

THE MORALITY OF DOUBT: CAN I DOUBT AND NOT SIN?

I. Is it a Sin to Struggle with Doubt?

- A. Doubt is the intellectual struggle that results from seeking to reconcile seemingly contradictory evidence (e.g., the existence of a loving God with the existence of evil).
- B. Is doubt the opposite of faith? Can one struggle with doubt and be pleasing to God?
- C. We must take an exegetical and anthropological approach to answer this question.

II. The Bible and Doubters

- A. Centurion (Mark 9:24)
- B. Thomas (John 20:24-29)
- C. John the Baptist (John 1:29-34; Matthew 11:2-6)

III. Christian Experience and Doubt

- A. As we have seen, even the “greatest of people” can doubt (e.g., John the Baptist).
- B. Anecdotal evidence suggests that most Christians have struggled with doubt to some degree.
- C. Doubt should not be surprising, since we do not live by sight (Heb 11).
- D. The question is—How will you deal with your struggle when it comes?

IV. Discerning the Reason(s) for doubt

- A. Sometimes the Root Problem is **Moral**.
 - 1. Often our desires lead to our beliefs (Rom 1:21-23; Eph 4:17–18)^{1,2}
 - 2. Doubt may be caused by the **desire to sin**.
 - 3. Other times doubt is a **product of sin**.
- B. Sometimes the Root Problem is **Emotional**
 - 1. Tragic events such as the loss of a loved one rock the faith of the Christian.
 - 2. Scripture refers to trials as a fire (1 Pet 1:6–8).
 - a. Sometimes such “faith” is found wanting.
 - b. Other times such faith is strengthened through the trial.
- C. Sometimes the Root Problem is **Intellectual**.

V. Doubt Vs Alternatives

- A. Two alternatives to doubt sometimes masquerade as doubt: skepticism and agnosticism.
 - 1. Skepticism says, “That is not true!”

¹ “I want atheism to be true and am made uneasy by the fact that some of the most intelligent and well-informed people I know are religious believers. It isn't just that I don't believe in God, and, naturally, hope that I'm right about my belief. It's that I hope there is no God! I don't want there to be a God; I don't want the universe to be like that.” Thomas Nagel, *The Last Word* (Oxford University Press, 2001), 130.

² The [reality of God] would require a radical change in my way of life, a basic alteration in the direction of my day-to-day choices as well as in the ultimate objectives to be sought or hoped for The simple truth of the matter is that I did not wish to live up to being a genuinely religious person.” Mortimer Adler As quoted in Martin Gardner, *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* (Macmillan, 1999), 437.

2. Agnosticism says, “No one can know what is true.”
3. Doubt says, “I am struggling to see what is true.”
- B. The skeptic is dogmatic in his unbelief; The agnostic is dogmatic in his lack of belief; the doubter is searching for a reason to believe.
- C. Inclination of the Heart
 1. Another way of considering the difference is by observing the inclination of the heart.
 2. The default of the believer is inclination to Christ.

VI. Dealing With Doubt

- A. First, determine why the doubt is there—sin, emotional trial, or factual data?
- B. Second, pinpoint and seriously consider the issue causing doubt.
 1. Consider the alternative(s)
 - a. All other worldviews have irreconcilable difficulties.
 - b. Be careful of jumping from one ship you think has difficulties and landing in another that has far more fundamental difficulties.
 2. If you are looking for a worldview that does not have any problems, you will never be satisfied. Our worldview has some mystery, but *this mystery is expected*. God, an eternal entity, cannot be fully comprehended by His creation.
- C. Third, speak to another mature Christian about the doubt.
 1. Unfortunately, many have felt the church is a place unsafe to verbalize their doubt.³
 2. People don’t ask questions because they think they are the only ones who have them.
- D. Throughout, take the doubt to God in prayer.
 1. Honesty before God is evidenced in the Psalms (Ps 22:1–2; 73; 77)
 2. The Doubter’s Psalm (Psalm 73)
- E. Take the step of dependent faith when it is evident that you must.
 1. There are some elements of Christianity and some events in life that are inexplicable.
 2. When we have exhausted our mental capacity, we must learn to trust God. He knows infinitely more than we do. When we do not understand the answer, it does not mean there is no answer. It may simply be that God has not given us the answer.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Doubt is not always sin, but it may be a result of sin or a result of desire to sin.
- B. One can have faith while in the throes of doubt.
- C. One can be entirely pleasing to God while struggling with doubt.
- D. The Christian response to doubt is to humbly seek resolution through greater obedience, trust, and knowledge.

³ “I think the hardest thing about Doubt is that it’s like anything else in the Faith. It better be done alone and it better not cause any type of disruption. I have had doubts at times almost mind numbing, two things I have learned though is “Keep your mouth shut”, any questions refer to rule one. I think the most frustrating is that if you ask such questions it proves you don’t love the Lord, are a liar, deceived of Satan etc. Truly Frustrating.” Anonymous, “Christians Who Struggle With Serious Doubts”, n.d., <http://debunkingchristianity.blogspot.com/2007/02/christians-who-struggle-with-serious.html> (accessed December 18, 2012).