

## Why Is It That So Many Do Not Believe In The Lord Jesus Christ?

Text: John 8:46-59

Suggested Hymns:

70, 173, 175, 356, 615

1) Because They Do Not Want To Hear The Truth

2) Because They Despise The Lord's Grace

3) Because Christ's Divinity Is Foolishness To Them.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is John 8:46–59, ***46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.***

***48 Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death."***

***52 Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"***

***54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word.***

***56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." 59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by. (NKJV)***

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

*“Why do you not believe Me?”* This question is asked by the Lord Jesus in our Gospel. The Jews to whom the question was put answered with scorn and denunciation. In our days people generally couch their answer to this question in polite words.

If you ask an unbeliever, *Why do you not believe in the Lord Jesus?* he will most likely say, *“I cannot; I would like to, but I am sorry to say, I cannot.”*

Some years ago a pastor had a conversation with a man on a train. The man told him that nearly all the highly educated men that make the laws of the land were unbelievers, and that he, too, was an unbeliever, but that he was not happy in that state.

His mother was a devout Christian, and he knew that she was a happy woman. But as for himself, he could not believe the Christian doctrine, though he desired very much that he could do so and be a happy man.

But in the course of the conversation it developed what the man's trouble was. It was that he had contrived for himself an obstacle to keep him from the faith. He had fixed in his mind the idea that to be a faithful believer you must be ignorant to a certain extent and prone to superstition. So he preferred to be an unbeliever and to claim for himself the name of a highly educated man who was no more bound with the ties of old traditions and superstitions of bygone days.

Let us not be deceived by these pretensions of unbelievers when they say that they would like to believe in the Lord Jesus, but that they could not, because they were too highly educated, they knew too much, they had made a thorough study of the laws of nature, had travelled and seen so much of the world, and the like.

Among the greatest men, the most profound thinkers, the wisest statesmen, the highest men in literature, there always have been, and there are to this day professed Christians.

Learning and education are not barriers against the Christian faith. The true cause of unbelief is always to be sought in man's will. A person may think that he does not believe because he cannot on account of his own convictions to the contrary, but if he will examine his own heart honestly and sincerely, he will

always find that he does not like to part with some pet sin, or that he is loath to put up with some things that true believers must endure.

This is shown in our Gospel by the example of the Jews with whom Jesus disputed in the temple. Let us, therefore, consider, with help of God's Holy Spirit, the question, *Why Is It That So Many Do Not Believe In The Lord Jesus Christ?* May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. They Do Not Believe Because They Do Not Want To Hear The Truth.**

In the third article of the Creed we confess according to our Catechism, "*I believe that I cannot by my own reason and strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him.*"

This means that natural man cannot by his own natural power decide for Christ and himself make up his mind to believe. But it does not mean that such natural inability may be tendered as an excuse and that it could not be overcome. The root and source of this inability lies in man's perverted will. He cannot believe because he does not want to believe.

This is clearly shown in our Gospel. Christ says to the Jews, "<sup>46</sup>*Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?*" The Jews did not want to hear the truth, as Jesus testifies here. He asks, *Which of you convicts Me of sin?* He had lived among them. They had closely watched His deeds and sayings. Now they should bear witness to the truth and own the truth.

They should either name and prove a sin which He did, or openly confess His sinlessness and believe Him. Do they convict Him of sin? They know that they cannot. Do they, then, admit His holiness? They do not. By such conduct they prove that they are opposed to the truth and do not want to hear the truth, and for that very reason do not believe in the Lord Jesus.

Christ says, furthermore, "<sup>47</sup>*He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.*" They had God's words, the Law and the prophets. Both Moses and the prophets wrote of the Messiah and His works, and Jesus did exactly the works which the Messiah was to perform.

Why did the Jews not pay any attention to that? Jesus proved His sayings by the Scriptures of the Old Testament; He Himself spoke the Word of God. Why did they not listen to Him? They show by such conduct that they are enemies of the truth, and for that reason do not believe in the Lord Jesus.

Yes, they resort to lies and blasphemy. For we are told, ***“Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?”*** They cannot answer the Lord’s questions, their conscience pricks, they know that they are doing wrong; still, from pure hatred they will not admit this, and they give vent to their ill feeling by uttering blasphemy. Did these Jews have any excuse for their unbelief? Certainly not! They did not want to hear the truth.

And to this day why is it that so many who possess the Bible and live among Christians cannot believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it because they are too well educated, too far advanced in wisdom and knowledge, too much enlightened? That claim is persistently made by their supporters. But facts are stubborn things, and the fact is that some of the greatest thinkers were Christians.

Why, then, do learned men among the unbelievers not believe? Certainly not because of their high intellectual standing, but because they do not want to hear the truth. Christ’s sinlessness, His divine works, His precious Gospel is before them, they cannot dispute it, it is attested by better evidence than any historical fact which they themselves believe. Why are they so ready to believe almost any theory that opposes religion, and so eager to discredit the Gospel? The fault lies in their own sinful heart which cannot bear the truth.

Furthermore, if these unbelievers, as they often claim, would like to believe if only they could, why do they not hear the Word of God, through which faith is planted in the heart? Why do they shun the preaching of the Word? Why do they not read the Bible?

Must not Christ say to them the same words which He spoke to the Jews, ***“He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God”***? Do they not show by such indifference that they do not want to hear the truth?

