

THE SIN OF UNBELIEF

John Bunyan (1628-1688)

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.”—John 6:37

This doctrine of coming to Jesus Christ for life informs us of the *evil of unbelief*—that wicked thing that is the only or main hindrance to the coming sinner. Does the text say, “Come”? Does it say, “And him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”? Then how great is the evil that keeps sinners from coming to Jesus Christ! And that evil is *unbelief*: for by faith we come; by *unbelief* we keep away. Therefore it is said to be that by which a soul departs from God; because it was that which at first caused the world to go away from Him, and that keeps men from Him to this day. And it does it the more easily, because it does it with a trick.

This sin may be called *the white devil*; for it often, in its mischievous doings in the soul, pretends to be an angel of light: yes, it acts like a counsellor of heaven. For that reason, I will take a little time to talk of this evil disease.

1. It is that sin, above all others, that *has some show of reason in its attempts*. For it keeps the soul from Christ by pretending its present unfitness and unpreparedness: in its lack of a more thorough sense of sin, its lack of more repentance, the lack of more humility, and a lack of a more broken heart.

2. It is the sin that *most agrees with the conscience*. The conscience of the coming sinner tells him that he has nothing good; that he stands in debt for ten thousand talents; that he is a very ignorant, blind, and hard-hearted sinner, unworthy to be once taken notice of by Jesus Christ. “And will you,” says unbelief, “in such a case as you are now, presume to come to Jesus Christ?”

3. It is the sin that *most agrees with our sense of feeling*. The coming sinner feels the workings of sin, of all manner of sin and wretchedness in his flesh. He also feels the wrath and judgment of God due to sin and often staggers under it. “Now,” says unbelief, “you may see you have no grace; for that which works in you is corruption. You may also perceive that God does not love you, because the sense of His wrath abides upon you. Therefore, how can you come to Jesus Christ?”

4. It is that sin above all others that *most agrees with the wisdom of our flesh*. The wisdom of our flesh thinks it prudent to question awhile, to stand back awhile, to listen to both sides awhile; and not to be rash, sudden, or unadvised in too bold a presuming upon Christ. And this wisdom unbelief agrees with.

5. It is the sin above all others, that is *continually whispering in the ear of the soul with suspicions of the faithfulness of God* in keeping His promise to them that come to Jesus Christ for life. It also suggests doubts about Christ’s willingness to receive the soul and save it. And no sin can do this so well as unbelief.

6. It is also that sin which is *always at hand to enter an objection against this or that promise* that by the Spirit of God is brought to our heart to comfort us. And if the poor coming sinner is not aware of it, it will, by some exaction, slight, trick, or cavil, quickly wrestle from him the promise again, and he shall have but little benefit from it.

7. It is that above all other sins, that *weakens our prayers, our faith, our love, our diligence, our hope, and expectations*. It even takes the heart away from God in duty.

8. Lastly, this sin, as I have said, even now, *appears in the soul with so many sweet pretences to greater safety and security*, that it seems to be counsel sent from heaven, bidding the soul to be wise, wary, considerate, well-advised, and to take heed of too rash a venture upon believing. “Be sure, first, that God loves you; take hold of no promise until you are forced to by God; neither be sure of your salvation; doubt it still, though the testimony of the Lord has often been confirmed in you. Live not by faith, but by sense; and when you can neither see nor feel, then fear and mistrust, then doubt and question all.” This is the devilish counsel of unbelief, which is so covered over with false pretences, that the wisest Christian can hardly shake off these reasonings.

