

We Must Learn to Handle Disappointment and Doubt

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Introduction: Some of the most fearful moments in a Christian's life is when we realize that doubt is creeping into our hearts.

- A. The molding of the hearts of men involves great pain and struggle.
 - 1. Paul described the conflict his first letter caused within the disciples at Corinth. **(2 Cor 7:5-11)**
 - 2. As a result of an open heart the Corinthians was a conviction of sin and a strong understanding of God's truth that they had not previously known.
- B. Sadly many who experience the pain of guilt and uncertainty quit.
 - 1. Phillip had doubts about "Jesus of Nazareth" but he "dug deeper!"
 - 2. The Messiah had to come from Bethlehem! **(John 7:41-42)**
 - 3. For many people this planting of doubt was enough to end their struggle. When that struggle ended, so did their opportunity for eternal life. **(Jn 8:24)**

I. John the Baptist had a time of doubt

- A. John expressed doubt in the identity of Jesus. **(Lk 7:19-20)**
 - 1. Our first reaction might be one of disappointment.
 - 2. What had John already seen and confessed? **(Mk 1:10-11; Jn 1:32-33)**
 - 3. He expressed his conviction to the future disciples of Jesus. **(Jn 1:35-37)**
- B. There are two possible reasons for John's doubt.
 - 1. Jesus had not done what John expected. **(Mt 3:11-12)**
 - 2. Why had Jesus not purge out the wicked Jews and the Romans? John likely did not understand God's purpose or timing!
 - 2. John was in prison and likely both isolated and discouraged.
 - a. Any man who is isolated and suffering, depression and doubt will come.
 - b. The great prophet Elijah knew this feeling! **(1 Kgs 19:10, 14, 18)**

II. Our God provides us a path to certainty

- A. Can I know that Jesus is the Son of God?
 - 1. John wrote that we might believe and have life! **(Jn 20:30-31)**
 - 2. Luke said that one could "know the certainty" of the life and truth about Jesus. **(Luke 1:3-4)**
 - 3. The steps to belief will always be accompanied by obstacles and doubt.
 - a. Jesus' own brothers did not believe at first. **(Jn 7:3-5)**
 - b. They had to reason, test, and struggle. It was not an easy process nor was it a fast one!
 - c. In the end they came to believe in Jesus. **(Acts 1:14)**
- B. Can I know and stand upon "the faith?" **(Jude 3)**
 - 1. Here is where many battles are fought and where Satan has destroyed many.
 - 2. Some ask: "What in the Bible is "essential" and what is "non-essential?""
 - a. The answer for me and you is that I must stand upon what I understand.
 - b. I must maintain a purity of heart that will not compromise what I know.
 - c. This does not mean that I am perfect, or have perfect knowledge, but that I will keep a good conscience. **(Acts 24:15; Rom 14:20, 23)**

C. Can I know that I am right with God?

1. Satan will use the doubt of possible hidden sin and hypothetical sudden sins to make one experience guilt without possible relief. **(2 Cor 2:10-11)**
2. We can know where we stand. We must “continue to believe.” **(1 Jn 5:13)**
3. It is in God that we trust and not in our own abilities and strength.
4. A living faith will always repent when more is learned. **(Acts 18:26)**

D. Is there room for occasions of uncertainty?

1. Consider the example of Habakkuk. **(Hab 1:2-4)**
2. Some of the most effective workers for Satan have in their pride been “certain” about that which they should have been filled with doubts.
3. It is not weakness to recognize your own limitations by pursuing further study and prayer on a matter.

III. How Satan uses doubt

A. Satan’s goal is to deny the power of God’s word in our hearts.

1. Without the certainty that God’s word brings, a man cannot stand against Satan. **(Rom 8:24-25)**
2. Doubt should be a temporary state not a permanent one. It is like a doorway that you pass through. Satan wants you to live in the doorway!
3. Those who live in uncertainty do not yet have a living faith. **(2 Tim 3:5-7)**

B. Satan uses doubt to close minds. **(Lk 7:33-35)**

1. It is very easy to raise questions and doubts about anything!
2. Satan knows that throwing “clouds of dust” in the air will stop most from further study. A “sound mind” will not be intimidated by these things.

C. Satan uses false teachers to paralyze and then destroy our faith. **(2 Cor 2:16-18)**

1. Often false teachers are good at diagnosing legitimate problems; however their solution is often worse than the problem itself.
2. False teachers will boast about your “spirituality” because you are unsure about an issue they consider “traditional.” They will try to separate you from brethren rather than bring unity through struggle and study. **(2 Cor 11:4, 19-20)**

IV. The heart that overcomes doubt

A. We cannot win the fight without a pure heart.

1. How did Nathanael overcome his doubt? **(John 1:46-49)**
2. There are many things that can divide our hearts and block answers that we dearly need. **(James 1:6-7)**

B. We must fight against the pride that looks at men and weights the possible consequences of accepting a new truth. **(Jn 5:41-44)**

1. Men will often disappoint us. Those men may believe different things.
2. Let us never be of the mind to reject the truth of a matter because of the actions of a few hypocrites. **(Rom 3:4)**

C. It is my prayer that when you are tested that your faith will stand and grow stronger.

1. This is what Jesus said to Peter. **(Lk 22:31-32)**
2. What was the sifting like for Peter? It was for his good.

Conclusion: Will you begin to turn your doubts to certainty?

