



Sermon Outline: Causes of Unbelief John 20:17-31 by Mark Dunagan

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

INTRODUCTION:

1. What would cause a person to end up in a condition where they distrust God?
2. How can we help them and how can we help each other avoid such a state?
3. Unbelief is an ever present danger (**Hebrews 3:12**). The eternal consequences of unbelief cry out for teaching on this subject (**Mark 16:16**; **Revelation 21:8**).

DISCUSSION:

I. Definition of Terms:

When we look at the various Greek words translated 'unbelief' in the New Testament we find the following concepts:

A. UNBELIEF = DISOBEDIENCE: JOHN 3:36

1. 'OBEYETH NOT' (KJV 'Believeth not'). To refuse to be persuaded, to refuse belief, disobedient. (Vine p. 319)
2. Not to allow oneself to be persuaded, not to comply with, to refuse or withhold belief. (Thayer p. 57)
3. Unbelief then can be viewed from the angle of willfully rejecting the evidence that should 'convince' any honest person.
4. Jesus would agree that enough evidence exists to make 'unbelief' inexcusable. (**John 20:27**; **Romans 11:23**).

B. UNBELIEF = THE PERSON WHO CANNOT TRUST GOD: JOHN 20:27

1. 'FAITHLESS' - without faith or trust.
2. Unbelief is also the condition of one that cannot allow themselves to trust God. Either they don't think He exists, or something has persuaded them that God is untrustworthy (not worthy of my trust).
3. Unbelief is lacking confidence in God.

II. Cause #1: Religious Division:

Some people reject Christianity because 'Christianity appears to be divided, divisive, contradictory and hopelessly confused'.

A. The world is filled with many "Christian" religious bodies

1. Each religious body is claiming to be part of Christianity and yet each is contradicting the other.
2. It may be surprising to some, to find out what the Bible actually says on this point:
 - a. Jesus prayed for unity among His immediate followers and those that would be converted through the message preached by the apostles (**JOHN 17:20-21**).

- b. By inspiration, Paul condemns religious division (**1 CORINTHIANS 1:10**)
- c. The Bible predicts religious division coming upon Christianity (**ACTS 20:30; 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3; 2 TIMOTHY 4:2-4**).

B. Conclusion:

- 1. **The divided religious world is not the will of God.** Don't blame God for that, blame man. (**I Corinthians 14:33**)
- 2. **The presence of religious division in the world today only confirms the truthfulness of the Bible.**
- 3. **The world of "unbelief" is just as divided!** Skeptics, atheists, agnostics, evolutionists, etc., are divided and in disagreement among themselves on many topics.

III. Cause #2: Faith in others shattered, trust betrayed:

A. Christians didn't come through for them.

- 1. Some turn to unbelief after having been 'hurt, let down, abused' by people that professed Christianity.
- 2. For some reason we tend to blame God when people hurt us. (**Mark 9:17-29, Mark 9:18, 24, 28-29**)
 - a. One writer said: 'A sexually abused woman once told me, "When God did not intervene to stop the abuser, He lost any right to require me to do anything. He owes me; I owe Him nothing' (**Bold Love**, p70, Dr. Dan B. Allender)
 - b. The writer made the following comments: "*Our thoughts run along this course: If only you understood the unbelievably tough decisions I am called to make everyday, you would not hold me accountable to make any more ... even more, if you only understood how much I've been hurt, neglected, and abused, you would know that God requires little or ... nothing from me.*"

B. YET WE WANT IT BOTH WAYS:

- 1. We want to be let off the hook for our own sins, mistakes, and weaknesses. We want to be able to casually dismiss them.
 - a. We want them all excused and we expect (demand) that others agree.
 - b. We don't want to be held accountable for our sins!
- 2. And yet we DEMAND everyone else to be held accountable! While we are arguing "imperfection" for ourselves we are demanding "perfection" in others.

