

Belief and the Believer

By: Elvis Gregory

***Originally Preached at Pinehaven Baptist Church in Columbus, MS on
September 16, 1973***

***(Editors note: This sermon was transcribed verbatim from a
recorded sermon of the late Elder Elvis Gregory. Every attempt was
made to retain the actual words spoken by Brother Elvis on this
wonderful subject)***

The reading tonight – **John 3:16**. None of us needs our Bible for this verse – very familiar. We are using it as a text for our study as we continue to think upon the subject of "*whosoever believeth*". Here the Bible says, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have [eternal life or]everlasting life*". Now notice, if you will, the promise in that text is to "*whosoever believeth*". Again we remind you that oftentimes the word "whosoever" is so misused and misconstrued that it is even almost ironical and hilarious to hear some Freewillers and Arminians talk about the pronoun "whosoever". But remember it is a word that is active and "whosoever" standing alone means absolutely nothing unless it has a verb with it and the particular verb here is "*believeth*". And so the promise of our text (eternal life) with reference to justification belongs to the believer – "*whosoever believeth*".

In our past two studies we have noticed the promises of God's Word to the believer; finding out that the Bible indeed teaches that justification before God is completely and wholly a work of faith. It is a work of faith in that it is contingent upon the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, our Representative, who worked out a righteousness for us on the cross of Calvary. And now by a God given faith, we are justified before God – acquitted before His law by faith in Jesus Christ and His finished work.

There are those today who would add to the Word of God with reference to salvation in the sense of justification and say we have to do thus and though and this and that. But beloved, sinners are justified before God quickly, completely, and wholly by faith. For faith is a work and a gift of God to the individual sinner enabling him to see, to know and to believe on and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who loved him and who died in his room and in his stead. For "*whosoever believeth*"...again there are so many who use this phrase in **John 3:16** and **Revelation 22:17** that make it say that whosoever believeth or will not believe will have eternal life – "whosoever" means everyone without exception. Oh no beloved! Every text like **John 3:16**...like **Revelation 22:17** is very limited – limited in fact to the believer. The Bible promises nothing to the unbeliever in the sense of blessings and salvation.

So beloved we have found 14 things in the Bible thus far that belong only to the believer – such as in salvation, justification of faith and on and on we could go. Tonight let's notice some further things that are ours by faith (those who have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ) – further blessings that they have which are by faith.

May I begin tonight by saying those who are saved are believers and they are those who believe with the heart. We found out that a fruit of the believer is justification or salvation. Now those who do in fact believe – believe with a heart to believe and of course this is in contrast to mental assent and mere mental belief in a historical Christ or in the historicity of the Bible. So beloved, those who are saved believe with the heart.

You recall the account in **Acts Chapter 8** with the Lord who spoke to Phillip to go down into Gaza. And you remember that how he joined himself to a chariot wherein an Ethiopian was reading from **Isaiah 53**. And he took the same Scriptures and preached unto him Jesus Christ. And as they went on their way they came to a creek of water and the Ethiopian said to Philip, now "*here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?*" And Phillip said in

verse 37, "*If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*". And this man said, "*I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*". And as a result of that, he was baptized by Philip.

Now beloved, we find that in that Scripture from **Isaiah 53**, Philip had preached Christ unto the Ethiopian. And not only did he preach Christ, he preached also how those who were saved by Christ were to profess Christ in baptism. And thus, he followed through after the preaching of Phillip. But notice again, beloved, that a prerequisite to him being baptized in water was that he believed that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And that he not only believe mentally, but that "*if thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest*".

So beloved I do not want to minimize the mind with reference and knowledge of Christ. But that it is a fact as we all well know that we can with a mind – with mental assent – believe in the historic Christ. Or, we can believe what the Bible teaches about Christ. Thus we believe the Bible and therefore Christ is a fact and not a farce. I believed in Jesus Christ before I was saved, as far as believing that He was – that He was, as far as history was concerned. It revealed a character that lived by the name of Christ Jesus who claimed to be the Son of God. Being raised in a missionary Baptist home made me believe that. I believed that! I believed that those who believed it were honest and had integrity and would not lie. I believe them to be right. And by virtue of their testimony, I believed in Jesus Christ. But my friend, I did not believe with the heart. But there came a time when I did believe with the heart. When God enabled me, by his grace to see my sins and see my need of a Savior, I was brought to see Christ Jesus and I saw – I believed for the first time in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. It was a heart belief. It came from within; for it had been worked within by the power of God's Holy Spirit making the Gospel effectual.

