

Dealing With Doubt

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There was something that came up at the end of Matthew that I wanted to take some time and deal with topically. And as you guys who attend Calvary Chapel know, we don't do this very often. And when we do, it's sometimes between book studies. And I want to do that this morning. I want to talk about something that we touched on briefly at the end of Matthew, but I want to talk about it a little more thoroughly. So go ahead.

We're going to go back to Matthew chapter 28. We are really done, I promise, with this—this is just an extra thing. But Matthew chapter 28, there's just this little statement that I touched on ever so lightly last week, and I got to thinking about it. And I thought, what, that deserves a little more time just because I think it's an issue that people deal with.

Matthew chapter 28, look at verses 16 and 17 with me, if you would, please. It goes like this: *“Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.”* (ESV) Those last three words: *“...but some doubted.”* Pray with me.

Heavenly Father, use this time, we pray. Speak to our hearts. I truly believe, Lord, that there is somebody here or within the sound of my voice that really needs this today. And so I pray that you would impart according to need here, and that you would speak to all of your children and guide them, Lord, and even speak to those who aren't your children yet, and talk to them about this issue that we're dealing with today. And we ask it, Lord, in Jesus' name, amen.

The last three words of that verse, *“...but some doubted,”* have bothered and challenged Christians for a very long time. And I didn't realize just how much it had bothered people until I started looking up these verses and just the comments that men have made on these verses over the years in my myriad of commentaries that I have on my laptop. Anyway, it was just amazing. People have been trying to figure out: just what does this mean?

Well again, I only talked about it briefly as we completed our study in Matthew. And I think the only thing I really said about it was if I was Matthew, I probably wouldn't have included those words in there, only because I think somehow it tends to cast doubt on maybe the validity of the resurrection of Jesus.

Because remember what's going on there. Jesus said that—He told his disciples—go to Galilee and I'll meet you there after the resurrection. So He's

been crucified, He's been buried, now He's been seen alive, and He says, go to Galilee and we'll talk there further. And they do. And it says that while they gathered, they came together and they worshiped Him, but some doubted. And so here are these words, and they are this raw honesty in the Bible.

When I think about it, last week I said, I probably wouldn't have written them in there, but I'm glad that Matthew did because he's just—he's being completely honest. In fact, we read through the gospels as we've gone through Matthew in the last two and a half years. I mean, how honest has Matthew been about the idiotic sort of things that the disciples would often say, how they were so slow to believe the things that Jesus said, and so forth?

And he was just very honest with us. Even when it came to the resurrection, they didn't expect Jesus to rise from the grave. Even the women who came on resurrection day, remember, came with ointments and things to anoint the body because they expected to find a dead body—even though Jesus had said to them repeatedly, I will rise from the dead, and so forth. (Matthew 16:21)

So I want to talk this morning about doubt. Can anybody relate? You don't need to show hands. I thought I should talk about it because this is an important thing, and reading through the scriptures, it becomes fairly obvious to us that doubt is not necessarily a good thing.

There's a passage where James talks about it. I'll put this up on the screen for you from James chapter 1:

James 1:6 (ESV)

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind.

That's pretty much what the Bible has to say about doubt. So you can imagine—I don't know too many people, and I'm sure you don't either, who would necessarily want to admit to that sort of a thing. Because the last thing we want to do is convey an attitude to other believers that there are holes in our faith. And like, hey, tossed by the wind—that's me, sort of a thing.

So most of us will, in fact, go out of our way to project an appearance of confidence when, in fact, we walk around day by day sometimes with doubts—and I mean serious doubts about what the Bible says, about what we're going to believe, and so forth. And let's face it—we have all struggled with doubt at one time or another. All right?

Now in the passage that we're looking at here in Matthew chapter 28, it simply says, "...*but some doubted.*" That's really all it tells us. It doesn't go into any other detail here. But I find it interesting that the word that is translated doubt here, when it says "...*but some doubted,*" the word that is there is actually only used two times in the entire New Testament: here, and once earlier in Matthew.

Where Jesus is walking on the water, the disciples are freaking out of their minds, and finally Peter says, Lord, if it's you, let me come to you walking on the water. And Jesus bids him to come. And so Peter swings his legs over the boat, and he begins to actually walk on the water. Until—he sees the wind and the waves, he becomes frightened by those things, he cries out to the Lord, and Jesus grabs him by the hand, lifts him up, and says—remember?—"...*Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?*" (Matthew 14:28–31)

Now what's interesting about that is: of all the references to doubt, doubting, doubts, doubter, or whatever other sort of variation you can find on that word *doubt*, the word that's here in Matthew 28 and the word doubt that I just referenced to you from that one story—those are the only versions of that word *doubt*, that Greek word, that are in the entire New Testament. Isn't that crazy?

