



"Many people think the purpose of their faith is to make THEM feel good."

—Lee Frank

**13-May-16**

## **Belief and the Firstfruits (Part One)**

In his book *State of Fear*, author Michael Crichton thoughtfully observed, "The past history of human belief is a cautionary tale." Crichton went on to demonstrate that mankind does not at all have a good record of holding beliefs that bear good fruit. After nearly 6,000 years—as we count it—men have held, either individually or collectively, more beliefs than we have been able to record. Yet, here at the end, carnal man is no more practiced at producing good fruit than Adam and Eve were.

It is evident that what a person believes forms the basis of his or her actions. When we consider all of the actions that have been sown by man throughout history, and the compounding calamities that are continually reaped, we can reach no other conclusion than that human belief is fundamentally flawed. Michael Crichton greatly understated the history of human belief when he called it "a cautionary tale."

The West has many advantages over the rest of [the world](#). A major reason for this is that the Bible has had more influence in the West than in the rest

of the world. With the Word of [God](#) at least somewhere in the mix, the beliefs of the Western world, in general, are at least slightly more correct, and because of this, somewhat better fruit is borne.

We understand that in the West, a tremendous amount of syncretism has existed, that is, a great deal of blending of true beliefs and false ones has taken place. The more syncretism that there is within a people, the more degenerate the actions and the more evil the fruits. So, God repeatedly warned Israel not to learn the ways of the heathen, since those beliefs would become a snare.

This is why today's multiculturalism, whether it is recognized or not, is a deadly threat to the nations of the West. As true and false beliefs become blended, a bitter concoction is produced that, without intervention, can only end in destruction. We are watching that unfold now.

The Bible has much to say on the subject of belief, and how foundational it is to life—and especially to eternal life. It shows men like Abraham, Joseph, and [Moses](#) overwhelmingly and consistently living lives of correct belief, even though, at times, they slipped into unbelief. On the other hand, the Israelites' overall record was one of unbelief, despite believing God on a number of occasions. They are even mentioned in the [faith](#) chapter of Hebrews 11.

In the more "Christian" nations of the West, we can recognize a similarity with the ancient Israelites. The religious among these nations generally believe that God is Creator, producing a starkly different view of life than that of militant atheists and confirmed agnostics. Citizens in these nations commonly believe that murder, [adultery](#), stealing, and lying are wrong, and to the degree that these beliefs play out in the lives of worldly Christians, their lives are better than those who do not hold to those standards. Yet, those same "believers" also believe in [Sunday-worship](#), [Christmas](#), [Easter](#), a triune god, and various other traditions of men. They are a mixed bag of true belief in some areas and unbelief in many others.

A profound statement about belief is found in the book of Acts:

Then Paul and [Barnabas](#) grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And *as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed*. ([Acts 13:46-48](#); emphasis ours throughout)

Verse 48 tells us what enables some to hold true beliefs, while others do not: God's appointment (or "ordination," KJV). This explains why some have a relationship with God, and why others who may seem to be more "deserving" or knowledgeable do not. It is not because of our inherent intelligence or that we are so good at figuring things out. Those who have a relationship with God are those who, like these Gentiles, have been *ordained* to eternal life. When we combine this with Jesus Christ's definition of eternal life ([John 17:3](#)), we can see that true belief is possible *only* for those who have been *appointed* to know the Father and the Son.

Belief is so important to what God is working out that it is actually defined as *the* work of God in [John 6:26-29](#):

Jesus answered them and said, "Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him." Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, *that you believe in Him whom He sent*."

This exchange took place the day after Jesus fed 5,000 people with five barley loaves and two fish ([John 6:5-11](#)). He admonishes them because they were seeking Him for the wrong reasons. They followed Him because He had demonstrated that He was able to fulfill their physical needs, and they

were eager to have a leader who could take care of them. But there was seemingly no recognition of their far greater *spiritual* need.

He points out to them that a "food" existed that was far more satisfying than physical bread and fish, and that He could provide it to them, as the Father had given Him the authority to do. However, there was one major caveat: They had to believe in Him, and as we will see next time, doing that is not as easy as it may seem.

- David C. Grabbe

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Willingness to Believe](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Americans (indeed most of the industrialized world) tend to be skeptical, cynical, and jaded, demanding mountains of evidence before becoming convinced of anything. We run the risk of losing our childlike credulity, becoming calloused, hardened, and stiff-necked like our forebears on the Sinai, even though God Almighty supplied a plethora of evidence in His desire to create in His people a humble, teachable spirit. We need to emulate Abraham, who strengthened and confirmed his faith when he stepped out in childlike credulity. We believe, obey, then understand. The proof comes after we believe. Following the apostle Paul's admonition in II Corinthians 4: 18, we place the preponderance of our trust in the eternal things we cannot see rather than the temporal physical things we can see.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Are Your Beliefs Preferences or Convictions?](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh discusses the depth of our beliefs, showing the difference between our preferences and our convictions. He looks at both legal and spiritual ramifications of this subject.

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