

PROBLEMS CHRISTIANS FACE

Dealing With Doubts

We are living in a very doubtful world. And the events over the past year or so have not help us resolve or even deal with that problem as a society. Everything about God and his word is called into question, sometimes by our own brethren.

A part of this is the product of a society that has taught us that we should question everything, especially authority and religion. And this comes with an education system, an entertainment industry and a government that have rejected the idea of a divine being greater than ourselves to whom we are accountable. We are bombarded with information that questions who we are and why are we here. Add to this the rampant immorality and worldliness around us, is it any wonder that from time to time we begin to question ourselves.

Personally, many, if not most of us, struggle with doubts of some sort from time to time. We may doubt ourselves (our ability to accomplish something, who we are, dwelling on our past failures), others (a lack of confidence), or even some spiritual fact (Who is God? Am I saved? Is the Bible really the word of God? What if I'm wrong? Questions about uncertainties such as suffering, eternal punishment, and evil. Or perhaps our faith is not what it ought to be.) For whatever reason, we have doubts. So what do we do about them?

I. What is doubt?

- a. Doubt is defined as, *A state of mind characterized by an absence of either assent or dissent to a certain proposition. It is a suspension of commitment to belief or disbelief, either because the evidence pro and con is evenly balanced (positive doubt) or because evidence is lacking for either side (negative doubt, exemplified by the apostle Thomas).*¹ In other words, there is uncertainty about whether or not something is true or false.
- b. There are different types of doubt:
 - i. **Honest questioning** - someone who doesn't understand something and genuinely wants the answer. This is one not considering abandoning their faith, but there are things they just want to better understand. This is Thomas that we will address in a few moments.
 - ii. **Skepticism** – this is one who is ambivalent to answers. He doesn't know one way or the other what the answer is and is likely not to commit unless something is answered to his satisfaction. This is where many are today. And it is a doubt that is usually spiritually unhealthy. Sometimes a standard is set so high, that it is almost impossible to attain.
 - iii. **Unbelief** – this is one who doubts what is said to the point of rejection. We read all about this type in the gospels as Jesus interacted with the religious leaders. He condemned their unbelief – Matthew 13:58 – Jesus did not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief; Hebrews 3:12 warns to beware lest an evil heart of unbelief appear and cause one to depart from God.
Many today doubt what God's word says simply because they do not like what God's word says.
- c. Our focus in this lesson is on the one who has honest doubts, though some of the recommendations can certainly be helpful with the other types of doubt if one is willing to honestly and objectively reason.

II. The Bible and doubts

¹ Beck, J. R. (1999). [Doubt](#). In D. G. Benner & P. C. Hill (Eds.), *Baker encyclopedia of psychology & counseling* (2nd ed., p. 367). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

- a. Thomas doubted – John 20:24-29. Perhaps the most prominent example of doubt. He refused to believe that Jesus was raised unless he saw Him and touched his wounds. The next Sunday he was able to. Jesus said to him, “Do not be unbelieving, but believe.”
- b. Peter doubted – Matthew 14:28-33. Jesus, walking on water, invites Peter to join him after he asks. Peter looks down and begins to sink. Jesus asked him, “Why did you doubt?”
- c. Other examples of doubt –
 - i. Zacharias – Luke 1:18 – How will I know this? The question he asked after Gabriel appeared to him and told him that he would bear a son and call his name John.
 - ii. John the Baptist. – Luke 7:19-22, Are you the coming one or do we look for another?
 - iii. Even the first sin can be attributed to Satan planting doubts in the mind of Eve concerning God’s goodness – Genesis 3:1-5
- d. When you pray, ask in faith without doubting– James 1:5
- e. 1 Timothy 2:8, *I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting*
- f. Romans 14:22-23 – to act while doubting is sin. Our actions must be with faith.
- g. From these passages it becomes clear that doubt is something we ought to be concerned about.

III. Dealing with our doubts

- a. ***Is doubt sinful?*** Not an easy question to answer. Is it a legitimate question for which you seek an answer, OR is it a cause to reject? Is it persistent, or are you trying to work through it?
Like so many other issues, it is HOW we deal with our doubts that determines who we are.
- b. ***Realize what doubt is.*** As we have seen, it is not always a denial of our faith. It is questioning something about our faith. It is insufficient or weak faith.
One source noted that doubt is a bridge that connects your current faith with perfect faith.
Doubt is not just intellectual; it is also spiritual. It is a tool of Satan. Consider again Satan lying to Eve. When you look at what he said, did he plant a seed of doubt within her?
- c. ***Deal with your doubt***
 - i. Do not ignore it, for that is sin. Rarely does ignoring something make it go away. Resolve it! IF someone comes to you with doubts, or YOU have doubts, they need to be dealt with. And not harshly, at least at first. We ought to be able to ask questions if we have them.
 - ii. Do not close your mind to an answer – Thomas, when told that Jesus was alive, refused to believe it until he had evidence. However, he was there the next Sunday. Willing to consider it. AND, when Jesus appeared, He immediately believed – “My Lord and my God”. One source said, *Learn to doubt your doubts.* If you can doubt something, can you be wrong about what you are doubting?
 - iii. Be humble. Many today let doubts excuse their ungodly behavior. Skeptics and critics argue that because they don’t have a concrete answer for spiritual matters, they have a right to reject the POSSIBILITY of a concrete answer.
We must humbly acknowledge that we don’t know everything. In fact, there are things we may never know! The secret things belong to God – Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 11:33-34 – who has known the mind of the Lord?
 - iv. Search for answers – diligently!
 - 1. Ephesians 6:10-13, 2 Corinthians 10:3-6
 - 2. Just because you don’t have an answer to something doesn’t mean there is not an answer. Keep looking. Romans 10:17 – faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.
John 8:32 – the truth will set you free.
 - 3. 2 Timothy 2:15. –keep studying!
 - 4. Be willing to accept the answer when you find it.

5. But realize you may not get all the answer, especially the way you want them answered. Be humble enough to accept that.
- v. **Consider and weigh the evidence** – John 10:37-38 – Jesus said, even if you do not believe Me, believe the works. NOTE: An inherited faith will not survive.
- vi. Pray about it. James 1:5 - It is ironic that even though there are passages that address doubting in our prayers, the answer includes prayer (cf. Mark 9:24, Lord I believe. Help my unbelief)
- vii. If there is sin in your life, repent of it. Often our doubts and questions come because of sins we are struggling with and refuse or hesitate to deal with them.
 1. How many struggle with the condemnation of sinful behavior in the Bible because they try to explain it away? No wonder they are living with doubts!
 2. How many struggle with the concept of hell (eternal punishment) because they don't want to change?
 3. How many struggle with the love, mercy and grace of God because they do not want to acknowledge His justice and righteousness?
 4. WHEN you are living right, there is less cause to doubt!
- viii. Keep growing. If doubts are a manifestation of weak faith, the way to overcome them is by strengthening your faith. 2 Peter 1:5-11 tells you how to do that. You add to your faith... In time, a strengthened faith (and wisdom and knowledge) will lead to less doubting and questions.
- d. NOTE: IF someone comes to you expressing doubts, it is IMPORTANT that you not be dismissive to those doubts. Do not belittle someone and give platitudes as answers (e.g. "You need to strengthen your faith" or "You just need to trust God more"). All you are doing is kicking the can down the road, and I guarantee someone else will pick it up!
 1 Thessalonians 5:14 – comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.
 Hebrews 12:12 strengthen the feeble knees that hand down.

Doubt can do one of two things: It can devastate you OR it can make you and your faith stronger. As with everything else, it depends upon what you do with it. Is your faith stronger today than before? Think about it!