

Sunday, November 26, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (61)

Challenges

Dealing of Doubts

As we continue our theme for 2022-23, we have been addressing some challenges. Thus far we have discussed worldliness, materialism, busyness and discouragement. Today, we want to address another challenge – doubt. It is something that most, if not all, of us struggle with from time to time. We may question ourselves (our abilities or who we are), others (we lack confidence in them for varying reasons), or even spiritual teachings (Who is God? Am I saved? Is the Bible really the word of God? What if I'm wrong? Etc.). Doubting can hinder our pursuit of closeness to God. So what we can when we face doubts?

I. Concerning doubt

- a. What is doubt? Simply stated, it is uncertainty about whether or not something is true or not. Spiritual doubt has to do with our faith.
- b. The prevalence of doubt
 - i. As with every other challenge we have addressed, this one is prevalent without our society as well. Certainly, there are material doubts and lack of trust because of so much brokenness around us. Spiritually, we are living in a time where questioning the existence of God, who Jesus was and whether or not the Bible is inspired continues to rise. Our media, social media, internet, many in our education system, lawmakers and liberal theology (which is the study of God and religion) have attacked our faith from every side. And it has always been that way.
 - ii. It is a tool of Satan. Consider that in the Bible the very first sin was after Satan planted doubt in Eve's mind. And every example of doubting is likely the product of Satan planting the seed.
 - iii. Doubt erodes trust, and if someone is prone to doubting, they will be hesitant to trust anyone at any time.
- c. There are different levels of doubt
 - i. There is **unbelief** – this is one who doubts to the point of rejection. He is in a state that nothing will convince him of the truth.
 1. This is the “wayside” in the parable of the Sower – Luke 8:12.
 2. Think of the religious leaders who scrutinized and rejected everything Jesus said and did. He would perform great miracles and live the LOM perfectly, but that is not what they wanted. So they killed Jesus.
 3. Matthew 13:58 - when Jesus was teaching in Nazareth, His hometown, He was rejected by many. Thus, He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief.
 - ii. There is **skepticism** – this is one who is ambivalent to answers. He doesn't know one way or the other, whether something is true. Often, unless someone presents irrefutable facts, he will not accept something. AND often they set a standard that is so high, it is almost unattainable. Further many are unwilling to investigate for themselves which means they are likely to stay skeptical. As such, they will remain in a state of unbelief as above.
 - iii. There is **momentary doubts**. The one who takes his eyes off the Lord because of some troubling situation. A characteristic of doubt involves weak faith – to whatever degree you doubt, there is weakness of faith.

1. Matthew 14:28-33 - Peter as he began to walk on water. He became afraid and began to sink. "Why did you doubt?"
 2. Luke 1:18 - Zacharias – he questions Gabriel who has told him that his wife Elizabeth would give birth to John. He questions God (at the time he was serving as priest).
 3. Luke 7:19-22 – John the Baptist – are you coming one...?
- iv. There is ***honest questions***. There are some who have doubts but they are honestly looking for the answers. They are not considering abandoning their faith (at least right now), but they want a better understanding.
1. John 20:24-29 - Thomas fits into this category, as we will note.
 2. Judges 6:11-13 – Gideon, seeing the oppression of Israel by the Midianites, is told by the Angel of the LORD and called for him to deliver Israel. He asks, "If the LORD is with us, why then has all this happened to us?"
- d. Dangers of doubt – There are dangers associated with doubt
- i. It can weaken your self-will. Often when we doubt, we are not willing to take necessary steps. It's a mindset that keeps you from even trying.
 - ii. It can lead to a poor view of yourself. Many because of doubts, especially failures either to act or something you have done, will despise themselves.
 - iii. It can cause us to put off taking action or taking a chance. How many do not talk to others about their faith because of doubts? How many fail to go to a brother with concerns because of doubts?
 - iv. It can lead to indecision – the double-minded man is often filled with doubts. James 1:6-8 – describes one who doubts as double-minded, unstable in all his ways. Ephesians 4:14 describes him as one "tossed to and fro and carried about by every wind of doctrine."
 - v. And, if unchecked it can lead one away from God. Hebrews 3:12 warns us to beware, lest an evil heart of unbelief appears and results in one departing from God.

