

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 12-11-11 AM NOTES  
"UNBELIEF AND BELIEF: A CASE STUDY"  
JOHN 9:7-41  
#37 in Series, "Verse by Verse through John"

**Matthew 10:34-36 (NKJV)** <sup>34</sup>Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. <sup>35</sup>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'*; <sup>36</sup>and *'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'*"

**John 9:39 (AMP)** "Then Jesus said, I came into this world for judgment [as a Separator, in order that there may be separation between those who believe on Me and those who reject Me]..."

**Matthew 15:14 (NKJV)** "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch."

**Acts 26:18 (NKJV)** "to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me."

**John 3:19 (NKJV)** "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

**2 Corinthians 4:4 (NKJV)** "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them."

**Proverbs 4:19 (NKJV)** "The way of the wicked *is* like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble."

**Colossians 1:13 (NKJV)** "He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love."

**John 8:12 (NKJV)** "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.'"

I. The Characteristics of Unbelief

A. Unbelief Sets False Standards (vv. 13-16)

**Exodus 20:8 (NKJV)** "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

**Hebrews 11:6a (NKJV)** "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*..."

**Mark 2:27 (NKJV)** "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath."

**Luke 6:5 (NKJV)** "The Son of Man is also Lord of the Sabbath."

B. Unbelief Always Wants More Evidence (vv. 17-24)

**John 7:17 (ESV)** "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority."

C. Unbelief Has Predetermined Conclusions (vv. 25-29)

**John 5:46 (NKJV)** "For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me."

**Acts 7:57-58a (NASB)** <sup>57</sup>But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. <sup>58</sup>When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*..."

D. Unbelief Is Prideful (vv. 30-34)

Syllogism—a form of reasoning in which two statements or premises are made (a major and a minor premise) and a logical conclusion is drawn from them.

**Psalms 66:18 (NKJV)** “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.”

**Isaiah 59:2 (NKJV)** “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He will not hear.”

E. Unbelief Results in Judgment (vv. 39-41)

**John 12:37-40 (HCSB)** <sup>37</sup> Even though He had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him. <sup>38</sup> But this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And who has the arm of the Lord been revealed to? <sup>39</sup> This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: <sup>40</sup> **He has blinded their eyes** and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I would heal them.”

“It is not our littleness that hinders Christ; but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back His hand.” —Charles Spurgeon

II. The Characteristics of Belief

A. Belief Begins With the Lord’s Initiative (v. 35)

**Luke 19:10 (NKJV)** “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

B. Belief Responds to the Truth Available (vv. 8-11, 17, 35-38)

**Proverbs 4:18 (NIV)** “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

“When this man acknowledged that Jesus opened his eyes, there was a little bit of faith. When he said Jesus was a prophet, he went to another level of faith. Then he said Jesus was sent from God. And finally he worshipped Jesus as the Son of God; he believed in Jesus and was saved. He went ‘from faith to faith.’” —Adrian Rogers

C. Belief Results in Worship (v. 38b)

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One of the recurring scenes in the Gospels is that we see Jesus revealing Himself as the Son of God (Jehovah God become flesh), and then the Gospel writers chronicle the division that follows that. Jesus Himself spoke to this subject of His dividing people in **Matthew 10:34-36 (NKJV)** <sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth [that waits for His second coming; at His first coming He came to bring peace in the hearts of those who are His disciples]. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. <sup>35</sup> 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*'; <sup>36</sup> and '*a man's enemies will be those of his own household.*'" Listen to the Amplified translation of verse 39 of our text: **John 9:39a (AMP)** "Then Jesus said, I came into this world for judgment [as a Separator, in order that there may be separation between those who believe on Me and those who reject Me]..." In some circles of the church today, there is a call to leave doctrine behind and unite around Jesus. The reasoning for leaving doctrine behind is that doctrine divides us and Jesus unites us. It is true that doctrine divides people. That is what doctrine is supposed to do. It divides between truth and error. As for Jesus uniting us, He does unite those who believe the fundamental doctrines of Scripture and those who join Him in His disciple-making mission to every tongue and tribe and people and nation. However, He divides this group from those who do not believe the fundamental doctrines of Scripture and those who do not share His mission. To summarize, Jesus unites only those who believe on Him and follow Him.