For those who are saved believe with the heart. For we read, for example in **Romans 10** and beginning in verse 8, "*But what saith it? The*

word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (and the righteousness here is the righteousness of God that is accounted to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ). So “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

So beloved, when one is truly converted and is a true believer, it is a heart belief. But mind belief only can be staggered. It can be changed. It can believe one day and disbelieve another. When one is made alive by the Spirit of God and the Gospel comes to them not in word only but in power, in the Holy Spirit, with much assurance, that is a heart belief and you can talk until you're blue in the face and never convince them that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God. My friend, that's the difference between a heart belief and a mind belief only. One who has believed with a heart has believed with a mind. But you can believe with a mind and not believe with the heart. And the difference is, one who has believed with the heart will always believe. There will never be any wavering with reference to who Jesus Christ is. But those who believe only with the mind, they will waver and they will differ in their view with reference to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here comes one – he is a great orator! He is a great talker! He is knowledgeable and he leads them away because they believe only with the mind. I can remember many times prior to my conversion how that I met men who said that they didn't believe in the Bible and they would put up some arguments and I could not argue with them. I didn't know that they might not be right. I knew what I believed. I thought what my father and mother believed – what other men and women who I believed and trusted in and knew to be honest – were right. But here was a man who seemed to have the evidence that they might be wrong. And I was led to believe at times, perhaps, could my father and could my mother...could that preacher

have been wrong? Could these others be wrong? I want to tell you that since the time that I have been enabled to believe with the heart I have heard them speak and others deny but there was not one doubt in my mind as to who Jesus Christ was. He was my Lord and he was my Savior! He was real if they did not know He was!

Therefore, beloved, those who are saved are believers. But they are those who have been enabled to believe with the heart – there referring to their innermost being. It is the inner man that has been quickened and made alive by the Spirit of God and it is from there that we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And so beloved, those that are saved believe with the heart. You may not know what you want to know and certainly you do not. You may not know what you want to know about the truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But I want to tell you that if you have been saved by God's grace, you know that He is the Savior of those who believe. You know that He (and no one else) is the Savior of sinners and that He is indeed your Savior. So those who are saved by faith have believed with the heart.

May I say beloved, to the believer the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God. For those who are enabled to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Gospel is the Power of God. In **Romans 1:15-16**, Paul said, *"as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein [that is in the Gospel] is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."* Now notice, beloved, to the believer – for those who have been enabled to believe with the heart, they believe and know that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the power of God.

Now may I suggest unto you, beloved, that the promise in that verse, **Romans 1:16**, is to the believer. The Gospel is the power of God unto *"every one that believeth"*. Now I ask a question many times: Is the Gospel

the power of God unto the unbeliever? No my friend, it is not! For example, in **1 Corinthians 1:18** "*For the preaching of the cross*" (What is the preaching of the cross but the Gospel of Jesus Christ?)... "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish [the unbelievers] foolishness; but unto us which are saved it [the preaching of the Cross or the Gospel] is the power of God.*"

Now beloved, I do not want to minimize the Gospel nor do I want to leave an impression that the Gospel is unimportant. I do trust before I finish I will have told you that the Gospel is a must in order for sinners to be saved – in order for them to be saved in the sense of justification and have righteousness imputed to them from Almighty God. Therefore beloved the Gospel is the Power of God – however, unto the believer. That verse does not say...that verse does not say that the Gospel of itself has power to make believers! What it does say is that it is the Power of God unto believers. This verse of Scripture presupposes a believer.

Now my friends, I do not believe that sinners are saved apart from the Gospel! "*For faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.*" Salvation (in the sense of judicial justification before God) is by faith in Jesus Christ and is imputed when one believes. But my friends, the Gospel of itself and by itself has no power to make believers. Oh beloved, the Gospel is important. Because "*how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how, shall [of course] they preach except they be sent?*" And if they are sent then they are sent to preach repentance and remission of sins through the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

But at the same time beloved, the Gospel (while it is not within itself the power) has within itself the power to make believers. It is the means to faith. Without the Gospel there can be no faith. But may I suggest beloved that the power for faith is in the effectual call of the Holy Spirit of God. Unless the Gospel of Jesus Christ is accompanied with the life giving Spirit of

God, the Gospel preached is foolishness. But my friend, when the Gospel is accompanied with the invincible and efficacious work of the Spirit of God, it is effectual and produces believers who are justified by their faith in Jesus Christ.

