



ISSUE

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Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF
THE OL-
SEN PARK
CHURCH OF
CHRIST

Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

9:30 AM

10:30 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Patrick Ledbetter

Brady McAlister

Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Ben Hight

Blake McAlister

Walker McNear

Sam Nunn

Lance Purcell

Justin Smiley

Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope

Dealing with Doubts

By Kyle Pope

In the context of urging his readers to pray for wisdom, James charged them not to ask God with doubt, warning, **“for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord”** (Jas. 1:6b-7, NKJV). All of us have times when we struggle with doubt. Whether it is doubt in things for which we pray, or even doubt in our faith in God. Is He really there? Does He really care for us? Is serving Him really worth it? How are we to deal with these doubts when they come into our hearts? The Bible addresses the subject of doubt in a number of different ways and it is clear there are different types of doubt and different dangers associated with each.

Being Caught Between Two Things

When Elijah stood to challenge the prophets of Baal, he challenged his unfaithful brethren in Israel, **“How long will you falter between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him”** (1 Kings 18:21). The type of doubt addressed in James 1:6 is much like the condition Elijah described. The word translated *doubt* is the Greek word *diakrinō* (διακρίνω) meaning, “to separate, make a distinction, discriminate” (Thayer). This literal sense helps us understand its application. Sometimes it is important to allow a distinction to exist between people or things. Jude used this same word to teach that Christians must **“make a distinction”** in how we approach people—some we **“save with fear,”** while others must be handled with **“compassion”** (Jude 22-23). Other times distinctions should not be maintained. In Acts 15:9 this word is used to describe what God no longer does between the Jew and the

Gentile. In pouring out the gospel, He “**made no distinction.**” In James 1:6 the Holy Spirit pictures being caught between one of two beliefs on the same matter. The one who doubts when asking God for wisdom acts as if he believes and trusts in the Lord, while at the same time acting as if he does not believe in His love or power. This type of doubt is not constructive, but actually reflects unbelief.

Two Types and Causes of Doubt

In the English language, *doubt* originally meant to waver, question or to be hesitant about something. Now it most often means to have a question about the honesty, integrity, or possibility of some person or event. When used with reference to God, it can mean that a person has an honest and sincere question regarding God’s actions, or it may indicate a skeptical view as to whether something is true. This type of doubt (like that mentioned above) reflects an unwillingness to believe. Let’s consider some things about these two types of doubt: *skepticism* and *honest questioning*.

1. Skepticism. What kind of things cause us to be skeptical? Perhaps statements made by political leaders, if they prom-

ise to cut taxes when their record is that of raising taxes, we are skeptical of their claims. When we hear claims that are supernatural or extreme we are skeptical. If I told you about a man who lifted his whole house, you should be skeptical. We are properly skeptical of offers that are too good to be true. If I promise to give you a brand new car for \$1.00—that is something you ought to view with skepticism. *What is it about these things that prompt our skepticism?* 1) These are things different from past evidence. 2) These are things not within normal experience. 3) These are things that seem unreasonable. Skepticism can be a valuable attitude when properly used, but it can also pose dangers. In matters of faith, we are called to trust in things far beyond our normal experience, yet these are not things for which there is no evidence or that are unreasonable to believe. Doubt that takes the form of skepticism must not be allowed to go unresolved. The skeptic is not truly convinced that he can put faith in that which he doubts in this way. In truth he lacks the kind of faith he should have.

2. Honest questioning. Sometimes we want to accept something but simply question how it could be. These may be things that are important to us, but hard for us to understand or accept. These may be things we would like someone to clear up for us. In material things I might question, for example, how a television, computer, or smartphone works. I see that they work, but I don’t understand how they work! Someone with more knowledge about this could help me learn the details of what seems mysterious to me through honest questioning. I could study and learn all I can about these things in order to dispel those things that raise questions in my mind. In matters of faith, I might question, how there can be a God?—How could Jesus be born of a virgin?—How and why would He die for me?—How can we know the Bible is true?—How can we be sure about salvation? Is it wrong to ask these things? Is this the lack of faith about which James warns? No. It is important to ask these questions and come to terms with the answers that can help us avoid the unbelief that often accompanies skepticism. We should ask others who may very well have struggled with these same questions. We should study to find the answers. We do not sin by asking these questions—we actually guard our hearts from allowing doubt to cripple us spiritually.

Two Examples of Doubt

Scripture shows us some examples of doubt that demonstrate both attitudes.

1. Abraham. When Abraham was still childless and owned no property in the land of Canaan God promised him descendants and a land in-

heritance (Gen. 15:1-5). Although Scripture tells us Abraham believed God (15:6), he also asked Him, **“how shall I know that I will inherit it?”** (15:8). Was this wrong? No, it was honest questioning. To resolve Abraham’s questioning God confirmed His word with a sign (15:9-17). His uncertainty did not compromise his belief.

