

DOUBT

⁵ And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. ⁶ If anyone causes one of these little ones--those who believe in me--to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!

Matthew 18:5-7

¹ Jesus said to his disciples: "Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come."

Luke 17:1

²² Be merciful to those who doubt.

Jude 22

² When John, who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples ³ to ask him, "Are you the one to come, or should we expect someone else?"

Matthew 11:2,3

I. What is Doubt? Uncertainty is common to human experience.

- * Doubt is human and universal for we are all finite and imperfect.
- * In the Bible doubt means to be unsettled, to be "in between", to be perplexed, anxious, to be of "two minds" about an issue.

* Doubt, for our study, is any uncertainty regarding the truthfulness of Christianity, God's existence, or our relationship to him.

II. Deciphering the maze of doubt / Seven Myths about Doubt

A. Godly men and women never doubt.

B. Doubt is always wrong and sinful.

C. Doubt is never dealt with in the Bible.

D. Doubt should never be discussed or admitted.

E. Doubt is usually factual in nature, and is always satisfied by studying more evidence.

F. Doubt only affects Religious people, but never atheists or other unbelievers.

G. Doubt always indicates that something serious is wrong, perhaps even the unpardonable sin.

III. The Thomas Factor / Three species of Doubt

A. Factual Doubt is concerned with the foundations of belief-- are they well-grounded biblically, logically, historically, philosophically, scientifically, or morally.

1. Factual doubt is simple versus compound doubt.

Sufficient information should satisfy the factual doubter.

2. Yet when fairly simple, but unanswered, questions are not forthcoming, factual doubt can fester into another kind of Doubt.

B. Emotional Doubt / When it's not about what it's about

* This doubt is a painful, subjective, mood- and passion-oriented experience.

1. Emotional doubt often passes as its factual sister; however, it actually is not so much about facts, but how we feel about facts.
 2. Conclusions are drawn from moods or feelings, not the facts themselves.
 3. “What if” questions are a staple of emotional doubt.
 4. Medical states, unresolved childhood issues, lack of sleep, bad diet, faulty God pictures, and anxious personality types are most prone to emotional doubt.
 5. Unanswered factual questions fester into painful emotional doubt.
- C. Volitional Doubt--this kind of doubt is chiefly concerned with one's will.
1. Volitional uncertainty has to do with one's willingness to implement a choice regarding what one knows to be true.
 2. Lack of walking in the light can deaden our capacities for interest, passion, and participation in life.
 3. The religious leaders at the time of Jesus are a good example of Volitional Doubt. They knew “truth” but were simply unwilling to act upon it.
 4. C. S. Lewis points out that people who leave the faith rarely leave on the basis of facts, but simply drift away unwilling to walk in what they know.
 5. Volitional Doubt must be challenged and warned against. No amount of facts can convince someone who “will not” believe.

IV. Help with Doubt

- A. Factual Doubt should be treated with adequate evidence.
- B. Emotional Doubt should be treated with love, compassion, and proper self-talk that nourishes the truth of what God really thinks and says about us.
- C. Volitional Doubt must be confronted and called what it is. It is never an issue of facts or emotions, but of willingness. Only a fresh touch of fresh fire from God can raise us out of such deadness.