

DELIVERANCE FROM 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 you 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 yourself that you believe what you 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..." One of the most honest statements found in Scripture has to be the words of an exasperated man who had a child that needed help: "...the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark 9:24). Our Lord did not rebuke the man for his doubts, but took what little faith he had and invested that in the miracle he longed for. Jesus said in Matthew 17:20b, "...verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you." Mountain moving faith does not begin like a mighty cedar of Lebanon; it starts out as a mustard seed, the smallest of the seeds.

I once asked someone reared up in church, but now was flirting with agnosticism, "Did you decide to disbelieve because your doubts were genuine, or was it to give yourself permission to not be accountable to God so that you may live your life according to your own sinful dictates?" This person paused and said, "I don't really know." You see, if there is no God, there are no absolutes. Right and wrong become relative and people live as they did in the time of the judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6).

On the other hand, there are sincere people who have entered the dark night of their soul, because they really have doubts. Researcher Drew Dyck reported, "Almost to a person, the leavers (young adults who left the church) 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." It is this person for whom I address this article.

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 become a 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” (I 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 equivalents (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." This is where we get our word "dialogue" from. Luke 24:37 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. Peter said it best when he said, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (I Peter 1:8). John 1:4 says, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men." "...In thy light shall we see light" (Psalm 36:9). If we obey the Light that is given to us, He will give us more light. Therefore, if you are in the darkness of doubt, walk toward the Light. It is at this point you shall find deliverance from darkness. "...That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (I Peter 2:9b).

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnny Pope". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.