

## The Crime of Unbelief



David Wilkerson January 1, 1983

Unbelief grieves the heart of God more than any other sin committed on earth. He considers it a crime to doubt His word or to question His faithfulness. We Christians cry out against the sins of the flesh - homosexuality, alcoholism, drug abuse, adultery. We call them vile abominations, and they are! But God is mostly concerned about the sins of the heart. The real issues of life and death have to do with how a person thinks - with what goes on in his mind.

Unbelief is the sin of the heart - the curse of the inner man. I have known Christians who forsake every besetting sin of the flesh. Some quit their secret affairs. Others stop smoking, drinking, or using drugs on the sly. But in spite of cleaning up their act, they are still restless and dissatisfied. They thought God would be so pleased they had finally forsaken their secret sin, that the blessings would flow automatically. But at times it does not happen that way. Instead, problems continue and the heavens seem brass.

The reason is that sins of the flesh are only part of the problem. They have not yet struck at the root of their discontent. They are unaware of a deep-seated sin - unaware they are guilty of a far worse crime in God's sight. They learned only to fear the Lord - but not to trust Him, and fear nearly always gives birth to unbelief.

God's people engage in a continual battle against the sins of the flesh. They fast and pray, calling on God to deliver them from satanic flesh traps. But most are totally blind to the dangers of unbelief! They don't even consider it in the same category with adultery, fornication, lying, drunkenness, etc. Yet God's Word puts the sin of fear and unbelief above all other crimes!

"But the fearful and unbelieving, and abominable, and murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers, adulterers, liars - shall all have their place in the lake of fire..." (Revelation 21:8).

God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the abominations of the house of Israel. The Spirit took him to the door of the temple court. Inside that door, seventy elders of Israel were going through their priestly motions.

"Go in," the Spirit said, "and behold the wicked abominations that they do here..."

"So I went in and saw; and behold every form of creeping things, and abominable beasts, and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed upon the walls.

And there stood before them the seventy men of the ancients of the house of Israel... with every man his censer in hand...and a thick cloud of incense went up...

Then said he unto me, son of man, hast thou seen what the elders of Israel do in the dark?" (Ezek. 8:9-12).

And what were these venerable old elders of Israel doing that was so wicked and abominable? Were they smoking opium? Were they having a sex orgy? Were they gambling? No! The abominable crime was committed in their minds: "...what they do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagination?..."

What were they thinking that so grieved God? What was this terrible abomination of their minds? They were

indulging in unbelief - turning to their own ways, to idols - because they had completely lost faith in God.

"For they said, the Lord seeth us not; the Lord hath forsaken the earth..." (Ezek. 8:12)

Think of it! These were priests, holy men of God - who for many years had seen miracles. God had revealed Himself to them time and again, but now their faith in Him was shattered. They no longer believed their prayers were being answered. They could no longer sense His presence, and had given up hope of any divine guidance. Oh, they still hoped God was there, but they no longer believed He was involved in their lives!

"He doesn't care!..." they surmised. "He is not at work with us! He has forgotten us. We give up. Why serve Him when there is no evidence of His working? We have been neglected, yea, forsaken by God." Are we too becoming unbelieving priests of the Lord?

How it must grieve the heart of God when His enlightened children still doubt Him so!

Unbelief not only grieves Him, but it provokes Him to anger and wrath. It is to be expected that the enemies of God will disbelieve Him, but how tragic when unbelief turns God's chosen people into enemies as well. Micah laments: "Even of late my people is risen up as an enemy..." (Micah 2:8).

There was a time the children of Israel believed God. They once trusted their Lord. They had just been delivered from Egypt and Pharaoh after crossing the Red Sea.

"And Israel saw the great work which the Lord did unto the Egyptians, and the people feared the Lord, and believed the Lord..." (Ex. 14:31).

Yet in spite of all God did for His people, their confidence did not last. In crisis after crisis, their faith failed! Moses grew weary of reminding them of God's faithfulness. When eight of the ten spies brought back an ominous report, immediately the people fell into unbelief. They murmured and complained, crying, "Oh, that we had never left Egypt!"

Moses cried out in frustration,

"I said to you, Dread not, neither be afraid...the Lord your God goeth before you, he shall fight for you...Remember in the wilderness, how he bear thee there, as a man carrieth his son?..."

Yet in this thing (in spite of all this), ye did not believe the Lord your God...and the Lord heard the voice of your words, and was angry..." (Deut. 1:29-34).

One could ask, "Why did God get so angry? The Israelites were just scared. It was a temporary outburst of fear. They didn't mean it. They were just confused!"

Oh, no! God hears every complaint, every murmur against His faithfulness. He hears every accusation that He is not concerned. Every thought that even suggests He is unfaithful, angers God! It angered Him then, and it angers Him now. And it provokes His wrath. Let all who preach only the love of God hear well the warning of David.

"And they tempted God in their hearts by asking meat for their lust...yea, they spake against God; they said, Can God furnish a table in the wilderness? Can he give bread? Can he provide flesh?... Therefore, the Lord heard this and was angry...because they believed not in God, and trusted not in his salvation..." (Psalm 78:18-22).

