

# The Case of the Unbelieving Believer

*"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all His angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate the people from one another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'... Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... into eternal punishment.'" Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46*

In this parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus Christ presented a sobering picture of the Day of God's Judgment when Christ will separate the believers from the unbelievers. All those who believe in Him will receive eternal life, but those who did not believe in Him will be cast into the eternal fire (John 3:36). The apostle Paul said, "If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are *perishing*. The god of this world has blinded the minds of the *unbelieving*, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:3-4)." The Greek word for perish is *apollymi*, which means to die. In this context, it means unbelievers are doomed to spiritual death and eternal separation from God. It does not mean that unbelievers will be annihilated (cease to exist) after they die. The Bible clearly states that unbelievers will suffer eternal punishment and torment after they are judged by God (Matthew 25:46, Revelation 14:10-11; 21:8).

This is not the only one of Jesus' parables that addresses the different destinies of believers and unbelievers – those who believe to the resurrection of life and those who do not believe to the resurrection of judgment. For example, in the parable of the tares and the wheat, Jesus compares the wheat to the sons of the kingdom, and the tares to the sons of the devil. Then Jesus said, "Let them both grow up together until the harvest... just as

the tares are gathered up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom those who practice sin, and those who cause others to sin. They will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 13:30, 40-42)."

But what about the case of the unbelieving believer? An unbelieving believer is someone who initially received the gospel of Jesus Christ, but then does not persevere to live by faith in Christ. Jesus described this kind of person in His parable of the sower and the seed as the second and third type of soil (Matthew 13:21-22). When their initial belief in the gospel is tested by either the trials of adversity or the temptations of prosperity, they fall away from the faith and do not bear spiritual fruit. How then can you know if someone is a believing Christian or an unbelieving Christian? Jesus said, "You shall know them by their fruit (Matthew 7:20)." The Bible says that a believing Christian practices righteousness and bears the spiritual fruit of sanctification, whereas an unbelieving Christian practices sin and does not bear any spiritual fruit (Luke 8:15; 1 John 3:7-10).

Remember the only way we can practice true righteousness is to believe and act on the truth of the cross. And this is the truth of the cross: when we were born again, God removed our sinful nature so that His risen Son could live in us (Romans 6:3-11; Colossians 1:27). If you are a true believer in Christ, you are capable of overcoming sin and walking in sanctification by exercising faith in this truth of the cross. However, since an unbelieving Christian does not believe this Biblical truth, they cannot overcome sin. Because they are convinced that they still have an evil sinful nature, they remain captive to sin. For the only way you can conquer sin is to believe that Christ conquered sin for you when He removed your sinful nature (Colossians 2:11). Consequently, an unbelieving Christian may go to church and appear outwardly moral, but inwardly they are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness (Matthew 23:28; 2 Timothy 3:5). These are the goats, though they bleat like sheep!

What then is the destiny of an unbelieving Christian? Just as the Bible spells out the fate of an unbeliever, the Bible also spells out the fate of an unbelieving Christian. The Scripture says, "Take care, brethren, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God (Hebrews 3:12). And Paul taught that any Christian who continues in unbelief will be cut off from Christ and not spared (Romans 11:17-24). Jesus Himself warned that no professing Christian who practices sin would enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21-23). The author of Hebrews said that anyone who goes on sinning willfully after receiving the gospel can expect God's terrifying judgment (Hebrews 10:26-27). And Jude warned, "I want to remind you that after the Lord saved His people out of Egypt, He subsequently destroyed those who did not believe (Jude 5)."

To sum up, what is the difference between a believing Christian and an unbelieving Christian? A believing Christian abides in God and walks in sanctification by faith in the truth of the cross (that he is dead to sin because he no longer has a sinful nature). An unbelieving Christian does not abide in God or know God because he does not overcome sin by faith (Hebrews 12:14; 1 John 3:6). We can now close the case of the unbelieving believer. The evidence of the Scriptures is conclusive: the unbelieving Christian will be missing from the Book of Life when God records the names of those chosen for eternal life. Although they initially responded to God's call, they proved themselves unworthy of the kingdom of heaven by not persevering by faith in the cross of Christ to overcome sin. As Jesus said, "Many are called, but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14)."

*"Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was cast into the sea and gathered all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and gathered the good fish into baskets, but they threw away the bad fish. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Matthew 13:47-50*