C. HOW OFTEN HAVE WE PLAYED THIS PART - MATTHEW 18:23-35? Like the unmerciful servant in the above parable:

- 1. We desire, plead for forgiveness and mercy for ourselves (**18:25-27**).
- 2. We turn around and have no patience or forgiveness for anyone else, for someone we feel that OWES US! (**18:30**).
- 3. When I allow the sin and imperfections of Christians to move me away from God; **in reality I AM NOT WILLING TO EXTEND MERCY.**
 - a. I AM UNWILLING TO TREAT OTHERS IN THE SAME MANNER THAT GOD HAS TREATED ME. (**COLOSSIANS 3:13**).
 - b. I have truly forgotten MY OWN SINS!

IV.Cause #3: Life is so Unfair:

A.Why do the innocent suffer?... causes some to abandon trust in God

1. Why does God allow bad things to happen to 'good people'?
2. Why did God allow that person to hurt me... and like arguments cause some to abandon trust in God

B.When people ask such questions, they usually have forgotten a tremendous truth.. "WHY DOES GOD ALLOW ME?" (ROMANS 3:9; 1 PETER 2:24; TITUS 3:3):

1. EACH ONE OF US HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE 'UNFAIRNESS' OF THIS LIFE...we all have sinned, we all have hurt someone else in some way. And...
2. JESUS SUFFERED THE PUNISHMENT DUE FOR OUR SINS TOO! Was that fair?

V. Cause #4: Freedom from Moral Responsibility:

A.Moral Freedom

1. Aldous Huxley once argued that belief in God and viewing the world as having meaning were hindrances to sexual freedom.
2. Some people are so 'into themselves, wrapped up in their own needs and desires' that anyone that would stand in their pursuit of what they think will bring happiness is rejected. (2 TIMOTHY 3:2-4).

B.Really means God cannot be trusted:

1. People who think that God 'hinders' their personal happiness have accepted the premise that 'GOD CANNOT BE TRUSTED TO BRING HAPPINESS'
2. **LUKE 8:14** - 'Cares, riches, and pleasures' all become problems when we have lost confidence in God.
3. 'I cannot bring myself to trust God enough to hand over my cares to Him...
4. I cannot trust God enough to depend upon Him for my physical needs (**Matthew 6:33**)
5. I don't trust God to the point that I am willing to entrust Him with my future and present happiness..
6. BUT MAN CAN.. LOOK AT MOSES (**HEBREWS 11:25**).

VI.Cause # 5: Human Pride:

A.Pride has caused man problems from day one.

1. **Psalm 119:21; Proverbs 6:16-17; 15:25; James 4:6**
2. God is so dead set against human pride because pride will exalt a man (in that man's mind) above God. (**Isaiah 2:12**).
 - a. "As nontheists, we begin with humans not God, nature not deity. We can discover no divine purpose or providence for the human species. While there is much that we do not know, humans are responsible for what we are or will become. No deity will save us; we must save ourselves" (**Humanist Manifesto**. p. 16)
 - b. "For there is one thing that man always has liked to feel.. that he is sufficient for all things.. that he is going to bring about a better world by his own ingenuity, that he is the greatest and highest and most important phenomenon in the world, and that beyond him there is nothing worth considering" (**Therefore Stand**. Wilbur M. Smith p. 151)

B. Some ways that pride manifests itself:

1. It sounds like someone is going to be telling me what to do: **Why do we become so stubborn and defiant when someone tries to offer us advice?**
2. **Faith systems devised by man: ROMANS 1:21-23**
3. **PRIDE DESIRES TO HAVE THE 'LINE ITEM VETO' IN YOUR LIFE.**
4. **PRIDE SAYS THAT GOD IS WRONG: PROVERBS 9:8; ROMANS 1:30**

CONCLUSION:

1. We can see that the 'causes of unbelief' are **'problems within man.. we're the one with the problem'**.
2. What is there about God that should cause one to distrust Him?
3. We are willing to admit that we are the sinners (**Luke 5:8**)? Trust/ faith begins when I realize the magnitude of my sins and the greatness of God's mercy... that God still wants ME to be one of His children..
4. Do we stand in awe of God's love? LET YOURSELF BE SILENCED BY HIS MERCY
Mark 16:15-16

— Mark Dunagan