

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Belief and Unbelief: Contrasted

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (1 Peter 2:7-8, KJV 1900)

In our last study, we examined the benefits of believing God and His testimony regarding the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the verses before us for this study, Peter restates the attitude that characterizes a faithful believer, as well as the contrasted behaviors that characterize those who do not believe. For purposes of this study, I will focus my thoughts on what Scripture teaches about those who are children of God, but who persist in unbelief. Yes, the idea is a contradiction of sorts, but so is their unbelief. A few years ago, I had an interesting discussion with a man who had fallen into a particular errant idea that is akin to John MacArthur's "Lordship salvation" ideas. When I used the term "Carnal Christian," the man scoffed. I considered citing the verse, but the man had so rigidly decided on his belief—or unbelief—that I chose to let it go. Is there such a thing? Let Scripture answer the question.

When Paul writes to the Corinthian Church, he describes them in the following terms:

Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ; That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; Even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Corinthians 1:2-8 KJVP)

This description is not the opinion of a soft-headed modern Christian, but the inspired words of an apostle. If we accept this description, we cannot believe otherwise than that the Corinthians were children of God, born again, and assembled as a local New Testament church. However, in the body of this letter, Paul proceeded to confront and to rebuke the church for a multitude of major errors

that they had embraced. How does he describe them after rebuking them for some of these errors?

*For **ye are yet carnal**: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, **are ye not carnal**, and walk as men? For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; **are ye not carnal**? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?* (1 Corinthians 3:3-5 KJVP; emphasis added)

Do I believe the errant preacher who scoffs at the idea of a believer, a born again child of God being carnal? Or do I believe an inspired apostle in Scripture? No competition; I'll believe Paul.

Further, when Jesus gave the disciples His farewell address (John 13-16), He specifically commanded them to believe in Him. If they already believed in Him as they should, why would He yet command them to do what they were already doing?

*Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, **believe also in me**.* (John 14:1 KJVP; again, emphasis added)

Unto you therefore which believe he is precious.... The more purely people believe in Jesus the more they will demonstrate in their attitude and conduct just how "Precious" He is to them. They will manifest that preciousness by imitating Him in their attitudes and actions. In turn (Prior two verses; last week's study), He delivers them from shame and confusion.

...but unto them which be disobedient... We may learn much in our study of Scripture by observing the two traits or qualities that Scripture sets in contrast. In this clause, Peter contrasts belief against disobedience. The simple observation leads us to conclude that these people were disobedient to the Biblical commandment to believe in Jesus.

...the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence. The majority of the Jewish people in the first century refused to believe in Jesus. Did their refusal to believe in Him

in any way frustrate or defeat God's design in His coming? Not according to this verse. Despite their not believing in Him, not seeing God's "Preciousness" in Him, God steadfastly continued in His purpose and work. He made the Lord Jesus Christ the chief cornerstone of His purpose and covenant with and for His people. At the same time that God glorified His Son to sit with Him on His throne (Revelation 3:21), these unbelieving people realized the inevitable consequences of their unbelief, their disobedience. In their unbelief—because of their unbelief—that Stone became their "...stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense." Their unbelief didn't diminish God's work in and through Him, but it certainly altered their future. As a nation, the people whom God had blessed and preserved for approximately two thousand years from Abraham to the coming of Jesus, lost that divine shelter. (Matthew 23:38-39; Romans 11:19-25, as well as the several appearances of "...their fall..." "...casting away..." and "...broken off..." in this chapter. And do not overlook that only one hindrance stood between them and restoration of their desolation from God's blessings. (Romans 11:20-23) They were cut off because of unbelief, experiencing the shame and "Confounding" that Peter mentions in our present study. However, Paul reminds us Gentiles that God shall restore them if they turn from their unbelief, "...if they abide not still in unbelief..." (Romans 11:23)

Later in Romans 11, Paul will describe the people of whom he writes as "...touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes." (Romans 11:28) The specific Jews of whom Paul writes were not numbered outside of God's election. No doubt some Jews of that age were, but not the ones that Paul describes in this context.

...being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. A few misguided people interpret this clause to say that God caused their disobedience, a view that contradicts Scripture, and Scripture's description of the character of God. (James 1:13-17) Think of this errant idea from a logical (Actually, an incredibly illogical) perspective. If God "appointed" these Jews not to believe in Jesus, they were actually obeying God when they refused to believe in Him. But then you have God punishing these unbelievers for doing what He appointed them to do. In Romans 3:1-8, Paul examines this idea and concludes that it slanders God's revealed truth in Scripture and falsely depicts God as doing something for which He should face trial, wholly disqualifying Him to judge any human sin. What does Peter mean by this expression?

When God created Adam and placed him in the Garden of Eden, He gave Adam a simple law. Do not eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. (Genesis 2:17) God "appointed" Adam to the law and the law to Adam. He also "appointed" Adam to the penalty, should Adam disobey. This "appointment" was conditional. As long as Adam obeyed God and refused to eat the forbidden fruit,

the law had no impact on him. He could live in the Garden and enjoy God's rich provisions. However, at the precise moment that Adam ate of the fruit, he would experience the appointment of the law's penalty, death. I suggest that the appointment mentioned by Peter in our study verse is similar. It is a conditional appointment. A child of God who refuses to believe in Jesus is "appointed" to the confusion and shame of his own unbelief. If you do not believe Jesus, you cannot avoid the consequences of His becoming a "...stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense..." to you. God has "appointed" the consequences of unbelief, and He shall not alter that appointment.

In recent years, various personal experiences and observations have lead me to realize that what a person believes has a major impact on how that person thinks and acts. I have engaged a number of men who embraced what I believe to be a major errant view of God's truth. As long as these men think you agree with them, they can be unbelievably gracious. However, the moment they realize that you do not agree with them, look out! Consistently, to a man, they manifest one of the most prideful, arrogant attitudes you'll ever see. The more I study their belief system the more I understand that this unbiblical pride is the natural consequence of their errant belief. Even if they had discovered a lost Biblical truth, their attitude would wholly exclude them from Biblical blessings, but then I do not believe they would tolerate that attitude of carnal pride if they did embrace Biblical truth. The unbiblical attitude of sinful pride and arrogance grows out of their errant belief system.

It is this precise point that Peter makes in our study passage. First century Jews, active, religious folk who thought they were worshipping God according to the Old Testament model, refused to believe Jesus, or to believe that He was the fulfillment of their holy writings, our Old Testament Scriptures, the promised Messiah. Those Scriptures teach us about both the preciousness of believing and the confused shame of unbelief. (Peter quoted two of those Scriptures in our study passage, Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22) Isaiah describes the blessings of believing, and David describes the divine "appointment," the unavoidable consequences of their unbelief.

I believe that most, if not all, who read these words are in fact believers in Jesus, so you joyfully embrace the preciousness of Him and of His merciful work for you and in you. He is indeed precious to you! And my encouragement to you is the same as Paul's, "...be steadfast, unmovable..." in your belief in Him. (1 Corinthians 15:58)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor