

What Is a Believer?

David Flatt

God's people are referred to in a variety of ways in the Bible: disciples, Christians, brethren, saints. Sometimes, God's people are referred to as believers. Today, the term believer is frequently used to describe religious people in the broadest of terms. Religious researchers sometimes use this term to identify "non-practicing Christians." The description classifies people with the slightest bit of faith.

Biblically, what is a believer? What do they believe? How do their beliefs affect how they behave? Does this term apply to "non-practicing Christians"? Now, these questions have specific answers. Simply claiming to be a believer does not make one a believer.

Believers...

1. Have faith in God's existence and rule. The apostle Peter simply characterized saints as *believers in God* (1 Pet. 1:21). There is no more basic belief than God's existence. Believers acknowledge God as the Supreme Being who created life. This fundamental belief shapes how believers understand themselves in God's creation.

Belief in God is designed to prompt us to seek and serve God. Regarding the importance of faith, the Bible says, "without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him" (Heb. 11:6). Some may believe God exists but do not seek to serve Him. James wrote that even the demons believe and tremble (Jas. 2:19). The passage in Hebrews teaches us how belief and action are required to gain God's reward.

2. Have faith in Jesus as God's Son. We cannot be true believers in God unless we believe that Jesus is His Son. We cannot believe in God; yet, ignore Jesus. Notice how John the baptizer taught the necessity of belief in Jesus as God's Son: "Whoever receives his testimony sets his seal to this, that God is true. For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him" (John 3:33-36).

Openly acknowledging our belief in God is mostly tolerated. However, open acknowledgments of Jesus are not nearly as welcomed in our society. Belief in God is general; whereas, belief in Jesus is narrow and specific. Belief in God is humble; whereas, belief in Jesus is considered by some as fanatical. As John taught, we cannot separate God from Jesus. To receive one, we must receive the other. If we believe in God, we must believe that He sent us Jesus as our Savior. We must believe in the message of Jesus.

3. Believe God raised Jesus from the dead. For some, their belief ends at the resurrection of Jesus. They are willing to believe in God and that Jesus was a real person; however, dead men

do not rise. Without question, believing that a dead man has risen is difficult to accept. Bodily resurrection goes against everything we see and know.

For this reason, the resurrected Jesus was witnessed. These witnesses testified to what they saw, heard, and even touched. With this testimony, we can make an informed decision about Jesus' resurrection. When resurrection evidence was presented to some in the city of Corinth, they believed (1 Cor. 15:1-8). The faith of believers is not wishful thinking, but reasoned thought based on evidence.

The resurrection of Jesus is intended to solidify our belief in God and in Jesus' ability to save us from eternal death. As Peter explains, true believers recognize how these tenets of faith work together: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet. 1:20-21).

4. Are shaped by their beliefs. Belief in God and the resurrection of His Son, Jesus, compels believers to obey the Gospel. For example, after learning the Servant of the Lord died as an atonement for sin, a man from Ethiopia wanted to be baptized for the forgiveness of his sins. Philip, the man teaching the Ethiopian, told him, "...If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest..." (Acts 8:37). The Ethiopian expressed his belief and was baptized.

After being baptized, the faith of believers continues to grow. They purpose to become more like Jesus. They learn the responsibilities of their new life. By the word of God, they examine the intentions of their hearts and pursue purity. They are motivated by their love of God and the hope of eternal life. With this in mind, John wrote, "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

5. Are guided by the Bible. A believer is someone who has an abiding faith in the truth revealed in the Bible. The Bible presents God as our Creator. The Bible shows what He did for us through Jesus. The Bible reveals what God plans to do in the future. Believers are guided by the Scriptures in how they live. Peter wrote that believers purify themselves through obedience to the truth and a genuine love of God's family (1 Pet. 1:22). Living according to the Bible ensures believers of God's approval and gives them confidence in their salvation.

Conclusion

The term "believer" is much more than just a politically correct term used by religious researchers. The term surely does not describe "non-practicing Christians." A believer is someone who is committed to God. Sometimes believers doubt. Sometimes believers fail in being like Jesus. However, by the power of God's word and the help of fellow believers, they persevere.