

BELIEVE

WHAT DOES IT REALLY MEAN?



It is the most-often quoted text in the Bible. Let us look at it:

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. – **John 3:16**

We use this reference as a way to introduce unbelievers to the love of God for mankind, and this is correct. We use it to show that God the Father sent His Son on a mission to be the Saviour, and this is correct. We use it to show that if a person believes in Jesus Christ, he will be saved from damnation, and this is correct. We use it to show that the opposite of damnation is eternal life, and this is correct. However, this is also a very superficial way to interpret and apply the verse. While the entire verse is true and inspired by the Holy Spirit, uttered by Jesus Christ Himself, too many of us are stuck at the starting line. We have barely left the starting blocks yet. Starting the race is one thing; finishing it is quite something else.

We need to focus on two things before the other aspects will fall into perspective:

- A holy and sinless **God** – the Holy One who resides in Heaven
- A sinful **world** – not the planet, continents, countries and cities, but those who occupy them: you and me.

These two aspects are in total contrast to each other and cannot be aligned in any way but through salvation in Jesus Christ. The problem is that we have watered down, or diluted, the true meaning of **believing** in Jesus Christ. I can believe in Him as much as I like, but if there is no real, motivated change in me towards the holiness of God, then the work that He came to complete, means nothing. I cannot claim to believe in Him and at the same time remain part of a sinful world. Thus, to “believe in Him” requires a life of devotion and every effort to root out sin, and strive for holiness. Can we attain holiness in this life? We can, and we must:

¹⁵But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

¹⁶Because it is written, **Be ye holy; for I am holy.** – **1 Peter 1:15-16**

Peter makes it clear that because He who called us to eternal life is holy, we must be too, in every way. The word **conversation** here refers to your daily life and everything you do. He quotes from the Law:

⁴⁴For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore **sanctify** yourselves, and **ye shall be holy; for I am holy**: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. – **Leviticus 11:44**

We often apply **sanctification** only as one of the acts that follow our conversion (see <https://www.johnchapterthree.com/en/soteriology11>), but this was required a long time ago. Holiness is not a New Testament concept. Not striving for holiness in our lives means we are not running the race. Paul is adamant that without holiness, your faith is in vain:

¹⁴Follow peace with all men, and **holiness**, *without which* no man shall see the Lord. – **Hebrews 12:14**

What are the things in your life that are not holy? Holiness as indicated in the verses quoted does not mean walking around with a long face and spend your time isolated from others. It refers to a life lived among others, being light and salt, that is dedicated to staying off sin as it comes our way. The more we identify and remove sin from our lives, the more we attain holiness. Sin and holiness cannot walk side by side. It is either the one or the other.

There are two important aspects to remember: we must **identify** sin, and we must **remove** sin.

- We identify sin by comparing what the situation offers to what the Word of God says about it. Anything that is not in line with the Word of God is sin:

¹²For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a **discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart**. – **Hebrews 4:12**

Only the Word of God exposes sin. Even your own conscience will fail you if the Word is not applied in full.

- We remove sin by confessing it for what it is:

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹**If we confess our sins**, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. – **1 John 1:8-9**

CONCLUSION

John 3:16 provides the key to eternal life: to **believe** in Him. However, this is just the start. If we believe in Him, we will do what He requires us to do. From belief should follow a relentless drive (the race) towards attaining holiness (eternal life).

Do some practical work today. What is there in your life that you know is sin? Identify it and repent of it. It could be many things – the music you listen to; the programmes you watch; contact details stored on your mobile phone of someone you should have shaken off a long time ago; thoughts you carry of others that have hurt you; frustration because things are not going your way; things you desire to purchase that you really do not need and are not going to enrich your life in any way; the list is endless.

This is what Paul says about it right at the end of his life, in a very personal and moving letter to his protégé, Timothy:

⁷I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith:

⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. – **2 Timothy 4:7-8**

Stop. Remove. Set free. Accept. Be content. Confess. Believe. Finish the race.

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