It's given the word doubt for you and I in English, but that word doesn't give us the full sense. It really means to hesitate. In fact, it could be translated, why did you hesitate, O you of little faith? Or it could literally be said here from Matthew 28: And they worshipped him, but some hesitated.

So it doesn't necessarily speak of a full-out attitude of unbelief or something like that. It could just refer to a moment's hesitation. It doesn't mean that Peter was an unbeliever. It doesn't mean that he was filled full of doubt at all times. It means that when he got in that situation where he was on the water, walking on the water, and trying to keep his eyes on Jesus, he got his eyes off for a minute—and he hesitated in his doubt, and he began to sink. Oh you of little faith, why did you hesitate? That's essentially what the word means. So doubt can come in different forms. It can be a momentary hesitation, or it can be a lifestyle of unbelief, I suppose.

I want to share—or suggest—maybe a radical idea for you this morning, and that is: doubt can actually benefit you. I want you to hear me here, but I want you to follow me. And let me be clear here too: I am not suggesting that doubt is good. Even a moment's hesitation of doubt is something that we ought to resolve, we've got to deal with, and so forth to go on in our walk with the Lord.

But the presence of doubt can benefit you in the long run, and I want to show you how.

So I'm going to give you here this morning four statements about doubt. And I'll put them up on the screen for those of you that are taking notes, so it will help you a little bit. So let's start with the first one, okay?

● Doubt is normal
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And the first—I've already obviously alluded to it—but the first statement that I want to make is: Doubt is normal.

I bring this up because it's important. Every Christian experiences doubt. It may be very fleeting, or it may challenge you for an extended period of time, but we experience this. Real Christians experience doubt. I think one of the reasons we don't want to admit it, or we don't sometimes want to deal with our doubts, is because we don't think that real Christians experience doubt.

We know that we do, but we don't really know about other people because they're not telling. And of course, we're not either. And they think the same thing about you. They think your life is essentially without any doubt. And so we go through this weird sort of a situation where we experience doubts, but we don't think anybody else does.

And we all do, but we don't want to appear weak in our faith to others. Christians have a tendency to think of themselves as the only person who ever struggles with a particular issue like doubt. So, because of that, more often than not, what we end up doing with our doubts is we just swallow them, gulp them down.

What I mean is we ignore them. We don't talk about it. We try, in fact, really not to think about it. And we do this sometimes because we're flat-out afraid to confront our doubts. What if they end up being true? I mean, what if they end up being legit? What if they end up being insurmountable? It's probably better if I just keep my mouth shut. Don't think about it. Don't talk about it. And just ignore it. And maybe it'll go away, right? On its own? Wrong.

It's not going to go away. And that's why I want to suggest this morning that confronting your doubts is of critical importance. And I'll tell you why. Because life is eventually going to confront them for you. And if you're not doing the confronting, let me tell you, life will. Somewhere down the road of your life, your faith is going to be tested.

Some of you, many of you, have already been tested sorely in your walk with the Lord. And something is going to happen to challenge everything that you believe. And if you've been ignoring your doubts, which a lot of Christians do, you're going to find that in that time of testing, they will surface, they will come to the forefront, and they will haunt you. And that can be devastating.

Let me share a quick quote with you that I found that was very interesting on this subject from Timothy Keller. He writes:

People who blithely go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against either the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if they have failed over the years to listen patiently to their own doubts. — Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God*

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What is the author saying here? He's basically saying what I just said. Life is eventually going to expose your doubts. If you don't, if you choose not to deal with them, life is going to do it. Either some tragedy is going to come along to you or to someone whom you love, and that is going to just bring the whole kit and caboodle of doubt back into your face.

Or you're going to meet up with somebody who's a really smart fool. And I mean, they're going to have their argument down pat, and they're going to make you look like an idiot. And then these doubts that have been raging in the background are going to suddenly find themselves in the forefront. And you're going to begin to think, I don't know what I believe. I don't know what I'm talking about. And at least this guy who says he doesn't believe—at least he's sure about what he believes. And I'm not. And I have serious doubts about some of the things that I believe.

It's going to happen. It's going to happen one way or another. Somehow your doubts are going to be challenged if you don't challenge them on your own.

So, to help you address your doubts, I want you to know, first of all, that you're not a horrible specimen of a Christian simply because you have them. They're normal. We all experience them. So let's get busy dealing with them.

Statement number two about our doubts.

