



"If you believe what you like in the Gospel and reject what you do not like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself."
—Augustine

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Disbelief

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" ([Luke 6:46](#))

Can anything be more paradoxical than professing [Christians](#) not following the words of the One they claim as their Savior? But such is the sad state of affairs in this Western civilization that, we are often told, was built upon a "Judean-Christian ethic." In a 2001 study by the Barna Research Group, 60% of all American adults agreed that, "the Bible is totally accurate in all its teachings"—45% agreed strongly, and the remaining 15% agreed somewhat. Yet, if the 45% strongly *believed* rather than just strongly *agreed*, the face of this nation would be radically different. Millions of people profess to know and to follow [God](#), but when it comes down to believing Him enough to follow His instructions and examples, they deny Him ([Titus 1:16](#)).

Although it would be rare to find it officially stated, there is an understated and understood idea in Protestantism that Jesus Christ's death is more important than His life, either before or after His crucifixion. Christ's death is focused on because of what it accomplished—forgiveness of [sin](#) and justification. But by taking this one event out of context and allowing it to

overshadow both Christ's earthly ministry and His service to us now as High Priest, Mediator, and Intercessor, the result is a great deal of intellectual agreement—and very little true belief.

This disproportion is often revealed in topics such as Christian obligation, works, God's law, and especially the seventh-day [Sabbath](#). Protestant theologians put a dividing line at Christ's death to determine what instructions are still binding. But in doing so, they essentially throw Jesus Christ's life and teachings right out of the picture. It matters not a whit to them that [Jesus Christ](#) kept the Sabbath ([Luke 4:16](#)) and said that it was made on account of mankind ([Mark 2:27](#)); Protestants protest that, after Christ's death, there is not a direct command that Christians should keep the Sabbath day.

Never mind that Christ states that He did not come to destroy the law ([Matthew 5:17-19](#)), that He will reject and destroy those who practice lawlessness ([Matthew 7:23](#); [13:41-42](#)), that keeping His commandments is a requirement (though not the means) of entering into life ([Matthew 19:17](#)), and that loving God and keeping His commandments are inextricably bound ([Matthew 24:12](#); [John 14:15](#), 21, 23-24; 15:10; [I John 5:2-3](#); [II John 6](#)). These and many other teachings are still somehow considered to be "[Old Testament](#) ." Appeals instead are made to the writings of Paul, as if *his* word—often misunderstood at that (see [II Peter 3:15-16](#))—somehow trumps *the* Word.

The practice of putting a line of demarcation at Christ's death essentially invalidates everything He said and did—except dying for our sins. It is as if Jesus Christ's example and teaching were only relevant for 3½ years, and now we are saved by Paul. The truth, though, as trite as it sounds, is that true followers of Christ will follow Christ! And they will follow Paul as he followed Christ ([I Corinthians 11:1](#))!

Several times, James states emphatically that faith—belief—without works is dead. A system of belief that does not produce corresponding and fitting behavior has no life in it. Belief produces obedience; disbelief produces disobedience. It is easily seen that anyone who rejects the example and teaching of Jesus Christ disbelieves Him. They are willing to accept His perfect sacrifice but unwilling to accept the life of obedience that follows.

The bottom line is that carnal man believes what he wants to believe, or what he has grown up believing, rather than what God says directly through Jesus or through the inspired writings of His apostles—which do not contradict Him. There is a large measure of fear involved in changing one's ways and submitting to God's Word—fear either of what it would cost the individual or fear of what others would think. This is why Jesus says, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him *deny himself*, and take up his cross, and follow Me" ([Matthew 16:24](#); [Mark 8:34](#); emphasis ours). It takes personal sacrifice to [worship God](#) "in spirit and in truth," and many simply disbelieve the One they claim to follow—and much of the rest Bible—because of what it would cost.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Do You See God?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

This powerful signature sermon examines the vital missing spiritual component in believing. Seeing doesn't necessarily lead to believing unless an active, productive, and trusting faith is added. The contemporaries of Moses and Jesus Christ experienced a plethora of awesome miracles, but did not believe, comprehend or understand. We see what we want, expect, or become educated to see. True wisdom (spiritual vision) comes from coupling human reason with revelation, reinforced by believing and practicing what God says or commands. Unless we acknowledge God's sovereign authority in our lives, following through with the things we learn from scripture, we, like functional atheists, will not see God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by John W. Ritenbaugh

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