II. The Bible and doubt

- a. We have noted a handful of Biblical examples that show what doubt can do.
- b. James 1:5 – when you pray, do so with no doubting.
- c. 1 Timothy 2:8 – Paul's desire that all men everywhere lift up holy hands without wrath and doubting.
- d. Romans 14:22-23 – to act when you doubt is sin.

III. Dealing with doubt

- a. It begins with attitude! Doubt is clearly in the mind, just like discouragement.
 - i. As we have noted, we all are faced with doubts from time to time. The question is: What will you do with them?
 - ii. Is doubt sinful? That depends on the type of doubts you have. AND it depends on how and if you act on it. It depends on what has led to your doubting?
 - iii. Understand that doubt is always the result of a weak faith! It may be momentary or much more.
- b. Deal with your doubt – do not ignore it.
 - i. Do not close your mind to an answer. That is when sin enters the picture.
 1. "Learn to doubt your doubts".
 2. Consider Thomas – John 20:24-25 - he is known as "doubting Thomas" because he told the other disciples he would not believe unless he saw the Lord himself and touched His wounds. BUT he was openminded enough to be with them the next Sunday. Consider, how was his doubts any different than the rest of the apostles? They didn't believe He arose until they saw Him, and even then "some doubted" (Matthew 28:17, cf. Luke 24:37 – even after appearances to many witnesses, when they saw Jesus that night, *they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit.*). While he doubted at first, Thomas was WILLING to investigate the

next Sunday. And when Thomas saw the evidence (the same as the others) he believed.

- ii. Search for answers – diligently.
 1. ***The key to overcoming doubt is knowledge.*** Romans 10:17 tell us that faith comes by hearing the word of God. We need to be studying - 2 Timothy 2:15, Ephesians 4:11-16 – do not forget this text is about grounding brethren in the word. Acts 17:11 what made the Bereans more “fair-minded”? They searched the scriptures. IF you have doubts about some subject, keep studying!
 2. ***Weigh the evidence and come to a conclusion!*** John 10:37-38, Jesus challenged His critics to consider His works, even if they did not believe Him.
 3. You don’t need all the answers to reach a conclusion. Consider Job – It is not recorded that God ever explained to Job what happened, but God knew! God did not give Abraham a reason when he told him to offer Isaac (Genesis 22).
- iii. Talk with someone on TRUST! Find someone you know you can confide with. Someone that will not judge you wrongfully. Someone with patience that can help guide you through your struggles.
- c. Don’t let doubts cause you to abandon what you DO know! Our faith is not blind. God has given us plenty of evidence to believe He is there and that the Bible is His word. Just because you do not have all the answers, does not mean there is not an answer. Cf. John 9:24-25. KEEP searching. As an example, if an evolutionist comes up with an argument that you cannot answer, does that mean there is no answer? Does that dismiss the multitudes of evidence for a designer, AND even more so the answers that naturalism cannot answer?
- d. Be humble and openminded - Honestly weigh the evidence. Matthew 13:13-16 – the Pharisees were closed minded which is why they refused to consider Him. They had preconceived notions and Jesus did not fit those.
- e. Don’t let doubts keep you from acting. Some people are satisfied to remain in ignorance. They don’t want to decide! If they have doubts about what the Bible teaches on a subject, they do not have to submit. 2 Timothy 3:6-8 describes those who were always learning but never coming to the truth.
- f. Pray about it – Mark 9:24, “Lord, I believe, help my unbelief.” James 1:5-9 – if you lack wisdom, ask!
- g. If there is sin in your life – repent. In spiritual matters, so often our doubts and other troubles of mind are there because we KNOW we are not what we ought to be in some area. That is why we doubt our faith, salvation or various established teachings. Acts 3:19 – repent and be converted; Acts 8:22, etc.
- h. Never stop growing – when it comes to doubts, with time you can grow out it.
- i. When one comes to you expressing doubts – do your best to help them. Do NOT be dismissive of what is on their minds, NOT belittle them because they “ought to know that”. If they have made themselves vulnerable to you, be there for them – 1 Thessalonians 5:14. Hebrews 12:12 – help to strengthen them.

Yes, doubt can be a challenge as we strive to draw closer to God. And one of 2 things will happen – it will either make you stronger or ravage your faith. And as with everything else, it depends on what you do with it. Genesis 4:6-7, the LORD spoke to Cain, *So the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.”* Is your faith where it ought to be? Think about it!