

DOUBT

Background

There are many things that can creep in and cause doubt along the Christian way. Doubt can become a recurrent sin for individual Christians and will become a characteristic of the last days. Doubt causes coldness and a loss of spiritual vitality in those Christians who nurse doubts rather than working through them faithfully and prayerfully.

Finding things puzzling and having questions which we humbly ask the Lord is not condemned. Indeed, we are shown the disciples asking Jesus in order to learn from him, and he used such times to teach them. Such sincere questions were something very different in character from the mischievous questions which the Pharisees used to try to trick or ensnare Jesus. When we want to know something, we ask the Lord to show us and to guide us, and we ask in the context of a trusting, believing relationship with him, as disciples ask their Master to teach them.

Very different again is sceptical doubt that withdraws full commitment until there is absolute certainty. Such doubt undermines the Christian life, which depends on faith. Thinking "I have unsolved questions" is not the same as saying, "I will believe it when you prove it to me beyond doubt." Faith trusts the Lord Jesus to know the answers when we ourselves do not. In fact, He IS the answer. Christians trust a *person*, not a proof (even though there is good historical evidence, e.g. for the resurrection, and God sometimes graciously provides signs and wonders).

We note that there are many examples in the Bible of people who struggled with doubts

Abraham Genesis 17:16–19, 21 with Romans 4:18–22

Sarah Genesis 18:9–15

Job (whose questionings are not answered directly):

Job 42:1–6 (v. 6: "I despise [myself]" could equally be translated "I despise [what I have said]")

The sons of Korah Psalm 42:5, 9–11

Asaph's wrestling with doubt Psalm 73:1–22, 77:7–9

Jeremiah Jeremiah 15:18

The father of the boy with an unclean spirit Mark 9:24

Peter Matthew 14:28–33

Nathanael John 1:46–47

Thomas John 20:25

The Eleven Mark 16:14

The circumcision party Acts 11:2–3 [but see v. 18!]

The praying believers Acts 12:12–16

Dietary doubters Romans 14:23

Some of the 500 brothers 1 Corinthians 15:6 with Matthew 28:17

The waverer James 1:6–8

Wobbling Christians Jude 22

If doubting thoughts present themselves to our minds from time to time, how are we to deal with them?

First of all, always remember that the Bible does not commend doubt. Whilst we are to be merciful to those who doubt (Jude 22), that does not mean that doubt itself is ever encouraged! The consistent scriptural encouragement is not to doubt but to believe (see again, for example, James 1:6–8). In John 20, the Lord dealt kindly with Thomas, but he still told him to stop doubting. Nowhere is doubting God's revealed truth *approved* as a state of mind. The biblical guidance as to how to deal with doubt is therefore simple: stop it! We are not to doubt our Lord Jesus. We have given our lives to him and we are to grow in trust in him, repenting of all wrong attitudes including doubt (which we have distinguished from honestly asking sincere questions and looking to the Lord to answer them).

Many of the answers we need are in the Bible, and as we continue to study it, seeking the in-filling and guidance of the Holy Spirit, then we can be confident that any doubting thoughts will disappear and trust will grow.

Good Bible-believing Christian friends and pastors may be able to help us along the way.