Now we see then that apart from regeneration, justification is an impossibility. One is not saved without justification. But, without regeneration justification is an impossibility. And in the effectual call of God there are both aspects of salvation – spiritual life and judicial life and we have them both in the effectual call of the Word and the Spirit.

When we talk about the effectual call of God, we are talking about an invincible work – a work of God that really works bringing faith to the individual – the Holy Spirit taking the Word of God. Let me, for example, give you an analogy from the Scripture what I mean – that the Gospel by itself does not have power to make believers. It is the means to faith. But the power for faith is in the work of the Holy Spirit. Now for example, Paul said in **1Corinthians 1:18** *"the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us who are saved it is the power of God."* Now notice that the Gospel is preached indiscriminately. That is we do not select God's elect. The church nowhere is to select the crowd that it is to preach to. But we are commanded to preach the Gospel to every creature. But my friends the preaching of the Gospel for some is mere foolishness. Now why is it foolishness to one while it becomes the power of God to others? I want to tell you my friends that the thing that makes the difference is the work of the Holy Spirit of God! He works sovereignly! No one can dictate to him where He is going to work, when He is going to work or on whom He is going to work.

My friends, this says in short that when one is saved it is the work of God; not the work of the preacher; not the work of the program; not the work of anyone else. But it is the work of God. And I am not minimizing the Gospel! But notice now if you will, for example, in that same context, Paul

says "we preach Christ crucified. Unto the Jews the stumbling block and unto the Greeks foolishness." Now my friends, showing you that the Gospel alone preached in Word only does not have power to give faith – does not have power for faith. It is the means to faith! No one will ever believe without the Gospel! But at the same time it has no power within itself to make believers. For example we said "we preach Christ to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greek foolishness". We preach it indiscriminately – to Jew and Gentile alike. But to one it is foolishness and to the other it is a stumbling block. "But to them who are called"...*"but to them who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the wisdom of God"*. Now what made the difference? The calling... The call made the difference.

The Gospel is preached indiscriminately to everyone but the Gospel of itself, unaccompanied by the call of the Spirit, will be sheer foolishness. On the one hand, to the unbeliever it will be a stumbling block. But to those who are called...who are called by the Spirit, the Gospel becomes the power of God and the wisdom of God. It becomes their means for faith. My friends it reveals Christ in the Gospel and they have now grounds for faith. It is preached that Christ died, was buried and rose again and that sinners are saved by faith in him. They hear that. They are enabled to believe on Him. And the Gospel becomes the means of their faith by which they are justified. But the power for that faith was in the call of the Spirit of God.

Paul said, for example, in **1 Thessalonians 1:4-5** he said "*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God*". How?"*For our gospel came not unto you in word only*". In short, the Gospel comes to many in word only. But it came to you "*in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance*". Beloved it was accompanied by a work of the Spirit of God and the result was faith in Christ and salvation thereby. So beloved to the believer and to the believer only is the Gospel the power of God unto salvation – to the believer only! The believer only is justified before God. Therefore beloved it must be to the believer only that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation.

And so let's never...never miss this point because here oftentimes many miss the mark and become rank Arminians in their Theology with reference to salvation. My friends, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit taking the Gospel and making it effectual, the preaching of the Gospel is in Word only. It doesn't mean we are not to preach it for I don't know and you don't know and we don't know when it's going to be made effectual for the salvation of the sinner and when it isn't. That's God's work and we can't do God's work! It is our work to preach the Gospel indiscriminately. But you remember that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to believers only...believers only! Now my friends, I tell you that believers have something. They have something that the world knows nothing about...the world of unbelievers.

Thirdly, the believer only can please God. The believer only can please the Lord. Now I know this rubs the grain the wrong way many times for we have the idea that all men can in some degree, in some way, please the Lord. Now my friend, when an individual pleases the Lord, that means that the individual is going to be blessed by the Lord for the act that he does. And it is proven and an affirmation that we will receive blessings. But my friends the Bible declares in **Hebrews 11:6** that one must believe in order to please God. For the Bible says, "*without faith, it is impossible to please [God]. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*". Who is it that seeks the Lord? Well the first part of the verse tells us – why it's believers! "*Without faith it is impossible to please [God]. For he that cometh to God must believe that he is*". One will never come to God unless he believes that God "*is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*".

