

Doubts That Do Not Damage

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. It is a common belief in the religious world that no single understanding of the scriptures is correct. It is widely believed that the word of God is so mysterious, ambiguous, and archaic that we cannot understand it, let alone understand it alike. That being the case, most are convinced that we cannot be certain of what we believe.
 - 1. This spirit has migrated into the thinking of some disciples who become impatient with the preaching and teaching of sound doctrine in a clear and unambiguous manner.
 - 2. It has led some to doubt whether what they understand to be the truth is actually the truth. "I cannot make a solid stance. I could be mistaken."
- B. This has also created a new vulnerability for the Adversary to exploit.
 - 1. Doubt that leads, not to questioning what one believes about the faith, but to discouragement in believing the faith.
 - 2. It is one thing to admit that we do not have all the answers and that our understanding is incomplete. It is quite another to fall prey to doubting whether one has the capacity to believe at all.
- C. Confidence in the scriptures and in our ability to read and understand them is critically important to spiritual success.
 - 1. We are robbed of stability in our belief and practice.
 - 2. We will be without the means or the confidence to save others who have fallen victim to false doctrine.
 - 3. We will be without the ability or the drive to proclaim the good news of salvation from sins and the promise of a home in heaven.
 - 4. We will lose what makes the Lord's Church unique and distinct from man-made religions.
- D. So, what is the common reaction of brethren toward those who try to talk about their doubts?
 - 1. "You just need to believe more." "Don't you know that doubt is a sin?"
 - 2. Like the Life Lock commercial, "I'm not a pest exterminator; I'm a pest monitor." What good have you done?
 - 3. At best, you are confirming what they already know, that they are struggling with their faith. They don't need you to tell them that; they need you to help them with their struggle. Now you have added guilt to their problem of doubt.
 - a. Dwight Carlson, Why Do Christians Shoot Their Wounded?
- E. We want to understand the Bible's perspective of doubt, including how to resolve our own doubts, and how a healthy dose of doubt can lead to a healthier faith.

I. DOUBT IS UNIVERSAL

- A. Luke 1:5-22, 62-64 - Every honest person has struggled with doubt.
 - 1. Abraham tried to make Eliezer and Ishmael his heir.

2. Gideon the Judge tested the angel of the Lord.
3. Asaph the Psalmist nearly told the people to give up on God.
4. Elijah ran away and hid in a cave.
5. Jeremiah questioned God's instructions at every turn.
6. Zacharias, priest and father of John the Baptist, doubted the word of an angel sent from God.
7. C. S. Lewis, who was an atheist before he converted to Christianity, acknowledged that just as the Christian has his moments of doubt, so does the atheist. He wrote, "Believe in God, and you will have to face hours when it seems obvious that this material world is the only reality; disbelieve in Him, and you must face hours when this material world seems to shout at you that it is not all. No conviction religious or irreligious will, of itself, end once and for all this fifth-columnist in the soul. Only the practice of faith resulting in the habit of faith will gradually do that." (Cited in "Focal Point," July-September, 1989)

B. Doubt comes in varying degrees.

1. The doubt of the proud skeptic who delights in his own intellect. He dismisses God as if he is a match for the Almighty. He delights in upsetting the faith of weak believers. He presents his arguments against God's existence and the Christian faith as if he is the first brilliant thinker in history to come up with such insights - Psalm 14:1
2. The doubt of the person who wants to believe, but is struggling with difficult questions and has not yet come to see Jesus Christ as the all-sufficient Savior. While this person's questions are often sincere, invariably they are mixed up with wanting to run his own life apart from the lordship of Christ - John 7:17
3. The doubt of the believer who has taken his eyes off the Lord in a difficult trial - Matt. 8:25-26; Mark 9:22-24
4. All believers in Jesus Christ as the Son of God have been there. If you put a penny close to your eye, it will block out the brilliance of the sun. If you let a trial occupy all of your awareness, it will block your view of the power of God.

C. What can Zacharias teach us about dealing with doubt?

1. Zacharias and his wife, Elizabeth, prayed for a son.
2. He resigned himself to his view of reality; they were too old.
3. He believed this to the point of doubting the word of an angel of God.

