

## DEALING WITH DOUBT

Many, if not most Christians reared in Christian homes are embarrassed to confess that there have been times they have had doubts. There is no need to become fearful that they may have committed the unpardonable sin. Doubt is not denying God's existence or the salvation He provides; it is belief that asks questions in order to convince themselves that they believe what they confess to believe, not to aid unbelief. Perhaps for some of you, this doubt has become a storm that has rocked your proverbial boat. Let us claim Isaiah 30:15 before we go further, *"For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength...."*

In the November, 2010 issue of Christianity Today, Drew Dyck wrote an alarming article entitled, *The Leavers: Young Doubters Exit the Church*, More than in previous generations, 20- and 30-somethings are abandoning the faith. Why? He says, "There has been a corresponding drop in church involvement. According to Rainer Research, approximately 70 percent of American youth drop out of church between the age of 18 and 22. The Barna Group estimates that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be "disengaged" by the time they are 29." Toward the ending of his article, Dyck remarked about an unsettling pattern that emerged in his interviews of former professing Christians, "Almost to a person, the leavers with whom I spoke recalled that, before leaving the faith, they were regularly shut down when they expressed doubts. Some were ridiculed in front of peers for asking 'insolent questions.' Others reported receiving trite answers to vexing questions and being scolded for not accepting them. One was slapped in the face, literally. At the 2008 American Sociological Association meeting, scholars from the University of Connecticut and Oregon State University reported that 'the most frequently mentioned role of Christians in de-conversion was in amplifying existing doubt.' De-converts reported 'sharing their burgeoning doubts with a Christian friend or family member only to receive trite, unhelpful answers.'"

There are answers to stem the tide. I am praying and believing God for a revival and resurgence of the *"...faith once delivered unto the saints..."* (Jude, verse 3). To see this reality, I am convinced we must follow the command of the Scripture which tells us, *"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear"* (1 Peter 3:15).

A Christian must place a premium on the absolute truth and trustworthiness of God. His goal should be to align his or her thinking process to the same criteria of truth. We, as the followers of Jesus, desire with all of our hearts to know truth, searching the Scriptures to find the answers. We do not believe that because we are disciples of Christ we must leave our brain outside the church or outside of our belief system. I appreciate

what the ancient Augustine said, "Not only does a Christian believe, he is a person who thinks in believing and believes in thinking."

What is doubt as we find it in the Bible and how do we deal with it?

### **1. Doubt is being in two minds.**

In Mark 11:23 Jesus said, *"For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith."* The Greek word for "doubt" in this Scripture is "διακρίνω" (diakrino) which means to separate thoroughly, to oppose; to hesitate, contend, doubt, judge, stagger, waver. It is a meaning that expresses an inner state of mind so torn between various options that it cannot make up its mind. James 1: 6 and 8 say it like this: *"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed...A double minded man is unstable in all his ways."* The word "wavereth" is again from the word "διακρίνω" (diakrino) and the word "double-minded" is translated from the word "δίψυχος" (dipsukos) which means two-spirited (chronically double-minded) i.e. vacillating in opinion or purpose.

Our English word "doubt" comes from the Latin "dubitare" which is rooted in an Aryan word meaning "two." So we can start by defining our terms like this: to believe is to be "in one mind" about accepting something as true; to disbelieve is to be "in another mind" about rejecting it. To doubt is to waver between the two, to believe and disbelieve at once and so to be "in two minds." This two-ness or double-ness is the nerve center of doubt and represents our deepest dilemma about it. The heart of doubt is a divided heart. This is not just a metaphor; it is the essence of the biblical view of doubt. Human language and experience from all around the world also bear it out. In English, this double-ness is pictured in phrases such as "having a foot in both camps." Os Guinness in his book, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* points out, "There are many equivalent (to express doubts) in other languages. The Chinese picture of irresolution is humorous as well as graphic. They speak of a person "having a foot in two boats." In the Purvian Andes the Huanco Quechuas speak of "having two thoughts."

We do not understand to believe; we believe to understand. We set our love upon God; believe Him through the doubts and He will reward us with confidence and assurance. Paul's intense prayer was: *"That I may know Him..."* (Philippians 3:10). Let's make that our prayer as well.

### **2. Doubt is like being suspended in mid-air.**

Jesus said in Luke 12:29, *"...neither be ye of doubtful mind."* The Greek word for "doubtful mind" in this verse is "μετεωρίζω" (meteorizo). This is the root origin of our word "meteor." Literally rendered, it means to raise in mid-air, i.e. (figuratively) to

suspend. The best example I can give you is the feeling I received when I was a kid and the giant Ferris wheel we were riding came close to the top and suddenly stopped and rocked our seat back and forth. My only comfort was knowing that, directly, we were going to proceed with the ride and eventually be safely lowered to the ground. Emotionally this is what many a youth is experiencing who is going through doubt -- they are suspended in mid-air. It is the pain of non-resolution and spiritually troubled due to the suspense of not knowing.

### **3. Doubt is an inner argument.**

The Risen Lord was still dealing with some doubtful believers and He asked, *"...Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?"* (Luke 24:38). The Greek word for "thoughts" is "διαλογισμός" (dialogismos) meaning: "a man with an inward debate, the thinking of a man deliberating with and arguing with himself." In Luke 24: 37, it says, *"But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit."* Then he asked them for something to eat. This ended their doubts as to His identity. Remember, Thomas said, *"... Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). Eight days later, Jesus walks into a room without opening a door, *"Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God"* (John 20:27, 28). In all of inspired Holy Scripture, you will not find a more dogmatic statement affirming the Deity of Christ. And who gave this declaration? The man often referred to as "Doubting Thomas." God doesn't give up on the doubter. He wants to end your inner arguments. Jesus said following this incident, *"...because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"* (John 20: 29). Our Lord challenges us to stop arguing within ourselves and believe.

### **4. Doubt is faltering.**

Peter walked on the water with Jesus, but soon he looked at the turbulent waves around him and began to sink. The Lord extended His hand and pulled him up and asked, *"...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"* (Matthew 14:31). Here our Lord uses "διστάζω" (distazo), meaning to falter, to hold back and to distance oneself. Don't believe your doubts and doubt your beliefs; believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts! The essence of faith is described in Hebrews 11:1, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."* If we can see it, faith is not required. This is why we are commanded to *"...walk by faith, not by sight"* (II Corinthians 5:7).

In conclusion, what can deliver us from being in two minds, suspended in mid-air, carrying on an inner argument and faltering? The answer is found in I Corinthians 13:13, *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is*

*charity.*" (Charity is God's agape love). Paul told Timothy, a young man reared in the faith, *"If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself"* (II Timothy 2:13). This means God can no more deny a believer who doubts than He can deny His Son who took that believer's place on the cross. *"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31). Jeremiah said, *"...great is thy faithfulness"* (Lamentations 3:23)! Our response to faith and hope (the two intangible unseens) is love. We lovingly give our belief from a heart of trust. God's response to our faith is more faith and more hope. *"...In thy light shall we see light"* (Psalm 36:9).

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in black ink and features a long, horizontal flourish extending to the right from the end of the name.