The primary division that Jesus brings is between those who believe on Him and follow Him and those who persist in unbelief. Throughout the Bible, blindness and darkness are used metaphorically to represent unredeemed humanity's inability and unwillingness to comprehend Scriptural truth and to believe on the Savior presented in Scripture. Light and sight are used to represent those who are born again, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and follow Him. Let me give you some examples. Jesus described the Pharisees in **Matthew 15:14 (NKJV)** "Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch." When the Lord sent Paul to the Gentiles, He tells him what the desired outcome is in **Acts 26:18 (NKJV)** "to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me." We see the contrast and division between darkness and light in **John 3:19 (NKJV)** "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." We are told the primary reason that people do not believe the Gospel in **2 Corinthians 4:4 (NKJV)** "whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them." We are told this of the unsaved in **Proverbs 4:19 (NKJV)** "The way of the wicked *is* like darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble." Those who have not believed on Christ are described in Col 1:13 as being under the "power of darkness". **Colossians 1:13 (NKJV)** "He has delivered us from the **power of darkness** and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love".

In the Bible, we are told over and over in many different ways that the only cure for spiritual blindness and darkness is Jesus Christ who describes Himself in **John 8:12a (NKJV)** "I am the light of the world. " Only those who have believed on and then follow Jesus Christ have light and can spiritually see.

In John 9 we meet a man who was blind from birth. Jesus sovereignly chooses to heal this man and give him physical sight. Jesus didn't stop there. He continues pursuing this man until he believes on Jesus and is saved. In our text we see a contrast between the blind man who in darkness received light and sight from Jesus and the Pharisees who continued in spiritual darkness and blindness because they would not believe on the one who is the light of the world. We will contrast the unbelief of the Pharisees and the belief of the man born blind.

## I. The Characteristics of Unbelief

In first century Judaism, the Scribes and especially the Pharisees had become the final authority instead of the Scriptures. They had added the traditions of the Elders (well known Rabbis) to the Old Testament Scriptures, but actually gave greater credence to the traditions than to the Scriptures. According to the Pharisees, the common uneducated people weren't capable of interpreting and applying the inspired Scriptures. There are some amazing parallels with 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism and the Roman Catholic Church in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century when the Protestant Reformation brought things back to the Scriptures. In both situations, there were dual sources of authority (Scriptures and the traditions of the Elders) and the common people were told that they were incapable of understanding Scripture. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century, only the Scribes and Pharisees were competent to speak for God and in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was only the clergy, the priests that could rightly understand and expound the Scriptures. In looking at the Pharisees, let's find some characteristics of unbelief.

### A. Unbelief Sets False Standards (V13-16)

It was only natural to seek an explanation from the religious leaders as to why this unprecedented miracle had taken place. It seems like this was some kind of a formal inquiry since it resulted in the healed man being excommunicated from the Synagogue. The problem the Pharisees raised was that this healing had taken place on the Sabbath. Jesus healed this man intentionally on the Sabbath because He desired to expose and correct the false teaching of the religious leaders concerning the Sabbath. This false teaching had put the Jewish people in bondage because of the man-originated false standards that had arisen around the Sabbath. Learn this: unbelief sets up its own substitute for simply repenting of sin and believing on Christ alone for salvation and acceptance with God. Oh, did the Pharisees have false standards! Listen to just a few of the things they had added to the very simple fourth commandment in **Exodus 20:8 (NKJV)** "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."

- A man could not go out on the Sabbath with sandals put together with nails because that constituted carrying a burden which was considered working on the Sabbath.
- A person could not put out a candle on the Sabbath because that was considered work.
- A person could not cut their fingernails or pull a hair out of their beard or head on the Sabbath.
- A person could not heal on the Sabbath. Medical attention could only be given if life was in actual danger, and even then it could only that which kept the patient from dying, not anything that would make him better. This was probably the specific violation they got Jesus on. Also, there was a regulation against kneading bread or anything. Jesus had kneaded the clay.

This was only a few of the false standards they had set up around the Sabbath. Why did they have all these foolish rules? It is unbelief's attempt to earn acceptance from God by human works when God has clearly stated in **Hebrews 11:6a (NKJV)** "But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*..." Jesus saw all of these rules as a wall, a barrier to righteousness by faith. Jesus kept breaking their non-Scriptural rules to have the opportunity to break down these legalistic barriers that kept people from God. God gave the Sabbath for man's good, but the Jewish religious leaders had turned it into man's bondage. **Mark 2:27 (NKJV)** "And He said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'"

In this official inquiry, the Jewish leaders didn't care anything about the beggar that had been born blind. Never do they rejoice with him. In fact, they end up excommunicating him from the synagogue. All they cared about was getting rid of Jesus because He was messing up their legalistic system that brought them prestige and self-righteousness.