D. Isa. 35:3-20

II. DOUBT EVEN BESETS THE RIGHTEOUS

A. Luke 1:6; Matt. 11:2-6; Gen. 17:17 - Doubt is universal. More relevant questions are:

1. What kind of doubt am I experiencing?
2. What is the source of my doubt?

B. Doubt does not come from a lack of evidence.

1. Consider Zacharias' reaction to the angel - Luke 1:12, 18
2. God has spoken and given sufficient evidence - Luke 16:27-31

3. Philip had seen Jesus perform miracles, and yet he couldn't imagine how the Lord would resolve feeding the multitude - John 6:5-7
- C. The disconnect happens within us.
 1. We forget the power of God, we forget the wisdom of God, we forget the consistent promise keeping of God, and we forget the record of the proofs of God's love and care.
 2. We have allowed other things to block our view: we judge the difficulty of the problem based on our ability to solve it, or by what we know of the limits of life in this world.
- D. Doubt is often connected with disappointments or long-term trials.
 1. We don't know how long Zacharias and Elizabeth had been married, but in that society, childlessness was a matter of shame - Luke 1:25
 2. We have prayed so often and so fervently, and our petitions were denied for so long that we often conclude, "It isn't going to happen."
 - a. Acts 12:12-15

III. THE SOLUTION FOR DOUBT

- A. The solution for doubt is simple to say, but a challenge to apply. It is to choose to see that God will do what He says He will do.
 1. "Zachariah, righteous as he is, needs to learn that God will fulfill his promises when He sovereignly chooses to act.... The major lesson ... is that God will do what He promises in His own way" (Darrell Bock, Comments on Luke [IVP], p. 37).
 2. Strive against wavering in unbelief if God doesn't do something the way we think He should have. Believe that if He said He will do something, He will do it, even if it takes a different form than we had expected.
- B. We know through His prophetic word that God does what he says.
 1. In this very chapter, Luke records the prophecy of the births of John and Jesus, and later the births of both that occurred exactly as prophesied.
 2. Luke proves that what God says He will do, He does - 2Peter 1:19
- C. We know through His loving discipline that God does what He says.
 1. Luke 1:20, 62 - Zacharias' chastisement was appropriate for his doubt.
 2. He shut his mouth in silence when he should have praised God, so he would be silent until the day when his lips were loosed to praise God in the presence of others - Luke 1:67
 3. Doubt has nothing to say; faith opens the heart and lips in praise to God
 4. Thankfully, doubt need never be fatal. We can recover if we will submit to God's gracious discipline.
 - a. Luke 1:68-79 - Zacharias praises God for keeping His promises
 - b. We can either grumble and chafe under discipline, and be overcome by doubt and resentment;
 - c. Or, we can thankfully submit to it; in which case, we will grow stronger in faith.
 5. We can overcome the problem of doubt if we will see that God does what He says He will do.

- D. We know that the object of our faith is all important.
 - 1. In the matter of faith and doubt, the crucial thing is not our feelings and not even our thoughts and beliefs. The important thing is the object of our faith.
 - 2. You can have great faith in a faulty airplane, but it will crash in spite of your great faith because it's not a trustworthy plane. You can have little faith in a sound airplane, just enough to get you on board, and that's all it takes to get you where you're going. It's not your faith, but the object of it, that matters most.
 - 3. God is faithful to His promises, especially in the matter of the salvation of our souls. He has a proven track record of keeping His word.
- E. The doubts that we have, prove that we need a Savior, because we are subject to weakness and temptation. When we face our doubts by seeing God in scripture, we will come out on the other side of our doubts better people for the experience, just like Zacharias.

IV. GOD GIVES US POWER TO OVERCOME OUR DOUBTS

- A. Jesus does not change - Heb. 13:8-9
- B. We are stabilized by what Jesus gives us - Eph. 4:11-16; Isa. 32:17
- C. Jesus Christ gives us confidence - Heb. 10:19-23
- D. Paul had full confidence in the Savior - 2Tim. 1:8-12
- E. Our confidence rests on the unchanging Rock - Eph. 3:8-12
- F. We can know we are of the truth - 1John 3:18-22; 2Peter 1:10
- G. We can know that we have eternal life - 1John 5:13, 19-20
- H. Our hope is based on the unchangeable promise of God - Heb. 6:15-19
- I. What can I do?
 - 1. I recognize my limited knowledge and my need to grow, but that which I have already learned, I can take confidence in and press forward.
 - 2. I don't have to know with 100% certainty in order to commit myself to Him 100%.