Finally, such unbelievers resort to lies and blasphemy, and unscrupulously pervert the Word of God and denounce the Christian religion as fraud and hypocrisy. That is why they cannot believe in the Lord Jesus. Is it because of

their sincerity and conscientiousness? No; like those unyielding Jews, with whom Christ disputed in the temple, they do not want the truth.

## **2. They Do Not Believe Because They Despise The Lord's Grace.**

The second reason why so many cannot believe in the Lord Jesus is because they despise the Lord's grace. We read, *"<sup>49</sup> Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My Father, and you dishonor Me. <sup>50</sup> And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges."*

These Jews dishonoured Jesus. They had made up their minds that this man should not be their Messiah, and they opposed Him all the more, because all the indications were in His favour.

In their council they said, *"What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. <sup>48</sup> If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."*<sup>51</sup>

They would not humble themselves under this man Jesus, who claimed to be the Messiah, and was not such a Messiah as they expected, not a great worldly ruler, who could smite the nations and establish the throne of David. They were too proud and worldly-minded to accept His grace and to receive from Him eternal life.

When, therefore, Jesus said to them, *"<sup>51</sup> Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death"* then the Jews said to Him, *"Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' <sup>53</sup> Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?"*

Note how angry they get when Jesus speaks of eternal life, to be received by the keeping of His saying, that is, by faith in Him! Look how they pervert the words of His mouth and construe them as if He was speaking of natural death! Look how they despise His grace and mercy! It is apparent, they are too proud, too self-righteous to humble themselves and to receive eternal life as a gift of His grace, by faith in Him. Hence their unbelief.

And, to this day, why is it that so many cannot believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it not because they are self-righteous and expect to get to heaven by their own good works and righteousness? Is it not because they despise the Lord's grace?

They are puffed up with pride, with egotism, with arrogance, and conceitedness. Is it, then, to be wondered at, that they despise the Lord's grace and cannot believe? To such people the doctrine of justification by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is foolishness.

They are too proud to admit that they are damnable sinners. It is too degrading for them to think so low and little of themselves. They are too proud to humble themselves before their divine Maker.

They will even criticise His doings, His works in nature, His dealings with mankind, and prescribe to the Almighty how He must rule the universe. They are too proud to receive eternal life as a gift of God's grace and mercy.

If still they believe in a Supreme Being and a future world, they expect to get there by their own efforts, by their good behaviour in this life, by their own virtues, by doing what they themselves consider to be right and pleasing to the Creator.

But a Saviour of sinners they despise and the blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, which flowed also for them, they tread under foot. They despise the Lord's grace. And that is the true reason why they cannot believe.

### **3. They Do Not Believe Because Christ's Divinity Is Foolishness To Them.**

But there is one thing in particular which is especially objectionable to an unbeliever, and that is Christ's divinity.

At the end of our Gospel we read, "*If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God.*" <sup>55</sup> *Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word.*

<sup>56</sup> *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*" <sup>57</sup> *Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"* <sup>58</sup> *Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."*

Here Christ attests His divinity. He says that Abraham rejoiced to see His day, believing in Him as the Seed in whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. The Jews well understood the meaning of these words.

Scornfully they retort, ***“You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”*** <sup>58</sup> ***Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.”***

Our English Bible reads, ***“Before Abraham was,”*** but the exact translation is, ***“Before Abraham was made.”*** This implies that Abraham was a creature of God. And in opposition to that Christ says, ***“I AM,”*** and this implies that Christ is not a creature, that He is eternal, that He is God.

This is just as plain as when He says, ***“All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.”***<sup>2</sup> This is just as plain as when St. Paul says, ***“Christ is God blessed forever;”***<sup>3</sup> or as plain as when St. John says, ***“This [Jesus Christ] is the true God and eternal life.”***<sup>4</sup>

And what response do the Jews make? ***“<sup>59</sup> Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”*** They cannot find words with which to express their disgust. They want to stone Jesus as a blasphemer. It was the assertion of His divinity which enraged them and made them act like madmen.

Why is it, to this day, that so many people cannot believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it not because Christ’s divinity is utter foolishness and such a great stumbling-block to them? Like the Jews in our Gospel they make Him the greatest liar and impostor that ever lived.

There is a class of unbelievers who claim to be Christ’s true disciples and say that they walk in the footsteps of Christ, proclaiming the Gospel of love, while, at the same time, they deny His miracles, His divinity, His redemption, and all the essentials of the Gospel truth. What an absurdity to claim the Christian name, and yet deny Christ!

Others, more true to the evil designs of their wicked hearts, say, Jesus was led to proclaim Himself the Son of God and the Lord’s Anointed from human weakness, being intoxicated with the homage paid to Him by His disciples.

Why, then, can these unbelievers not believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it because they are so conscientious concerning the Gospel truth? No, it is because the Gospel is foolishness to them, because they harbour ill feelings in their own hearts against the divine Lord, and will not concede His divinity, in spite of overwhelming evidences.

Let us not be deceived by the arguments of unbelievers, when they say that they feel sorry because they could not believe in the Lord Jesus.

Whoever is sorry for his unbelief, in him God has already begun His work; and his sorrow, if true, will soon turn into joy and saving faith.

May the Lord grant to us all, His grace that we may not resist His Holy Spirit, but yield to the life-giving power of His Word, and believe with all our soul in Jesus who has bought us with His own precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> John 11:47-48

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 28:18

<sup>3</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:31

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 5:20