It is interesting that verse 16 tells us that there was at least some disagreement among the Pharisees. **John 9:16b (NKJV)** "Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them." We cannot know for certain, but could this have been Nicodemus, the one who came to Jesus by night in John three? Could this be the man who later it seems believed on the Lord Jesus Christ and gave evidence of being His disciple by helping prepare His body for burial when it was taken from the cross?

### B. Unbelief Always Wants More Evidence (V17-24)

The evidence that Jesus had performed this miracle was overwhelming. No amount of evidence is sufficient for unbelief. Their investigation was subjective and had a conclusion they already had decided on before they even talked to anyone. The parents knew that if they said anything good about Jesus they would be excommunicated from (put out of) the synagogue. This meant they would be socially and economically cut off from the rest of Israel. The same is true of unbelief today. If anyone comes with an open heart and objectively examines the evidence relating to Christ, they will see the truth of Scripture! **John 7:17 (ESV)** “If anyone’s will is to do God’s will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority.” Josh McDowell who for many years has spoken to college students on many campuses that have a lot of hostility to the gospel, is often asked to prove that Jesus is God or that He rose from the dead or that the Bible is the Word of God. He has learned over the years to ask the questioner a question before he begins his answer. He asks something like this: “If I could prove to you conclusively that these things are true, would you submit to Christ and receive Him as your savior and sovereign Lord?” He says that most of the time the answer is “no”. In that instance, to give the evidence (which is plentiful) would not accomplish anything. Unbelief usually does not have an intellectual problem at its root; it typically has a sin problem! For determined unbelief like that of the Pharisees there will never be enough evidence.

#### C. Unbelief Has Predetermined Conclusions (V25-29)

The attitude of the Pharisees was, “Our minds are made up; don’t confuse us with facts”. They refuse the formerly blind man’s clear testimony and begin to badger and threaten him. They try to justify themselves by saying they were disciples of Moses. Jesus had already dealt with that falsehood. **John 5:46 (NKJV)** “For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me.” These Pharisees remind us of those who were questioning the first martyr of the church, Stephen. It may have actually been some of the same people. As Stephen gave testimony to Christ we read in **Acts 7:57-58a (NASB)** “<sup>57</sup> But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one impulse. <sup>58</sup> When they had driven him out of the city, they *began* stoning *him*...” These Pharisees may as well have covered their ears because in their unbelief they had already come up with their conclusions before they examined the evidence.

#### D. Unbelief Is Prideful (V30-34)

This beggar confronts the learned Pharisees with some irrefutable logic! He confronts the Pharisees with a syllogism. A syllogism is a form of reasoning in which two statements or premises are made (a major and a minor premise) and a logical conclusion is drawn from them. An example would be, “All mammals are warm blooded (major premise). Whales are mammals (minor premise). Therefore whales are warm blooded (conclusion).” Let’s look at the beggar’s logic. Based on numerous passages in the Old Testament, man’s sin is a barrier to God’s hearing their prayers. **Psalms 66:18 (NKJV)** “If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.” **Isaiah 59:2 (NKJV)** “But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden *His* face from you, So that He will not hear.” Here is his syllogism: Only people from God are heard by God so that they could open blind eyes (major premise). Jesus opened my blind eyes (minor premise). Therefore Jesus was heard by God and if He was heard by God He couldn’t be a sinner (conclusion). The Pharisees had no reasonable response to the reasoning of this formerly blind beggar! All they were left with were irrational pride-filled personal attacks, and to throw him out of the synagogue. We see this scenario played out throughout church history. When church leaders have left the truths of the written Word of God, God raises up His people and the religious leaders begin to defame them and pridefully talk down to them. It is an honor to be kicked out of some churches who have substituted the traditions of man for the written Word of God! It was an honor when Martin Luther was excommunicated from the corrupt 16<sup>th</sup> century Roman Catholic Church. It was an honor when the Waldenses, the Huguenots, the Covenanters, and the Puritans were put out from the prominent, but corrupt church of their day. When this formerly blind beggar was put out of the synagogue, look at what he was cast out to – **John 9:35 (NKJV)** “Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him...” they cast him into the waiting arms of Jesus!

Unbelief is a horrible sin. Unbelief sets false standards, it always wants more evidence, it has predetermined conclusions, and it is prideful and self-centered. There is one more thing we must see about unbelief.