- **Doubt is normal**
- **Question *why* you doubt**

We need to learn to question why we doubt. Doubts have to be ultimately challenged. And what I mean by that is we need to look our doubts straight in

the face and have the courage to say, why am I doubting? To even say that, to even admit that, to say, I have doubts about my faith, or I have doubts about the Bible, or I have doubts about God, is a very frightening thing because it's like admitting you have holes in your faith.

But we forget, and we think that we don't have faith at all. We say, well, I obviously don't have any faith because I struggle with doubt.

Do you know what's interesting about doubt? We fail to recognize that there are always reasons for doubt. Sometimes we don't think so. We're just going along in our life, doing what we're doing, and we don't realize that the doubt that we're struggling with—and even the reason for our doubt—is something that we can point to.

Here's an important question to ask yourself if you're experiencing doubt. In fact, let me put this on the screen.

AM I feeding my doubt?

The question you need to ask is: Am I feeding my doubt?

I put a picture there of a dog eating from the bowl called *doubt* because there's a great story, actually, that Billy Graham tells about a man who's supposedly like in Alaska walking down the road with these two beautiful huskies—one in each hand, one on each side—gorgeous dogs. And somebody, a stranger, walks up to him and compliments him on these two dogs. And he says, I have a question for you. Which one of these is stronger? To which the owner of the dog simply replied, whichever one I feed.

And it sounds like a trite answer, but the fact of the matter is, Christians are walking down the street of their lives with faith in one hand and doubt in the other. And the one that they feed is the one that is going to be strongest.

And so the question comes here again: Are you feeding your doubts with information that you're exposing yourself to?

I found myself doing this a number of years ago—not terribly long after the internet kind of fully bloomed. I discovered, like many of you guys, chat rooms. And I found this Christian chat room. Well, no, it wasn't a Christian chat room. There were Christians in it, but it was just a debate room where people were defending their faith. A lot of Christians were there defending their faith.

But in this chat room also were a lot of atheists. And they weren't dumb people. They were very bright people. And they were very good at their arguments. And I considered it a challenge to hang out in there and explain to them why they

were wrong. And so I hung out in this chat room, like in the evenings and stuff, and figured that I was probably doing these guys a favor by doing this.

But ultimately, over a period of weeks, after all the arguments—and these guys, like I said, were really good at presenting arguments of why not to believe—I found something frightening happening. I found that it was actually having an impact on my faith. And I was beginning to entertain doubts because of some of the things that were being said there—not that they were even necessarily all that great of arguments, but it was just wearing on me over time, a long period of time.

And even though I found it exhilarating at first, I found that after, again, a number of weeks, I was just struggling. And I really was truly frightened by the whole idea that I—and by the way, I was pastoring at the time. I mean, you guys who know when the internet kind of came into full flower, you know what that's all about, or what the timeframe is—I was right here at Calvary Chapel Ontario.

And I was struggling. I began to struggle with some doubts. And it scared me. And I cried out to the Lord about it. What's going on here, God? I teach your word several times a week. I can't entertain doubts. Good grief. I went into this chat room to help people resolve their doubts, and now I've taken on some of my own. What's up with that?

And I really cried out to the Lord about it. And God gave a scripture to me that I didn't want to hear. And it was from our wonderful story study in Matthew. Let me show you this. You might remember this, actually, when we talked through it. He writes,

Matthew 7:6 (ESV)

Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and to attack you.

Do not give dogs what is holy (this is Jesus speaking), and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and to attack you.

I always read that passage, that verse, and I thought that all it really had to say was just don't cast your pearls before swine. And that's really the whole point of the thing to me was, hey, this is a very precious thing that we have, so don't let people run it into the mud.

Never even read the last part of the verse and applied it to myself: Or they will turn and attack you. Why do you suppose Jesus cared? That He would actually—He could have just stopped and said, hey, by the way, don't give what is holy to people who can't appreciate it. All they're going to do is trample it in

the mud, and they're going to make it look like a filthy thing. So just don't do that. He could have said, alright, next lesson. But He amended it on the very end by saying, and then they'll turn and attack you.

So not only had I been doing the first thing, and that is causing the Word of God to become trampled underfoot, but I was experiencing that trampling of my own heart and soul that goes on at a time like that when I'm focusing my attention on trying to help other people deal with their doubts. But I'm not really feeding my own heart as it relates to being built up in the faith.

I was so exhilarated by being in this chat room. I was spending all my time chatting when I should have been building up my own heart in the Lord. I should have been spending time in the Word, building up my own strength, but I wasn't. I was giving, giving—and in a very foolish forum. And it began to wear me down. And instead of going into the Word, the only time I checked the Word back then was just to make sure I had my argument down for somebody in the chat room or to put together a teaching for you guys.

