work in the nursery. And what I saw was people desperate for the system to work for them.

Preached to thousands of teenagers at a time, wrote blogs, was published, formed curriculum, taught workshops, was an up-and-comer reforming my denomination. The whole time hoping at some point it would click, and become true for me.

An inescapable reality that I came to was that the people who benefited the most from organized religion were the fringe attenders who didn't take it too seriously. The people who were devout were the most miserable, but just kept trying harder.

All the while, the experience I had within the church was that a lot (granted, not all) people use the church for power and influence. Many involved people in churches use it as their small kingdom for personal control and ego.

And the entire system is rife with abuse. And not just from the top down, sure there are abusive church leaders, but church leaders are abused by their congregants as well. Church people are just horrible to each other.

I spent my entire life serving, loving, and trying to help people in my congregations. And the lies, betrayal, and slander I have received at the hands of church people left wounds that may never heal.

This massive cognitive dissonance - my beliefs not matching with reality - created a separation between my head and my heart. I was gaslighting myself to stay in the faith.

Eventually I could not maintain the facade anymore, I started to have mental and emotional breaks. My internal stress started to show in physical symptoms. Being a pastor - a professional Christian - was killing me.

During this time I also found something amazing: I found a handful of people who were more Christian than any Christian I had ever met - and they weren't Christian. I found love in places where love wasn't supposed to exist. I found acceptance among people who were godless.

I learned that love is real. That acceptance is possible. That life is vibrant and full. But the church burdens people with fear, shame, and guilt, all for the purpose of maintaining control. I now see the church as a system perfectly curated to control people and culture.

I was a part of a system that enslaves people, and I was both a slave and a slave driver. We called chains freedom, and misery happiness. We had impossible

standards that we could not meet so we turned the attention on others so the spotlight wasn't on our own inadequacies.

Eventually I pulled the lever and dropped the bomb. Career, marriage, family, social standing, network, reputation, all gone in an instant. And honestly I didn't intend to fully walk away, but the way the church turned on me forced me to leave permanently. For those of you who want to yell at me, that's fine. I know that many will call me an apostate, say I was never really saved, that I was a wolf in sheeps clothing, and that a hotter hell awaits me. And to you I say I love you. My heart is tender toward you.

To those who have been in my congregations or under my teaching/preaching I sincerely apologize. I thought I was right. I thought I was doing the right thing. I thought I could fake it until I made it. I was wrong. I'm sorry. I love you.

I have lost everything. I gave literally everything to serving Jesus. And walking away has cost me everything. All I can hope for is that the second half of my life can be full of love and genuine human relationships. I was wrong. I'm not faking anymore”

This the Tragedy of Unbelief!!!!!!

The comments that were left below, were equally tragic. Most to the twitter comments were amazing positive and affirming.

“bittersweet. He's starting anew, but he's finally dealing with the years wasted”

“It's what happens when you get infected by the religious mind poison.”

“But at least he's no longer delusional”

as one pastor who wrote

The world's favorite Christian is an apostate Christian; but that love is a suicidal love (Matthew 5:13-16).

1. Momentary

2. Cowardly

⁴² Nevertheless even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *Him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue;

The religious authorities had already decreed that dreaded punishment, which cut a person off

from Jewish religious and social life, for anyone who confessed Jesus as the Messiah

MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2008). [John 12–21](#) (p. 54). Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.

John 9:22 (NKJV)

²² His parents said these *things* because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had agreed already that if anyone confessed *that He was* Christ, he would be put out of the synagogue.

John 7:13 (NKJV)

¹³ However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews.

But it was in this context that Jesus said these words

Matthew 10:32–33 (NKJV)

³² “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 10:34–39 (NKJV)

³⁴ “Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword.
³⁵ For I have come to ‘*set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*’; ³⁶ and ‘*a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.*’ ³⁷ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. ³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

1 John 4:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.

Romans 10:9 (NKJV)

⁹ that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

There are times when we will fail to confess.

John 20:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹ Then, the same day at evening, being the first *day* of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, “**Peace be with you.**”

² Timothy 1:8 (NKJV)

⁸ Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God,

But it needs to be noted that if cowardly, unwillingness to confess Christ before men is the characteristic of our Life, it is a serious problem.

Revelation 21:8 (NKJV)

⁸ But the **cowardly**, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”

eilos: **cowardly, fearful**

Original Word: δειλός, ή, όν

Part of Speech: Adjective

Transliteration: deilos

Phonetic Spelling: (di-los')

Definition: cowardly, fearful

Usage: cowardly, timid, fearful.

1169 deilós (an adjective derived from deidō, "fear-driven") – properly, dreadful, describing a person who loses their "moral gumption (fortitude)" that is needed to follow the Lord.

1169 /deilós ("fearful of losses") refers to an excessive fear (dread) of "losing," causing someone to be fainthearted (cowardly) – hence, to fall short in following Christ as Lord.

Matthew 10:28 (NKJV)

²⁸ **And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.**

1 Peter 3:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."*

1. Momentary

2. Cowardly

3. Selfish