Let me show you how seriously God takes this matter of unbelief!

1. It caused the Lord to reject the entire house of Israel.

"And the Lord rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and delivered them into the hands of the spoilers, until he had cast them out of his sight..." (II Kings 17:20).

And why did He do such a drastic thing? "Because they would not hear, but hardened their necks, like to the necks of their fathers, that did not believe in the Lord their God..." (II Kings 17:14).

2. Unbelief brought upon them a flood of oppression and trouble.

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and the anger of the Lord was hot against them...therefore, the children of Israel were troubled and oppressed..." (Judges 10:6-8).

3. It caused a "breach of promise". Unbelief voided all God's precious promises to His people.

"(Israel) hath tempted me now these ten times...how long shall I bear with this evil congregation, which murmur against me?... I have heard the murmuring of the children of Israel, which they murmur against me..."

As you have spoken in my ears, so will I do unto you...each day for a year...forty years...shall ye bear your iniquities, and ye shall know my breach of promise..." (Num. 14:22-34).

4. Unbelief brings on a curse of dumbness.

According to the New Testament, the Lord spoke clearly to Zechariah, a priest of the holy temple, promising him a son who was to be called John. The angel of the Lord told Zechariah marvelous things about John becoming a mighty man of destiny. None of which this great man of God believed. So God said to Zechariah,

"Thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things be performed...because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their time..." (Luke 1:20).

Later, when Zechariah's faith returned, his dumbness left!

"And he asked for a writing table, and wrote, saying His name is John. And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God..." (1:63, 64).

5. Unbelief causes leanness (emptiness) of soul.

"They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel...and he gave them their request, but sent leanness to their soul... Thus they were defiled with their own works...and went a whoring with their own inventions..." (Psalm 106:13, 15, 39).

Israel Limited God

Do you remember the great faith of Israel at the Red Sea? Do you remember their song of confidence and trust in the Lord? They sang, they danced, they shouted the praises of God for revealing His mighty arm of deliverance.

"The Lord is my strength and song...he is my salvation...I will exalt him...his right hand is glorious in power...he has dashed the enemy to pieces...who is like thee in holiness?...fearful in praises, doing wonders...you led forth thy people...guiding them with strength...The Lord shall be our King forever and ever..." (Ex. 15:1-18).

But how soon they forgot His works! How soon they turned away from His guidance, limiting the Holy One of Israel. They remembered not how He delivered them, and reverted to doubt and unbelief.

Listen to the dismay of an incredulous heavenly Father -

"And the glory of the Lord appeared in the tabernacle, before all the children of Israel...and the Lord said, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be before they will believe me, for all the signs (miracles) which I have showed among them?..." (Num. 14:10,11).

What a profound cry from the heart of God! "When? What will it take? What do I have to do - to find a people who will fully trust me?"

We have learned nothing from the tragic unbelief of Israel! We see it destroy an entire people of God. We see them lose all the promises, and waste away in the wilderness - a confused, depressed people. Yet we trudge blindly on in our unbelief! We seem to believe the grace of God exempts us from the penalties of this abomination.

We have before us one of the most detailed examples in all of history, showing us how unbelief alienates us from God. How it provokes and angers the Lord. How it causes emptiness, fear, depression, and total confusion, opening the door to every kind of evil known to man!

Furthermore, we have a New Testament warning to avoid these same mistakes!

"But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the

wilderness...And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not. So you see they could not enter in because of unbelief...

Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fail after the same example of unbelief..." (Heb. 3:17-19; 4-11).

The Spirit today is focusing on this sin because the Word makes it clear that only an evil heart is capable of unbelief.

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God..." (Heb. 3:12).

Paul is not talking here to reprobates, drunkards, or addicts! He is speaking to born-again, Spirit-filled believers! "Beware, brothers, of an evil heart of unbelief - in you!:"

Saints of God, are we holding onto our confidence in the Lord? Are we clinging fast to our trust in His faithfulness? Listen to what the Scriptures say: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end..." (Heb. 3:14).

Sad but true, many of God's people today are losing the steadfast confidence they once had. We are in the midst of severe end-time testing - and many have not kept the faith.

Jesus warned of fiery trials of faith that would immediately precede His coming.

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold...though it be tried with fire...might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ..." (1 Pet. 1:7).

This young generation is being tested by the hottest fires in all of history! The future is absolutely hopeless, humanly speaking. The world faces unemployment, poverty, depression, and hunger. Careers are getting expensive and complicated, and no one seems to be able to answer the important questions. Much of the rebellion, drunkenness, and drug-taking among our youth is the direct result of fear and confusion.

Even Christian kids are getting scared! Everything seems to be spinning out of control. Many young people want to give their futures to the Lord in full time service, but it's getting so complicated. More than ever they need to know they serve a God they can fully trust.