But to be brief, let me here give you a more accurate description of the qualities of unbelief, by comparing it to faith in these twenty-five comparisons:—

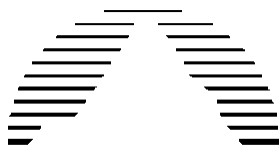
1. Faith believes the Word of God, but unbelief questions the certainty of it (Psa 106:24).
2. Faith believes the Word, because it is true; but unbelief doubts it, because it is true (1Ti 4:3; Joh 8:45).
3. Faith sees more in a promise of God to help, than in all other things to hinder; but unbelief, notwithstanding God’s promise, says, “How can these things be?” (Rom 4:19-21; 2Ki 7:2; Joh 3:11-12).
4. Faith will make you see love in the heart of Christ, when with His mouth He gives reproofs; but unbelief will imagine wrath in His heart, when with His mouth and Word He says He loves us (Mat 15:22-29; 25:24).
5. Faith will help the soul to wait, though God defers to give; but unbelief will take offence and throw all away, if God makes any tarrying (Psa 25:5; Isa 8:17; 2Ki 6:33).

6. Faith will give comfort in the midst of fears; but unbelief causes fears in the midst of comforts (2Ch 20:20-21; Mat 8:26; Luk 24:25).
 7. Faith will suck sweetness out of God's rod; but unbelief can find no comfort in His greatest mercies (Psa 23; Num 12).
 8. Faith makes great burdens light; but unbelief makes light ones intolerably heavy (Mal 1:12,13).
 9. Faith helps us when we are down; but unbelief throws us down when we are up (Mic 7:8-10; Heb 4:11).
 10. Faith brings us near to God when we are far from Him; but unbelief puts us far from God when we are near to Him (Heb 10:22; 3:12-13).
 11. Where faith reigns, it declares us to be the friends of God; but where unbelief reigns, it declares us to be His enemies (Heb 3:18; Rev 21:8).
 12. Faith puts a man under grace; but unbelief holds him under wrath (Rom 3:24-26; Eph 2:8; Joh 3:36; 1Jo 5:10; Heb 3:17; Mar 16:16; Joh 8:24).
 13. Faith purifies the heart; but unbelief keeps it polluted and impure (Act 15:9; Tit 1:15-16).
 14. By faith the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us; but unbelief shuts us up under the Law to perish (Rom 4:23-24; 11:32; Gal 3:23).
 15. Faith makes our work acceptable to God through Christ; but whatsoever is of unbelief is sin. For "without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb 11:4; Rom 14:23; Heb 11:6).
 16. Faith gives us peace and comforts our souls; but unbelief works trouble and tossings, like the restless waves of the sea (Rom 5:1; Jam 1:6).
 17. Faith makes us to see preciousness in Christ, but unbelief sees no form, beauty, or comeliness in Him (1Pe 2; Isa 53:1-3).
 18. By faith we have our life in Christ's fullness; but by unbelief we starve and pine away (Gal 2:20).
 19. Faith gives us the victory over the Law, sin, death, the devil, and all evils; but unbelief makes us vulnerable to them all (1Jo 5:4; Luk 12:46).
 20. Faith will show us more excellency in things not seen, than in them that are; but unbelief sees more in things that are seen, than in things that will be hereafter (2Co 4:18; Heb 11:24-27; 1Co 15:32).
 21. Faith makes the ways of God pleasant and admirable; but unbelief makes them heavy and hard (Gal 4:6; 2Co 12:10,11; Joh 6:60; Psa 2:3).
 22. By faith Abraham, Isaac and Jacob possessed the land of promise; but because of unbelief, neither Aaron, nor Moses, nor Miriam could get there (Heb 11:9; 3:19).
 23. By faith the children of Israel passed through the Red Sea; but by unbelief the majority of them perished in the wilderness (Heb 11:29; Jude 5).
 24. By faith Gideon did more with three hundred men, and a few empty pitchers, than all the twelve tribes could do, because they believed not God (Jdg 7:16-22; Num 14:11,14).
 25. By faith Peter walked on the water; but by unbelief he began to sink (Mat 14:22-33).
- Thus might many more be added, which, for brevity's sake, I omit; pleading with everyone that thinks he has a soul to save, or be damned, to take heed of unbelief, lest seeing there is a promise left us of entering into His rest, any of us by unbelief should indeed come short of it (see Heb 4:1).

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