The Danger of Doubt by Larry Rouse

"If you were to die today, do you know where you will spend eternity?" This is a question that others have asked me and one that I have asked others. John wrote so that "you may know that you have eternal life" (1 **John 5:13**). Men today fight this truth for various reasons, preferring men to be left to wander in doubt and darkness. Is it arrogance and pride to say "I know" about this or any other Bible subject?

The powerful claims the Bible makes for itself will correctly lead one to the conclusion that certainty about the truths which God has revealed is not only possible, but expected! When Luke wrote by inspiration about the life of Christ, he did so that everyone who read would "know the certainty of those things..." (**Luke 1:4**). Luke wrote by the guidance of the Holy Spirit and as a result he had "perfect understanding of all things from the very first" (**Luke 1:3**). This is the very nature of inspiration, a perfect revelation that will provide certainty in the path a Christian is to walk. "All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 **Timothy 3:16-17**)."

How Faith Comes Through Doubt

There is, however, a place for doubt in the building of our faith. Consider the struggles that must take place before a certain faith is found. During His ministry Jesus' own brothers did not believe in Him. "...If You do these things, show Yourself to the world. ⁵ For even His brothers did not believe in Him" (**John 7:4-5**). I can understand why they would struggle this way. From the standpoint of sight, how could they believe that their older brother was the creator of the universe! Jesus gave undeniable proofs of His deity but He did not answer every question that a man might ask. Often Jesus would leave a man to struggle with his doubts. Jesus always gave them a path that would lead them to certainty if only men would have the commitment to follow it. His brothers followed that path and later came to know with certainty the truth about Jesus. After the ascension of Jesus His brothers are named as being among the believers. "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus and with His brothers" (**Acts 1:14**).

How Satan Uses Doubt

Satan wants to destroy the effectiveness of God's work in every way he can. In the parable of the sower Satan is pictured as a bird that snatches away the seed of God's word before it can penetrate a man's heart. Why did the seed not enter this man's heart? "When anyone hears the word of the kingdom, and does not understand *it*, then the wicked *one* comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is he who received seed by the wayside" (**Matthew 13:19**). A lack of understanding, a doubt about the value of the message, caused this one to quit and turn away from the powerful word of God.

There were many shallow "arguments" that Satan used that effectively discouraged many from further investigation. The very name "Jesus of Nazareth" brought forth doubts. "Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? ⁴²Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was" (**John 7:41-42**)?

Satan also used false charges against the character of both Jesus and John the Baptist by saying that John "has a demon" and that Jesus was a "glutton and a winebibber" (**Luke 7:33-35**). Those who did not have a heart that would pursue the truth would easily turn away from Jesus.

How False Teachers Use Doubt

Like Satan, false teachers have the goal of ending the pursuit of the truth found in God's word. They are not fair and will use any tactic to cut off the influence of a faithful teacher. A favorite tactic is to raise questions about anything and everything, to create confusion by switching to unrelated subjects and interrupt any answers with more questions. This "cloud of dust" that is

raised is then pointed to as proof that the subject is not understandable and not worthy of being an issue that anyone should be concerned with. A careful observer will note that the one who raises all the questions often will not lift a finger to find any answers. Commonly the position that the false teacher holds will be kept hidden or he will not allow it to be examined. Please remember, there is a difference between raising an honest question to pursue the truth, and raising a question just to defeat an "opponent."

Another common, but effective, tactic of a false teacher is to correctly diagnose a problem among the people of God, but then offer a "solution" that is worse than the problem itself. Many upon hearing a effective analysis of problems of worldliness and divisiveness among some Christians, are then treated to a number of "solutions" that will "solve" these problems. People are urged to cut off "traditional teaching and traditional teachers" or to pursue a direct leading of the Holy Spirit apart from the written word or even to reject foundational principles of Bible study for a nebulous "hermeneutic of love."

False teachers will often replace the doubt they planted with a confidence in the student's relationship with himself. Praise, flattery and needed attention is lavished upon this one who shares in this new "spirituality." "They zealously court you, *but* for no good; yes, they want to exclude you, that you may be zealous for them" (**Gal 4:17**).

My Personal Observation

Over the years I have seen those who were once close to me overcome by these men and their relationship of pride. I was marked as "traditional" and unworthy of study though their influence. In time my friends accepted the "wisdom" of their new teachers and, as a result, they cut me off without as much as a word to me. On my part I longed for open Bibles and open hearts and prayed for some time with the friends that I loved. I was never given that opportunity; however, for my friends had found a new "certainty," one that involved closed Bibles and closed relationships.

How to Find God's Certainty

1. Never be satisfied with questions alone. God's power will never be found among those who are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (**2 Timothy 3:7**).
2. Do not accept "easy answers." Those who rejected Jesus because of the easy answer that He grew up in Nazareth failed to look deeper into the question. He grew up in Nazareth, but He was indeed born in Bethlehem! Be like Nathaniel who raised this very objection, but was willing to investigate further when invited to "come and see" (**John 1:46-49**).
3. Never give up. In my own life I had to study some challenging subjects while I was first learning how to study the Bible. At times I needed to lay aside a difficult subject for other studies. Over time I always came back to the challenging question. Some of the greatest blessings God has given me were from these studies! Be like the brothers of Jesus, and pursue, over time, those doubts you may possess.
4. Pray. Let all of your studies have a faith in God at its foundation. Remember the examples of His own prophets who struggled with doubt but always took that doubt to God in prayer (**Habakkuk 2:1-4**).
5. Do not run from an open study of any truth that you have found (**John 3:19-21**).

Are you running from your doubts? If so, you are running from a living faith. It is my prayer that you will begin the struggle today to open God's word and find the assurance that will only be found in the knowledge of the truth.