

#21 “Biblically, How Are We to View Doubt?”

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Not long ago, I came upon a church which held a doubt night. Now this is not just any church, but a church that is bursting at the seams, meeting what this up and coming postmodern generation needs, or so it is said. Their entire service was a message which was a sort of coming out celebration for those who had hidden doubts about God, the Bible, Jesus, and salvation. Each attendee was to write on a card what his or her specific area of doubt was. Then at the end, the cards were collected, and a pronouncement was made that everyone was alright because they had admitted and acknowledged their doubts. The conclusion was not to help them overcome their doubts but to celebrate their doubts, glorifying such admissions as honesty and humility. The truth, said the pastor, was that we all doubt, and doubt is normal, real, and healthy. We may as well just accept it. So everyone could go home having undergone doubt therapy and having learned to embrace uncertainty and a lack of doctrinal conviction.

The Bible doesn't present such a pretty, healthy, and tranquil picture of doubt. James 1:6-8 says that he who doubts is a double-minded man, unstable in all of his ways. He shouldn't expect to receive anything from God, not any wisdom or answer to his prayers. After all, prayers must be made in faith if they are to be answered (Mark 11:22-24). Indeed, doubt is as close of an antithesis to faith as there is. If Scripture says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6) and if doubt is the absence of faith, then how is doubt pleasing to God? Jesus praises a man for having faith that is not found in all of Israel (Matthew 8:10). The disciples are rebuked for having little faith (Matthew 8:26). Hebrews 11 celebrates not those who doubted and questioned the word of God, but those who held to the truth of God's Word and believed God's promises in faith despite persecution and despite not seeing any fruit of their labor. Now that is something to celebrate, and indeed the author of Hebrews through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit does just that as he lists name after name of faithful men and women of God.

The Christian is not to doubt, let alone celebrate doubt and uncertainty. Granted, there are divine mysteries that God hasn't let us in on, but that which He has let us in on we had better understand. Why would we preach the gospel if we doubt whether it is universally and absolutely true? Why would we put our full confidence in the sufficiency of God's Word if we question its reliability and credibility? If we doubt the resurrection, then our faith may well be in vain (1 Corinthians 15:14). Thomas questioned the resurrection, and Jesus told him that those who believe without actually seeing Him and touching His nailed-pierced hands are blessed (John 20:29). He didn't rebuke him for doubting as it appeared Thomas was looking for evidence. God is not against evidence and honest seeking and questioning. We do well if we learn to defend the faith and are prepared to give an answer (1 Peter 3:15). We do well if we study the Scriptures so that we can handle them correctly and teach them appropriately (2 Timothy 2:15). We do well to study the culture so that we can bring truth to bear upon it in a relevant manner (Acts

17:16). Creation testifies of God's glory, so as we study and seek honestly, practicing the truth, we will inevitably come to the Light of Christ (John 3:21). Such inquiry is really not doubt, but faith. It is faith to want to learn the truth and to take steps to see if what one believes is indeed reasonable and credible.

We get in trouble when we refuse to put our faith in what the evidence points to, even though we may not be able to see it with our eyes. "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Doubt is the polar opposite of faith, denying a person assurance. Doubt ignores evidence, discredits evidence, and celebrates the attitude that could care less about evidence. Doubt is the antithesis of conviction in that it rejoices in uncertainty and instability. Paul tells Timothy to "continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of" (2 Timothy 3:14). Some marks of spiritual maturity in Christ are steadfastness, firmness, and conviction. We are to be "steadfast and immovable," says 1 Corinthians 15:58. Doubt is pliable, willingly moveable, and lacking steadfastness, totally contradictory to the Scripture. We are to resist the devil, having done everything to stand firm (Ephesians 6:13), which involves putting on the shield of faith (6:16). Firmness in faith is maturity and such should be celebrated. Think of it. Did Jesus praise Peter for doubting when he was walking to him on the water? No, He graciously rebuked him for his lack of faith saying, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" (Matthew 14:31). The opposite of faith according to Jesus is doubt.

Should we look for evidence for what we believe and why we believe? Yes, we are to know what we believe and why we believe it so well that we can contend for it and fight for it (Jude 3, 1 Peter 3:15). Should an honest seeker of truth blindly believe or use reason and logic to help arrive at the truth? No man is called to believe blindly. Faith has an object. We are to put our trust in Christ and in what He did for us on the cross, which was declared publicly to all creation under heaven (Colossians 2:15). God has given plenty of evidence in creation (Romans 1:18-20), in our consciences (Romans 1:32), and by setting eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). Archaeology, history, and honest scientific inquiry all point to the truth of Christ and God's Word. We have good reason to believe what we believe, and we ought to be convinced of it. When we have doubts, may we seek the truth in faith and come to a place where we rest in the perfection of God and His Word. Let us point people to the truth of God's Word and bring it to bear upon their doubt. God's desire and call is for faith, and He gives grace upon grace to supply us with the faith that we need (John 1:16).