Those of you with secure jobs and homes, and with a certain amount of fulfillment - how would you like to change places with teenagers today? They go to schools that are mostly drug-infested. Their friends party and get stoned because they are afraid of the future. Government is corrupt and the politicians are mostly liars. Their families are breaking up - they watch their parents cheat and drink and lie!

What kind of abominable unbelief would the Lord find in certain of His saints and ministers should He pull back the curtain and look deep into the heart? Do not think He spoke these words lightly - "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on earth?..." (Luke 8:13).

Jesus warned us that some would believe for a while, but in time of testing and crisis, they would fall back into unbelief:

"They on the rock are they, which when they hear, receive the word with joy...And they have no root in themselves...which for a while believe, and in times of testing fall away..." (Luke 8:13).

How long have you believed? Five years? Ten? Forty? What happens to you in "times of testing"? Do you fall back into fear and unbelief? How many teachers, missionaries, evangelists, and pastors have stood in the pulpit calling on the saints to believe, trust, and have confidence in God, only to fail when they faced their own time of testing?

The most important question facing God's people in these last days is this: "Do you believe God is able to see you through? Do you believe he can do all that is necessary to answer your prayers and meet your needs?"

This is the same question our Lord asked the two blind men who begged Him for mercy and healing. "And Jesus

said unto them, Do you believe I am able to do this? They said, Yes, Lord...and their eyes were opened..." (Matt. 9:28).

To you, to me, to the church - the Lord asks, "Do you believe I am able to direct and guide you, and perform my perfect will in your life? Do you believe I am still at work on your behalf? Or do you harbor secret thoughts that I have forsaken you and let you down?" He says to us what He said to Mary and Martha - "Said I not unto you that if you would believe, you will see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

God is not primarily interested in our doing some great work for Him. Rather, He desperately wants us to simply trust Him!

I am amazed at the number of restless Christians I meet who tell me they want to "forsake all and get into some kind of full-time ministry." Some are actually selling their homes and businesses, and packing the family off to some sacrificial, poverty-type ministry. Occasionally God is in it, and it becomes fulfilling. But in most instances, nothing is solved. The emptiness and restlessness linger on - because doing something for God does not guarantee that one truly believes Him! Often it is unbelief that keeps driving us on!

Beloved, God doesn't want anything you possess. He is not after your house, your land, your car, or any other worldly possession. No! He wants your trust! He wants you to be firmly established in your confidence in Him!

An American soldier in Germany wrote to me last week, offering me his coin collection. He called it an idol. I wrote back to him, saying, "God wants more than your coin collection - He wants your trust!"

We keep wanting to do things, to give up things, to sacrifice, work, suffer. And all the while what He desires most is our obedience and trust. His Word is clear. God will be pleased with nothing short of our faith -

"For without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.." (Heb. 11:6).

God has provided us a sure way to rise above this crumbling world - through absolute confidence in Him!

- "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid; yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet..."
- "Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked, when it cometh...for the Lord shall be thy confidence, and shall keep thy foot from being taken..." (Prov. 3:24-26).
- "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward..." (Heb. 10:35).

If we have confidence in our Lord now, we can have confidence before the judgment seat!

- "And now, little children, abide in him, that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed at his coming..." (1 John 2:28).
- "And this is the confidence we have in him, that, if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us.
- "And we know if he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petition we desired of him..." (1 John 5:14, 15).

So - fix your heart to trust in the Lord! Don't give in to fear or doubt! Deal with unbelief as you would any other abominable sin. Remember the words of the Psalmist:

- "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord...his heart is established, he shall not be afraid..." (Psalm 112:7,8).

Isaiah predicted that in the last days the redeemed of the Lord will sing and praise God for a new spirit of trust and confidence:

- "In that day this song will be sung in Judah...thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee...because he trusteth in thee..." (Isa. 26:1-3).

There you have it, beloved! While all the foundations of the world are shaking; while Satan roars like a maddened lion; while everywhere there is confusion, violence, and uncertainty - those who trust in the Lord, fixed and established in their confidence in Him - will stand still to see God's salvation with hearts and minds at peace. They will enjoy rest, sleep sweetly, unafraid of conditions around them, untouched by violence and fear - unashamed in the final days and rejoicing in hope!

In Conclusion

I give you some glorious promises of God to all who trust in Him!

- "As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is tried; he is a buckler [shield of protection] to all them that trust in him..." (1 Samuel 22:31).
- "Show thy marvelous lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust in thee from those that rise up against them..." (Psalm 17:7).
- "Oh, how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust thee before the sons of men..."
- "Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence from the pride of men; thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavillion from the strife of tongues..." (Ps. 31:19,20).
- "Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord..." (Ps. 31:24).
- "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass..." (Ps. 37:5).
- "The salvation of the righteous is of the Lord: he is their strength in time of trouble...and the Lord shall help them; and deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him..." (Ps. 37:39,40).
- "In God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me..." (Ps. 56:4).
- "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us..." (Ps. 62:8).
- "They that put their trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever..." (Ps. 125:1).
- "Whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe..." (Prov. 29:25).

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