



"We should more quickly doubt our love for our own children than doubt God's love for us."

—Burk Parsons

**20-May-16**

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

In [John 6:26-29](#), [Jesus](#) upbraids the 5,000 people who had followed Him because they had sought Him out for the wrong reason. Instead of desiring the truth He taught them, they had merely wanted to be fed again. Chastised, they ask, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of [God](#)?" and Jesus replies, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

They had witnessed His many miracles, also called signs, but they sought Jesus because of what they could get from Him, not because they understood the significance of those signs. They saw only the physical benefits He could give them rather than the spiritual meaning of what He had done. All eight of the signs given in John's gospel serve as beacons, advertising who Jesus was, yet the people were blind to what was truly happening right in front of them. So Jesus has to explain it to them; His explanation takes up most of John 6.

The people in the crowd wanted to do the work of God. We in the church have the same desire. Jesus' answer was simple, but as is often the case, the application of it is all-consuming. He said, "Believe in Me." It sounds so easy, and hundreds of millions have said, "I believe." But in reality, belief in

Christ is *impossible* to do until a person has been appointed to know the Father and the Son (see [Acts 13:48](#)).

*The Amplified Bible* does a good job of expounding on the phrase "believe in Him whom He sent." It reads, "that you *cleave to, adhere to, trust, rely on,* and *have [faith](#) in,* His Messenger" (our emphasis throughout). The belief Jesus is talking about goes far beyond simply believing the facts that Christ lived and died and that He is God. [James 2:19](#) says that even the demons believe in the existence of God, yet their works prove that they do not cleave to, adhere to, trust, rely on, or have faith in God.

James 2 is that well-known chapter where the apostle makes a three-fold witness that "faith without works is dead" ([James 2:17](#), 20, 26). Sometimes we automatically insert "works of the law" in our minds when we read this passage of Scripture, but that distinction is too narrow. Certainly, keeping the law does demonstrate that we believe the divine Lawgiver, but the examples of works that James uses actually have nothing to do with the letter of the law:

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in [peace](#), be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered [Isaac](#) his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as

the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. ([James 2:14-26](#))

On some level, the examples of faith—belief—in this passage all have to do with recognizing God and making an appropriate response. Keeping the law is only one example of belief.

The Pharisees serve as proof of this. They kept the [Sabbath](#) and [the holy days](#), tithed, and showed great interest in the [holiness](#) code. But their belief was centered more on [Moses](#), a man of God, than on God Himself. Recalling the synonyms that *The Amplified Bible* gave for "believe," the Pharisees did not *cleave* or *adhere* to God's Word as much as they did the sayings of previous rabbis. They *relied* on their own righteousness, rather than relying on God, which is why they could not recognize God when He stood in their midst. Their belief did produce works, yet some of Jesus' strongest rebukes were reserved for these men ([Matthew 23:13-36](#)).

Jesus expounds the importance of true belief later in John 6:

And Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." ([John 6:35-40](#))

His words in verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out," is a precursor to the better known verse 44: "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." These verses reinforce that the Father appoints some to eternal life now by drawing them and giving them faith—by giving them true belief in Himself and in His Son. They have been appointed or ordained to know God, and as such, they are

the [firstfruits](#) of God's spiritual creation. The rest of [the world](#) will not have the opportunity to know God until the Millennium or until they are resurrected ([Revelation 20:11-15](#)).

In Part Three, we will further explore the link between belief and God's firstfruits.

- David C. Grabbe

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

### **[The Pharisees \(Part 1\)](#)**

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The Pharisees were continuously condemned by Christ. Having their origin in the days of Ezra, the Scribes and Pharisees were extremely zealous for the law, separating themselves for this exclusive purpose. Over time, this originally noble purpose devolved into a rigid, exclusivist sect, separating themselves from foreigners, heretics, or base people, manufacturing strict, repressive rules for the Sabbath; supporting and detailing the Temple service; and promoting strict observance of the tithing laws. As the teachers of the people, they held a great deal of power, which soon became corrupt, turning them into arrogant, desiccated legalists, ignoring the redemptive aspects of God's law. Pharisees sought after signs, interminably multiplied regulations concerning ceremonially clean and unclean, and developed elaborate regulations for washings, actually leading to the breaking of God's law.

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

### **[Living By Faith and God's Grace](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In nominal Christianity, God's saving grace is placed at the center of the message of the gospel and is often emphasized to the point of overshadowing

many of Christ's other teachings. Agreeing that grace is vital to a Christian's walk with God, John Ritenbaugh defines the term, showing that God gives grace from start to finish in a person's relationship with Him. It cannot be limited merely to justification and His forgiveness of our sins.

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