My friends, there are those who say "I sought the Lord." I want to tell you the night of my conversion, I don't know what the term for it is but as far as I knew, I was seeking the Lord. I really was! I wanted to be saved. I wanted to be saved more than anything in the world. I had a fear of death and Hell. And I was, in fact, seeking the Lord...in my way. But let me tell

you, that was the result of having been sought and found of God. That was the result of having been sought out by the Holy Spirit and found of His Gospel. My friend, the Lord had found the one who sought Him – but, not until he first sought us.

So beloved we have here, for example, in **Luke 14** that the table was spread which is indicative of the Gospel feast - that we should preach unto all men indiscriminately and the Gospel of peace has been spread. "*Go out*" he says "*and invite them to come*". Well the Gospel does invite men to come and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – to eat and to come and buy without money and without price. The Gospel feast is spread and free. Come eat and drink! My friends, the Gospel does that and the Gospel invites sinners to come. But my friends, they all began to make excuses. The Bible says they all began to make excuses. And finally the Lord of the supper said to his servant, "*you go out unto the lanes and the city and the highways and the hedges and you compel them to come in that mine house may be filled*". My friends, the Gospel (though it is preached indiscriminately by the Lord's people in his churches) in essence says come to Christ – eat and drink; be hungry no more and thirst no more. It's full and free. It is without money and it's without price. But my friends, the Gospel, unattended by the Spirit of God will go unheeded. Men will make excuses. Men will make excuses. But when the Spirit of our God, which is the Holy Spirit, goes out and compels men to come, they will come! And when they come to Christ, they are believers. They are believers! And they will please God in their coming and they who come to him will not be cast out.

So beloved, only believers please God. And it pleases the Lord for one to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. And coming to Christ is synonymous with believing on him or trusting in him. So beloved, only the believer can please God. The unbeliever in all that he or she does or says can in no wise please the Lord. That only belongs to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone can please Almighty God.

Let me say further that only true believers know who Christ really is. Only true believers know who Christ really is! As I said a moment ago, I cannot remember a day when I did not believe that Jesus Christ was. So, oftentimes I would argue with many that didn't believe but I wondered if they might not be right and another be wrong. But my friends, those who have been truly brought by the Holy Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ; my friends, they only know who He is. No one else does. You did not know who Christ was before you were enabled to believe on him and come to him. Until you were brought to Him, you did not know who He was. You knew the name Christ. You knew the name Jesus. You knew that they said he was the Son of God. You knew that they said this and that about him. But my friends, you...when you were brought to know Him...knew exactly who He was. No one had to tell you. The Holy Spirit of God through the Gospel introduced you to the One Who loved you, Who died for you, Who was dead and rose again.

My friends, the night I left Old Hurricane Missionary Baptist Church meetinghouse, no one had to tell me who Jesus Christ was. He was my savior! I knew that! I knew that! I knew that He died in my room and stood! I knew that He was alive! I knew that He was my Lord and He was my Savior! I couldn't tell you much else but I knew that. Only true believers know who Jesus Christ really is. Others talk about Him. Others lecture about Him. Others log His life. Others talk about the virtues of Jesus Christ. But only one who has been brought to believe on Christ really knows who He is.

In **John Chapter 6**, you will recall in verse 67 Jesus looked to those 12 after others – all others – had gone away and He said, "*will you also go away?*" Peter said "*Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.*" Look what he said in verse 69. Notice now, "*and we believe and are sure that thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" My friends, Peter knew who Jesus Christ was. And at least 10 others of those apostles knew who Jesus Christ was. Who is it that knows who Christ is? We believe and are sure. My friend, it's the believer only – one who has been brought to

faith in Jesus Christ as his or her personal savior; only they know who He is. Only they are sure who He is.

Before my conversion it was second hand knowledge. I said He is because they said He is. But after the Lord revealed Himself to me as my Lord and Savior, I can say I believe and I am sure that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God.

