

# What About...

## Do People Believe What They Want to Believe?

By Dave DeWitt



On Wednesday, August 2, 2023, during his YouTube program “The No Spin News,” Bill O’Reilly said, “People believe what they want to believe.” It was in response to a write-in question that was along the lines of, “How can a third of the country support the current liberal progressive agenda?” O’Reilly repeatedly answered, “People believe what they want to believe.” Now, O’Reilly is a smart guy. So I was amazed at this ridiculous answer.

Most people believe they are going to die. Is that because they want to believe it? I suggest it is because they understand the statistics say death is 100%. What they want to believe has nothing to do with what they believe. If a person is facing a serious medical diagnosis, or an IRS audit, they probably believe it, but that does not mean they want to believe it.

Some think, “If I want to believe something enough, that desire will help me believe it.” No, it won’t! I am not saying it is bad to get your belief from what you want to believe, I am saying it is impossible. You can only believe anything you believe when something causes you to understand it to be true. That understanding could be right, it could be wrong, it could be some ridiculous nonsense. Nonetheless, it must be understood to be true, in order to generate belief. We believe when we understand something to be true, and when we understand something to be true, we cannot help but believe it.

Even if what we want to believe and what we believe coincide, what we want does not generate belief. Ever! Let’s say a newlywed couple want a baby. That means they also want to believe they will have a baby. Then suppose they find out the wife is pregnant. At that point, they both want to believe and actually believe they are going to have a baby. But did that actual belief come from what they wanted to believe? Of course not! They now believe they are having a baby because they understand something about the natural laws of conception. What they wanted to believe had no influence whatsoever on what they actually believe. What they actually believe is only connected to what they understand to be true. What they believed changed when they understood that the report of the wife’s pregnancy was true. What they wanted to believe would not change whether the wife became pregnant or not.

When I drive my car to work, I believe my car will also get me home from work. But I also want to believe my car will get me home. I have both desire and belief. But if I get in with my key and it will not start, my belief that my car will get me home is greatly reduced. At the same time, I still want to believe my car will get me home. But I cannot believe it. What I want to believe remains the same, because it is disconnected from what I actually believe. And that is because the two never were connected. What I actually believe about my car getting me home has to do with my (limited) understanding of the mechanical condition of my car, not what I want to believe. My desire has no connection to my belief.

The O’Reilly comment assumes that liberal progressives believe what they want to believe because they are disconnected from reality. He is saying that liberal people believe what they believe, not because they are looking at things rationally, but simply because they want to believe those things.

Now let’s apply O’Reilly’s idea to biblical Christianity. If “people believe what they want to believe,” then Christians who believe the Bible only believe it because they want to. O’Reilly is saying there is no necessary connection between belief and understanding the truth. The O’Reilly comment applied to Christianity reduces belief, say, in the resurrection of Christ, the gospel message, and the infallibility of the Scripture to be only something Christians “want to believe.” Those things do not have to be real, they can just be what weak-minded people (like liberal progressives or Christians) want to believe.

In the Bible, the word **believe** never refers to something generated by what somebody wants to believe. **In the Bible believing is always understanding the truth to be true.**

• **Genesis 15:6**, *Then he **believed** in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Abraham's belief was connected to what he understood to be true, not what he wanted to believe.

• **Numbers 14:11**, *The LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people spurn Me? And how long will they not **believe** in Me, despite all the signs which I have performed in their midst?"*

The Israelites were to believe based on understanding the evidence from all the signs which God provided. Their belief had nothing to do with what they wanted to believe.

• **Isaiah 43:10**, *So that you may know and **believe** Me and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, and there will be none after Me.*

Belief that God is the only God is what we know and understand, not what we want to believe.

• **John 4:42**, *and they were saying to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we **believe**, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world."*

The men of Samaria believed, based on what they heard and knew, not what they wanted to believe.

• **John 8:46**, *If I speak truth, why do you not **believe** Me?*

Jesus said the Jews were to believe, based on an understanding that He spoke the truth. What they wanted to believe, or did not want to believe, had nothing to do with it.

• **John 9:18**, *The Jews then did not **believe** it of him, that he had been blind and had received sight, until they called the parents of the very one who had received his sight.*

The Jews did not want to believe the former blind man had been healed but were forced to believe it based on the evidence. What they ended up believing was the opposite of what they wanted to believe.

• **John 10:38**, *...though you do not **believe** Me, **believe** the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father.*

Jesus described belief as what they may know and understand, not what they wanted to believe.

• **John 14:11**, ***Believe** Me that I am in the Father*

*and the Father is in Me; otherwise **believe** because of the works themselves.*

Jesus said belief is based on the evidence of His works, wanting to believe has nothing to do with it.

• **John 20:25, 29, 31**, *So the other disciples were saying to him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not **believe**." ...Because you have seen Me, have you **believed**? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet **believed**...these have been written so that you may **believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.*

The belief of Thomas, like that of all the apostles, was based on understanding the evidence provided by the presence of Jesus risen from the dead. Jesus said the rest of us, who have not seen His resurrected body, are blessed. John said it is because we can believe based on the evidence John provided in his Gospel account. What we (or the apostles) want to believe has nothing to do with it.

• **Acts 28:24**, *Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not believe.*

Those who believed Paul, believed because they were being persuaded, not because they wanted to.

• **Romans 10:14**, *How will they **believe** in Him whom they have not heard?*

Belief is based on understanding what is heard, not on wanting to believe.

• **1 Timothy 4:3**, *...those who **believe** and know the truth.*

Belief is connected to knowing the truth (the way things actually are) not what people want to believe.

• **1 John 4:1**, *Beloved, do not **believe** every spirit, but test the spirits*

Belief is based on what we test, not what we want to believe.

• **Acts 28:24**, *Some were being persuaded by the things spoken, but others would not **believe**.*

Belief was being persuaded. What people wanted to believe had nothing to do with their belief.

• **2 Timothy 1:12**, *I know whom I have **believed** and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.*

What Paul believed was based on being convinced (understanding the truth) through knowledge. Whatever he wanted to believe was completely disconnected from what he believed.