

John 12:37-50... ³⁷ *Even though Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him.* ³⁸ *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?* ³⁹ *This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said:* ⁴⁰ *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.* ⁴¹ *Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke about Him.* ⁴² *Nevertheless, many did believe in Jesus even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, so they would not be banned from the synagogue.* ⁴³ *For they loved praise from people more than praise from God.* ⁴⁴ *Then Jesus cried out, "The one who believes in Me believes not in Me, but in Him who sent Me.* ⁴⁵ *And the one who sees Me sees Him who sent Me.* ⁴⁶ *I have come as a light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me would not remain in darkness.* ⁴⁷ *If anyone hears My words and doesn't keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.* ⁴⁸ *The one who rejects Me and doesn't accept My sayings has this as his judge: The word I have spoken will judge him on the last day.* ⁴⁹ *For I have not spoken on My own, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a command as to what I should say and what I should speak.* ⁵⁰ *I know that His command is eternal life. So the things that I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."*

Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg in their book, *Christ-Centered Exposition: John*. On pages 253-259 states "God used George Whitefield in a way seldom seen in this world. He was the main instrument in the spiritual revival known as the Great Awakening, which swept across the United States in the mid-1700s. Whitefield was also good friends with Benjamin Franklin. Their friendship began when Whitefield came to Philadelphia in 1739 and lasted until his death in 1770. During the course of this thirty-one-year friendship, Franklin was the primary publisher of all of Whitefield's sermons and journals. Forty-five times Whitefield's sermons were reprinted in Franklin's newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, and eight times the sermon filled the entire front page. Franklin published ten editions of Whitefield's journals and sold thousands of reprints of Whitefield's sermons. Their relationship extended beyond a business relationship. On more than one occasion when Whitefield came to Philadelphia, he stayed with Franklin in his home. When some of the religious elite criticized Whitefield in another local paper, Franklin wrote a rebuttal. His support for Whitefield, along with a regular correspondence between the two, continued for the next thirty years. Despite their friendship and Whitefield's continued presentation of the gospel, Franklin never responded in faith. In his autobiography Franklin wrote about Whitefield: "He used sometimes to pray for my conversion, but never had the satisfaction of believing that his prayers were heard" (quoted in Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin*, 113). How do we explain Franklin's rejection of the gospel? He heard and read hundreds of the sermons of America's greatest evangelist. He spent hours with him discussing the gospel. He received dozens of letters over the span of thirty years, yet he was unmoved.

Why didn't Benjamin Franklin believe? Why does anyone reject the gospel of Jesus Christ?

As Christians, we have a strong desire to call men and women in faith to Jesus. Because of God's grace, we understand the joy that comes from a restored relationship with our Creator. Our methods in calling men and women to faith will flow from our understanding of unbelief. If we don't know the answer to why people choose not to believe, then we'll constantly be asking the question, Will they believe if we do this?

Can we convince them to believe if we try that? Our theology determines our methods.

John 12:37... *Even though Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him.*

Though the crowds had seen and witnessed so many of Jesus's miracles, they persisted in their unbelief. This is exactly what John prepared us for in the opening of his Gospel: Jesus "came to His own, and His own people did not receive him" (John 1: 11). This passage answers the two most important questions about unbelief.

1. What Is Unbelief?

- a. An uncertainty or skepticism about what is true or not. That's not what unbelief means in this context.
- b. Their unbelief is not the result of a lack of information. They've seen and heard enough to make a well-informed decision. That's how Jesus defines unbelief. John 12:44-50 contains a summary of Jesus's message in which he emphasizes the close relationship between Himself and his Father and between Himself and His words. He's making the point that choosing not to believe in Him means rejecting God

Belief in Jesus is equivalent to embracing God; to choose unbelief is to willfully reject God. Notice how closely Jesus ties himself to God in these verses:

- To *believe* in Jesus is to *believe* in God (v. 44).
- To *see Jesus* is to *see* God (v. 45).
- To *listen* to Jesus is to *listen* to God (v. 49).

Belief in Jesus is not a sentimental salve for our guilt-ridden consciences.
It's deliverance from the kingdom of darkness.
It's redemption from the penalty of death.
It's enjoyment of the new life-the life God intended for us.
It's confidence in our renewed and restored relationship with the Creator.
It's the bedrock of our souls and the source of lives of good works.

Authentic, genuine belief brings radical, complete, and lasting transformation of whole person from the inside out. *Matt Carter and Josh Wredberg in their book, Christ-Centered Exposition: John. On pages 253-259*

2. The Cause of Unbelief (12:37-41)

³⁷ *Even though Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in Him.* ³⁸ *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?* ³⁹ *This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said:* ⁴⁰ *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.* ⁴¹ *Isaiah said these things because he saw His glory and spoke about Him.*

- **“The people could not believe (12:39) because God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts (12:40). After they refused to accept Jesus’ signs and teaching.**

What does this mean? Can it mean that God is directly prohibiting people who want to believe in Jesus from believing in him thus causing their judgment? Some think this is what this text means. But I ask how God can be just if he condemns to eternal punishment people who want to believe but God prevented it from happening? This seems to me to be equivalent to condemning you for not driving my car though I never gave you the keys! How can I condemn if the opportunity was never afforded to you? We must consider that there is another way of understanding this text, that remains faithful to the words of this text as well as faithful to the justice of God. So I will ask again: What does it mean that the people could not believe because God blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts? The quotation of Isaiah 6 is the answer to the question. God commands Isaiah to keep preaching to the people. In doing so, Isaiah’s preaching will, “Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes” (Isaiah 6:10). God was hardening their hearts, not through direct prevention, but by the continued preaching of God’s judgment and salvation message. The more Isaiah preached, the more the people’s hearts were hardened against God and his message so that they could not be saved. The same thing happened in Exodus. How did God harden Pharaoh’s heart? God hardened his heart, not through direct prevention, but by giving sign after sign. With each plague, Pharaoh rejected obeying God’s command and thus his heart was hardened further. Notice this is exactly what is being described in John 12. So how was Jesus blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts? Go back to John 12:37. Jesus continued performing signs. Jesus did “many signs before them.” But they still do not believe. Jesus did not just do one sign. Jesus did many signs”. <https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/new-testament/john-new-testament/unbelief.html>