#### E. Unbelief Results in Judgment (V39-41)

Here is a summary of what Jesus is saying in these verses. Judicial blindness is sent to those who refuse to recognize their need and repent and come to the light. Those who receive light and sight are those who recognize and confess their blindness and come to the One who is the light of the world and the only one who can make blinded eyes see. Permanent spiritual blindness is the ultimate judgment for those who persist in unbelief. The worst judgment is to be condemned to remain in darkness throughout eternity. Three times in the Gospels, hell is described as a place of outer darkness (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Let me show you an example of judicial blindness: **John 12:37-40 (HCSB)** “<sup>37</sup> Even though He had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him. <sup>38</sup> But this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet, who said: Lord, who has believed our message? And who has the arm of the Lord been revealed to? <sup>39</sup> This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: <sup>40</sup> **He has blinded their eyes** and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and be converted, and I would heal them.” We are told in John 3:17 that Jesus did not come into the world to condemn, but when man responds with persistent unbelief, the result is the judgment of permanent blindness and darkness. The reason for Jesus coming into the world is salvation, but the result of Jesus coming into the world is judgment for those who will not come to him admitting their need for the one who is the light of the world. Charles Spurgeon summarized it this way: “It is not our littleness that hinders Christ; but our bigness. It is not our weakness that hinders Christ; it is our strength. It is not our darkness that hinders Christ; it is our supposed light that holds back His hand” [Charles Spurgeon, Quoted in Kent Hughes, *John, That You May Believe* Page 261]. If the Pharisees had examined the evidence honestly they would have seen the truth clearly (John 7:17). There is an old saying that describes the religious leaders in our passage. It says, “There is none so blind as those who will not see”.

## II. The Characteristics of Belief

While unbelief tends to be complicated, belief is simple.

### A. Belief Begins with the Lord’s Initiative (V35)

All the way through this account, we see Jesus as the one taking the initiative. It was Jesus who came to the blind beggar outside the temple; the beggar wasn’t seeking Him. When the formerly blind beggar was kicked out of the synagogue, it was Jesus who came to him to reveal more fully to him who it was that had healed him. Jesus Christ is often revealed to us as the seeking Savior. **Luke 19:10 (NKJV)** “for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.” The Pharisees had shut out the formerly blind man; Jesus sought him out. I love the that line in one of my favorite songs, “Victory in Jesus”. It says, *He sought me and bought me with His redeeming blood.* He is the seeking Savior!

### B. Belief Responds to the Truth That Is Available (8-11, 17, 35-38)

It is so interesting to watch the progression of this formerly blind beggar as he comes to savingly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. First, as he is questioned by those who knew him before his healing, he says in **John 9:11 (NKJV)** "A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight." His first response is that it was a man called Jesus. He moves up to another level in **John 9:17b (NKJV)** “He said, ‘He is a prophet.’” A prophet is one who speaks for God. This is another level of faith. Do you see the progression? Third, he says in verse 33 that Jesus is a man from God. Finally, he says in verses 35-38 that he believes that Jesus is the Son of God. **John 9:38a (NKJV)** “Then he said, ‘Lord, I believe!’” It was here that this man rejected in the synagogue and ridiculed by the religious leaders is counted righteous by faith in Jesus Christ and is accepted by God. Belief responds to the light available and then God in His grace gives more light! **Proverbs 4:18 (NIV)** “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.” Every man has some light from God and any man who will respond in faith to the light he has will be given more light by God! The final judgment of the lost will be based not

as much on the amount of sin that is committed as on the amount of light rejected. Adrian Rogers summarizes how this man came to faith: “When this man acknowledged that Jesus opened his eyes, there was a little bit of faith. When he said Jesus was a prophet, he went to another level of faith. Then he said Jesus was sent from God. And finally he worshipped Jesus as the Son of God; he believed in Jesus and was saved. He went ‘from faith to faith’” [Adrian Rogers, *Believe in Miracles But Trust in Jesus*, Page 153-154].

#### C. Belief Results in Worship (V38b)

One of the most obvious evidences of salvation is that those who are saved can't help but worship Him. Saving belief is not just the cold acceptance of facts; It is a trust in Him and His sacrifice on our behalf that results in a heart of love for Him that is expressed in worship.

#### CONCLUSION

I close this message by asking you the question Jesus asked this formerly blind beggar: **John 9:35 (NKJV)** "Do you believe in the Son of God?" (3460)