I would like for you to remember in **John Chapter 4**, the woman had met the Lord at the well – Jacob’s well. She went back into the city and told the men *"there was a man who told me everything that I ever did. Is not this the Christ?"* And the Bible reveals there how they believed on him because of the sayings of the woman. But they remained there for three days and preached - Jesus did. And then the inhabitants of that city said to the woman, *"Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world."* First they believed because somebody else said it. But now we don't believe in the Lord because you said it, we believe now because we have seen and heard it and believe that Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world! So beloved, only true believers know who Jesus Christ really is. Others write about Him; talk about Him; even people sing about Him. But only true believers know who He is.

May I confess further as we think about the blessings that believers have, that only believers receive answers to their prayers. Only a true believer can receive answers to prayer. In **Matthew 21:22** Jesus said *"all things"..."all things, whatever ye ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."* To believers, He said, if you will just keep on believing that whatever you ask in my name ye shall receive. Who is it that receives answers to prayer? It is only a believer.

Now not every believer who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ gets everything that he asks for. I don't want you to get that impression. Oftentimes we as true believers ask amiss and we do not receive because

we ask amiss. We have to confess with the Bible that oftentimes we know not what to pray for as we ought. And so beloved it's not that we receive everything that we ask for. But those who do receive what they ask for are believers only. In other words, only true believers receive what they ask for. And so, beloved, what a wonderful time that we have as believers that we can in fact ask of our Lord what we will and receive of him, if we ask in accordance to His divine will.

And let's see further – to the believer all things are possible. All things are possible! Our Lord said in **Mark 9:23** to a father who was very distraught because of the physical condition of his son; Jesus said unto him when he said Lord, heal my son. Jesus said unto him *"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."* *"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"* even the welfare and health of your son. And of course, the son was made whole in that the Lord cast out the demon. For those who believe...and what did his father say? *"Lord, I [do] believe!"* *"Lord, I [do] believe! Help thou mine unbelief."*

My friend, that does not mean that one believes with a perfect heart – that is to the point that there is never doubt or wavering. It isn't to the point that we believe as we ought. We believe to the saving of our soul and we believe to justification but oftentimes those who have been justified by the work of Jesus Christ are unbelievers. Oftentimes I know it is so – that I don't lay a hold of that, and believe with the heart and the mind the rest of it. I do not find it without the help of the grace of God. So beloved, like this man, that I do believe – *"help thou mine unbelief"*. That should be the hope of every one of us – that we do believe and help thou our unbelief. We have unbelief many times as the children of God. But to the believer, all things are possible.

Finally tonight, the believer and the believer only is admonished to continue in good works – the believer only! The unbeliever is never admonished to work for the Lord. The unbeliever is never admonished to

continue in a work because he is never convinced. He may be a Sunday school teacher. He may be a Baptist preacher. She may be headed for sisterhood but she has never been convinced of the work of the Lord until he or she has become a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so beloved, the believer only is admonished to continue in good works. *"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works"* – **Titus 3:8**. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God. And so beloved, notice if you will, *"these things are good and profitable unto men"*. Those that have believed in God and continue in good works are profitable. My good works will renown in the glory of the Lord here and will also renown to our rewards at the Judgment Seat of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

And so beloved, tonight there are many innumerable blessings promised in the Word of God for those who believe – *"whosoever believeth"*. My friends, not one word is used to one who has not been brought to believe of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now we have and may lay hold by faith. And may we ask for grace and faith that we truly might lay hold of the Word of God with the grounds for faith and belief in God's Word. Like Abraham, may we believe God's Word. God said to Abraham through thy son Isaac all the earth or should I say through thy seed in Isaac, through Isaac shall thy seed be called and shall be numbered as all the stars of heaven. And yet God said, Abraham, take thy only son Isaac upon the mountain and therefore offer him as a sacrifice to me. Now wait a minute, Lord. You said in Isaac I would be blessed. But, because God said it Abraham believed it. And therefore he set out to do exactly what the Lord said to do. Now God has said to Abraham that I will give you a Seed that comes from thine own body and through that Seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And therefore God said to Abraham take thy son, thy only son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice unto me. And Abraham believed God. He believed it when God told him that though Isaac he would be blessed. He believed God!

Abraham did not know what the Lord was going to do. But he did believe the Word of the Lord. What God says you and I can depend upon it too!

May God give us grace to walk like it...to talk like it...and act like it. If God said it, then I have to believe it too. So Lord, help me to believe that I might, like my father Abraham according to the faith, make my faith perfect by thy Word.

Shall we stand for a word of prayer.