2. Thomas. In English the term “Doubting Thomas” has come to us from the account in John that records Jesus’s first appearances to His apostles after His resurrection. Thomas was not with the other ten and questioned their report of seeing Jesus alive (John 20:19-25). It is not until he sees the crucified hands and feet of the living Jesus that he believes (20:26-29). We have often questioned whether Thomas attitude was one of doubt or honest questioning. To some extent both seem to be true, however it was pointed out to me some years ago what Jesus’s words indicate about Thomas’s mindset. Jesus told him, **“Do not be unbelieving, but believing”** (20:27). Jesus had foretold His death and resurrection (Mark 8:31), but Thomas had allowed any uncertainty he had about this to move him to unbelief. It’s good to seek confirmation, but we must not allow this to lead to unbelief.

The Dangers of Doubting

1. Rejecting Everything as False. Skepticism can be dangerous when it becomes a preprogrammed mechanism to reject anything that’s unfamiliar. We use it as a defense mechanism. When the telemarketer calls with a “win a free vacation” scheme skepticism keeps us from losing our money. However, if skepticism dominates our thinking in all things it may lead us to reject what is actually true. It would be foolish to reject faith in Christ because of this kind of thinking. Our soul is at stake!

2. Always Questioning but Never Taking a Stand. Honest questioning is only of value if it leads a person to dig for truth and when he or she finds it accept and follow it! Some people may not be skeptics but they are content simply asking questions. We must act upon the logical consequences of the answers we find. There are some things for which we are not given answers (Deut. 29:29), but many answers are provided and must be accepted. There is no virtue in never reaching a conclusion on anything.

3. Overconfidence In Our Own Views. None of this is to suggest when we have confidence in our opinions it guarantees we are

right. In Paul’s discussion with the Romans about the one struggling with whether Mosaic dietary laws still applied he urged them never to act with doubt. Although the Christian is now free to eat a variety of foods (Rom. 14:14), he warns. **“But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin”** (14:23). *Diakrinō*, the same word used in James 1:6 is used here. While our conclusions can be wrong, this show that it is always wrong to act against what we believe to be true. To act with this type of doubt is wrong.

The Time to Choose

Sometimes the struggle with doubt is a matter of refusing to really make a decision. James 1:6 teaches us we can’t do that and please God. Let’s look at two passages that teach us the same thing. Both use a slightly different word for doubt: *distazō* (δισταζω) meaning “to stand in two ways” or “wavering as to which path to take” (Vine). Both concern two different periods in Jesus’s dealings with His disciples.

1. Jesus’s Disciples after His Resurrection. Matthew 28:16-17 tells us that after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to His disciples in Galilee **“some doubted.”** Although the eleven are mentioned, this may infer that others were present who had not yet seen the resurrected

Jesus because the eleven first saw Him in Jerusalem and believed (John 20:19-29). Whoever this was, it is clear that some **“doubted.”** Did they doubt it was really Him? Did they realize how this would change their lives from that point on, and struggle with *which path to take?* Whatever their struggle, they were confronted with a time when they needed to stop wavering and make a choice.

2. Peter on the Sea. Scripture records for us the marvelous account of Jesus walking on the sea and Peter asking to be allowed to come to Him (Matt. 14:22-33). Peter wanted to believe, but what happened? He looked at the things of this world (the wind, the waves, and the turmoil around him). Then he took his eyes off Jesus and became afraid. When we trust only in ourselves we will fall. When we look only to the world we will be overwhelmed with doubt. Only when we look to Jesus can we stand firm.

Conclusion

There are different types of doubt and different ways that doubt can affect us. It is wise to have skeptical doubts when false religion is presented, but foolish to be so skeptical that we won't even consider the truth. It is wise to have honest questions about matters that concern our souls, but foolish to never apply the answers to such questions to our lives. Our confidence is no assurance that we are doing right, but acting with doubt is always wrong! Let's consider a few suggestions to help us when we face doubts:

1. Constantly plant the word of God in the heart. Some people print passages of Scripture and post them in conspicuous places to remind them of the goodness and promises of God. Others schedule private reading times. We must not neglect the power the word of God has to help us dispel doubts.

2. Take time out to count blessings and see the good things God has done for us. A dark and sinful world can easily blind us to the goodness of God. Spend time in nature. Look at the innocence of a child. Consider all the good things you have for which God is the source (Jas. 1:17).

3. Keep lists (either mentally or on paper) of Bible promises especially meaningful to you. The Bible is filled with promises offered to His people. Focusing on these things can help us when doubts start to cloud our mind.

4. Don't give up—do whatever is necessary to resolve your doubts! Talk to a brother or sister in Christ about your doubts. You may find they have had the same struggles and can offer guidance in how to work through it. Be faithful in worship and Bible study. The answer to your struggle may have been addressed at the very service you missed. There is no weakness in wrestling with doubts—the key is not to let them defeat us!