“We are told at the end of this gospel, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book” (John 20:30). Jesus continued performing signs which only hardened the people’s hearts further with each sign. God was blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts through Jesus’ signs and teachings. God is hardening them by giving them continued opportunities to confess Christ. The first reason for unbelief is a hard heart and blind eyes. Every time the gospel is taught and every time that message is rejected, a person’s heart becomes hardened.

There is something happening today in the hearts of every individual during this lesson. It is happening, not because it is my lesson, but because I am reading the powerful word of God. **Your heart is either pricked and is being transformed by the message of Christ or your heart is unmoved and is being hardened by the message of Christ.** Either way, God is working on your heart. Remember the apostle Paul that faith comes by hearing the message of Christ (Romans 10:17). God is either creating faith in your heart and the reading of God’s word or is hardening your heart. It is your choice what God does with your heart. Consider the seriousness of what this scripture teaches. Your hardened heart will reach a point that you cannot believe no matter what is said or done. This is what we are seeing in this first century audience who has seen the signs of Jesus but have not believed. We can do the same thing, each week hearing the word of Christ, only to have our hearts hardened even further. Some want to hear the word and some just want to get out of here and get on with the day. God is working on your heart right now. What work will he do? Unbelief results from rejecting God’s continued pricking of the heart”. (Adapted from Brent Kerchville. <https://westpalmbeachchurchofchrist.com/new-testament/john-new-testament/unbelief.html>)

3. **Incomplete Belief:**

The points above about unbelief are vital and important, but chances are, for you that are here today, this verse and its concepts:

John 12:42,43...⁴² Nevertheless, many did believe in Jesus even among the rulers, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, so they would not be banned from the synagogue. ⁴³ For they loved praise from people more than praise from God.

Seeking approval, and the personal satisfaction, is not what Jesus condemns; it is seeking it in the wrong source. John Piper writes, Even if we do not have a strong sense of merit, we may crave the same result, namely the praise of men. Jesus warns us not to give charity or pray or fast in order to be seen by others. “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them” (Matthew 6:1). “When you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others” (Matthew 6:5).
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/whose-approval-do-you-crave>

Galatians 1:6-10...⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from Him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to change the good news about the Messiah. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel other than what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! ⁹ As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone preaches to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!¹⁰ For am I now trying to win the favor of people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ.

“Who Are You Trying to Please? People or God!”

Indicators that you are Seeking Validation and/or Approval From People More Than God:

1. You have a strong desire to ‘fit in’
2. Changing, softening or questioning your belief because someone disapproves
3. Paying insincere compliments to gain approval
4. Difficulty in saying NO
5. Your self-worth or sense of value is dependent on others opinion of yourself. (Social media as well)
6. Sub-consciously and initially ask yourself “What will other people think about me”, rather than “What does God say about this”!

The Solution to This Problem:

1. Read the Bible and develop a strong sense of what God says (not others) about your value.

Jeremiah 29:11... *"For I know the thoughts I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."*

Ephesians 6: 6,7... *Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but as slaves of Christ, do God's will from your heart. ⁷ Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to men,*

Colossians 3:22,23... *²² Don't work only while being watched, in order to please men, but work wholeheartedly, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, do it enthusiastically, as something done for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from the Lord. You serve the Lord Christ.*

1 Peter 2:9,10... *⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.*

2. Trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior and walk in His light and truth
3. Confess your weaknesses and sins to the Lord, accept His forgiveness
4. Pray daily for God to give you a proper vision of His Glory and His Will for your life
5. Develop friendships with Christians who spiritually and emotionally healthy
6. Fill your mind with Christ

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Conclusion

"Why? Why do some believe? Why do some not believe? The question is important. But even more important is the question, "Do you believe?" By the grace of God, are you one of those who believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name? Do you believe? In your heart and mind do you believe in Jesus? John wants you to have more than an intellectual or emotional faith, however. He wants you to have a faith that is open and up front and not hidden. John tells us that some of the Pharisees and chief priests believed in Jesus. (Jn 12:42) But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue. In a simply devastating commentary he says, "they loved praise from men more than praise from God" (Jn 12:43). By the grace of God, are you one of those who openly believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name? I think here of Nicodemus. He was one of those leaders who believed in Jesus, but was quiet and even secretive about his faith. Remember how he came to Jesus in the middle of the night (Jn 3:2)? Joseph of Arimathea was the same way – a secret disciple of Jesus (Jn 19:38). Somewhere along the line these two knew this kind of faith was deficient. They came out of the closet, so to speak, when Jesus died. They went to Pilate and put Jesus' body in the grave. How tragic that they waited until it seemed too late. So I ask you again, by the grace of God, are you one of those who openly believe and confess that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing have life in His name? Remember, we either have life or we perish. The only difference between the two is belief or faith. (from Adrian Dieleman. <http://www.trinityurcvisalia.com/NTSer/jn12v37-38.html>)