

## Christian Growth Course - Lesson 3

### Resolving Doubts

Introduction: Because the Christian life is lived by faith, doubt weakens and paralyzes us. Doubt threatens our salvation, because we are counted righteous by faith - Romans 1:17; 3:21, 22. Doubt frustrates us because we choose between right and wrong by faith - Romans 14:23. Doubt destroys our peace and joy, because these come through trusting God. And it hinders our prayers - James 1:6-8; Matthew 9:29.

Doubt is not unbelief. It is not a settled choice, but a hesitation or suspension between belief and unbelief - 1 Kings 18:21. It is being in two minds - James 1:6-8; 4:4-8. If it is not resolved, it can lead to outright unbelief.

Faith is not sight or absolute knowledge; therefore faith always involves some possibility of doubt - Hebrews 11:1; 2 Corinthians 5:7. But faith is not blind leaping in the dark. It is a decision to go a certain way and trust certain assumptions because these best fit the evidence available to us. Every person, even the atheist, has to assume some things by faith. Belief is basic to living.

Even God's great servants have had times of doubt - Matthew 11; 1-3; Luke 1:18-20; Judges 6:36-40; Matthew 14:28-31; 1 Kings 19:3, 4; Acts 18:9, 10. As we see in these cases, God is gentle and patient and helpful to his children when they are attacked by doubt (Jesus kept working with his doubting disciples) - compare Psalm 103:13, 14. God can even overrule doubt to use it for our good: prolonged wrestling with doubt can increase our hunger for God. And a healthy amount of skepticism keeps us from being credulous, swallowing every kind of teaching without proper examination.

There is no such thing in this life as being perfectly sure about everything. Our understanding is limited and our faith is still growing - Mark 9; 23, 24. Christians with differing views on lesser doctrinal matters have to learn to work together anyway - Romans 14. But we can learn to be sure enough about essentials to live a decisive, powerful life. In this lesson we will look at various doubts which trouble Christians, some causes of doubt, and how we can overcome it by God's help.

#### 1. Some doubts that trouble people:

- A. Doubts about Christianity and the gospel, such as:
  - 1) The existence of God.
  - 2) The divinity, resurrection and Lordship of Christ.
  - 3) The inspiration and authority of the Bible.
- B. Doubts about God's will, about right and wrong in a given situation. Examples:
  - 1) Should a Christian participate in war?
  - 2) Do I have a scriptural right to remarry?
  - 3) Should I move to another place, or take another job?
- C. Doubts about personal salvation and eternal security, such as:
  - 1) Have I committed the unpardonable sin?

- 2) Was my conversion genuine?
- 3) How can I know if my religious experience was really from God?
- 4) Have I really been forgiven and accepted by God?
- 5) Am I following false or true doctrine?

2. Some causes of doubt (the first six are listed by Os Guinness in his book In Two Minds [Inter Varsity Press, 1976; most of the comments are from GBS]):

- A. Ingratitude, forgetting from what we were saved, forgetting our need for God and becoming independent - Romans 1:21; Psalm 106:7, 13. Solution: Recapture gratitude and sense of need - Luke 15:11-32; Revelation 2:4, 5.
  
- B. Faulty view of God. We are unable to trust him because we do not know him as he really is.
  - 1) To know him accurately is to love and trust him.
  - 2) Our experience with our parents and other authorities affects our view of God.
  - 3) Secular, worldly concepts of God may affect our minds.
  - 4) Not our religious statements, but how we act in times of crisis, shows our real view of God.
  - 5) Our view of God is corrected by continued, prayerful receptive study of the scriptures, by asking for the help of the Spirit, and above all, by looking at Jesus - John 14:9.
  
- C. Weak foundations, not knowing the evidence that Christianity is true.
  - 1) The Christian faith is based on solid reasons, on verifiable, objective historical facts - John 20:30,31; Luke 1:3,4; Romans 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:3-8; Acts 4:18-20; 5:27-33; 21:13.
  - 2) The Christian is to be able to explain his reasons for believing - 1 Peter 3:15. His faith will not stand long in the face of critical unbelief (as in a secular university) unless he knows the reasons why he believes.
  - 3) Excellent studies in Christian evidences are available (such as materials by Josh McDowell, John Clayton, C. S. Lewis, and John R. W. Scott).
  - 4) The Bereans "searched the scriptures daily" to see if the apostles' teaching was correct - Acts 17:11. Faith is weakened by relying too much on teachers without studying for ourselves.
  - 5) Faith comes by hearing God's word - Romans 10:17.
  - 6) The apostles checked out the evidence for the resurrection - Luke 24:11, 12, 36-

42; John 20; 19-28.

- 7) Our relationship to God is partly subjective, but the subjective must be preceded by and judged by the objective, "public" truths of the gospel. The subjective relationship we have to God is further confirmation of our faith, but it is not the foundation.

D. Lack of Commitment makes our faith seem unreal.

- 1) We can know the facts of the gospel and yet not have committed ourselves to live accordingly - James 2:14-26.
- 2) Some people fear commitment and have trouble committing themselves to anything. We may want privilege without obligation.
- 3) One may become a Christian just because it is the "in" thing to do, or it helps a temporary need.
- 4) There comes a time when a person must decide if his parents' faith is also his own, and whether he will make his own personal commitment.
- 5) Christianity is a covenant agreement with God which, like marriage, requires commitment.
- 6) Faith is not only a belief based on facts, but a decision to live accordingly - Romans 1:5; 1 Peter 1:22. Faith is something that can be commanded - Mark 1:15.
- 7) We need to stress not only conversion but discipleship. Real involvement of our whole life in sacrificial service to God produces certainty - 2 Timothy 1:12. "Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" - Matthew 6:21.

E. Lack of Growth

- 1) Faith may seem dead or unreal because we have no fruit growing in our lives - nothing is happening.
- 2) Every time we make a right choice according to God's word, faith is strengthened. Every time we disobey, faith is weakened. If we do not obey our faith, we lose it - Luke 16:10.
- 3) We become sure of our calling and election by God only as our characters grow Christlike, and as we love him - 2 Peter 1:3-11; 1 John 3:3; 4:17,18; 2:5,29; 3:18,19.
- 4) The Holy Spirit is the guarantee of our salvation, and the best evidence of the Spirit is his fruit - 1 John 3:24; 4:13; Ephesians 1:13, 14; 4:30; Romans 8:16; Galatians 5:22, 23.

F. Emotional and psychological causes.

- 1) In our fallen nature, emotions are often strong enough to overpower reason.
- 2) Emotions are affected by many factors such as illness, conditions in the body, nutrition, relationships, exhaustion, accidents, traumas, neuroses, unresolved guilt, heredity, upbringing, etc. - 1 Kings 19:1-10.
- 3) If a person's conversion and relationship to God have been based on emotion more than reason, he becomes more vulnerable to doubt caused by emotional change.
- 4) Emotional doubt will not be healed as much by reason and logic as by dealing with the cause of the emotion - compare 1 Kings 19:5, 6.
- 5) Practicing faith and trust in repeated situations makes our faith more stable and less likely to be shaken by emotions.
- 6) Emotional doubt is especially likely to arise from a desire to disobey God, or from unresolved guilt.
  - a. It is more convenient not to believe, if you want to "do your own thing."
  - b. Guilt makes us doubt God's acceptance of us. And getting rid of the idea of God and his word seems to get rid of judgment.
- 7) Sometimes people have been so emotionally wounded by some experience, or so discouraged by some personal weakness, that their whole life becomes shaped by this, and they are afraid to believe. The good news is "too good to be true" - Luke 24:41. Their fixation becomes a faith-destroying idol. They desire to believe but are not willing. Healing of wounds is the answer, as well as getting the person to look from a different perspective.
- 8) It is important to distinguish between reasonable doubt and morbid, emotionally created doubt. Emotion can make something insignificant look very large.
- 9) Where emotion has become so strong as to make us unable to handle truth objectively, it helps to get alongside a respected person whose emotions are not out of control, and to partly let him "see" for you until your own vision clears.
- 10) A habit of constant hesitation between alternatives, an inability to make decisions, may mean that a person needs qualified counseling.

G. Wanting to know things that are beyond our capacity at this time - John 13:7

H. The inability to wait for God's timing.

I. Legalism. We never become perfect enough to be accepted by God on our own merits - Romans 3:20. We must learn to rely on the grace of God in Christ.

3. Additional notes on dealing with doubt:

- A. Remember that Satan is the father of lies and sows lies in our minds to make us doubt - John 8:44; Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43.
- B. Satan loves to create despair by making a person believe he has gone beyond the reach of God's grace - 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.
- C. Satan loves to discredit God in our minds, to distort our view of him - Genesis 3:1-5.
- D. Remember that Christ is greater than Satan and greater than our limitations - 1 John 4:4; 3:8,19,20; Ephesians 4:8-10; Colossians 2:15.
- E. God knows that we lack wisdom and has invited us to pray for it - James 1:5. If a person is truly committed to God, has approached a decision responsibly and has prayed for wisdom, he should rest in faith that the path that seems best to him was made so by the Lord.
- F. Avoid "having faith in your faith." God is the proper object of faith.

Conclusion: The best way to resist doubt is to build up faith, rather than simply fighting against doubt. If your attention is on the doubt, it is not on God whose nature is the ground of our faith.

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