But it's interesting, when I put together a teaching for you guys, that's not—I mean, it's not that I don't get anything out of it—but I need to have my own quiet time, just like you do. I need to be spending time in the Scriptures just like you do, just meditating on the Word and allowing God just to bathe my heart in the truth of His Word. I wasn't doing that because I had things I had to do. I had to save the world. And they turned, and they trampled me. And I felt it. And it was very devastating.

I got permission to share a quick story. I'm not going to do it with his name, but—although he gave me permission to do that too—but there's a brother in our fellowship who, just a year ago, came to me with some just real serious doubts. Just really struggling with doubts. And we talked and we prayed. And I just wasn't thinking at the time—I wasn't thinking, well, could this be something that he's doing? I mean, that he's causing this stuff on his own?

So we did. We talked, we prayed, we spent time in the Word together to try to counter what was going on in his own heart. But eventually he came to me and said, well, the Lord really convicted me of something that I was doing in my life, and it's already having an impact. And I said, well, what's that? He said—and again, this might not be an issue for you—but he said, I was listening a lot to AM talk radio, and it's so negative. I don't know if you've listened. It is so incredibly negative. So incredibly full of just problems in the world, that this brother just got weighed down to the point where he was struggling with all these doubts.

And when the Lord finally convicted him of his appetite for this sort of news talk radio and he shut it off, he began to instantly improve. And then as the Lord began to move him to spend more time in the Scripture and just feeding his heart with the Word of God, he found his vitality and strength in the Lord coming back.

So that's one of the reasons I put that picture of the dog eating out of the bowl of doubt there. Because sometimes we can be our own worst enemies in that respect. And we're actually doing this thing on our own.

Look at this passage from Matthew chapter 6. This is a great passage too.

Matthew 6:22-23 (ESV)

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness!

The eye is the lamp of the body. So if your eye is healthy (Jesus says), your whole body is going to be full of light, but if your eye is bad (and by the way, that could even be your ear, that's like the eye of the soul) your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, (oh man) how great is that darkness!

So what are you eating? What are you putting in your heart? Think about the movies. Think about the books you're reading. Think about the input in your life. If you're struggling with doubt, it could be your fault. And maybe the Lord needs to speak to you today about your diet. And I'm not talking about food—I'm talking about the input from other sources that affects the heart and the soul so powerfully. We just have to be very careful what we put into our hearts. The world is just bending over backwards to mess up our minds today.

Let me move on to the third statement about doubt.

- **Doubt is normal.**
- **Question *why* you doubt**
- **Challenge your doubt**

First of all, we made the point that doubt is normal. Second of all, we said that you need to begin to question why you doubt. It might be even something going on in your life. And then thirdly, we need to learn to challenge our doubts.

We tend to think of doubt as the absence of faith. Hear me now. This is important. We tend to think of doubt as the absence of faith. That is not true. The fact of the matter is, in order to doubt something, you have to believe

something else. Hear me now. This is really important. In order to doubt something, you have to believe something else.

Consider this statement that I want to put up here on the screen for you:

All doubts, however skeptical and cynical are really just a set of alternate beliefs.

All doubts, however skeptical and cynical, are really just a set of alternate beliefs.

What's that saying? You might say, well, I doubt something. I doubt that's true. You know why you're saying that? It's because you believe something else.

Let me give you an example. I'm going to put a statement here on the screen that is basically a statement of doubt. Alright? And here it is. Here's the statement:

Statement: "I struggle believing that the Bible is really God's Word."

I struggle believing that the Bible is really God's Word. I have doubts about the legitimacy, the validity, the accuracy, and all the other stuff of the Bible. So let's say somebody says that, okay?

Now, what they're really saying is that they believe certain things about the Bible. Let me give you some examples.

Statement: "I struggle believing that the Bible is really God's Word."

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that some things in the Bible are morally questionable

For example, beliefs that feed this doubt. The first one is that they believe they—and this is a possibility—I believe that some things in the Bible are morally questionable. People say that to me all the time. Well, it's not uncommon. Let's put it that way.

When you're talking about unbelievers particularly—but even sometimes believers will—you can tell they come and they struggle. And they're like, I was listening to my teacher at school or my professor at college or something like that. And he was talking about how, when the people of Israel came into the Promised Land and God told them just to wipe out those people—men, women, and children—and here in the United States of America, we would call that murder. And we would say that's morally wrong. So my teacher was saying, the

Bible is filled full of things that are morally questionable, at the very least, and so forth. And now I'm beginning to wonder if that isn't in fact the case.

Okay. But you see what happens? In order to doubt the Bible, in this case, you have to believe something else. I believe that what is in the Bible is potentially morally questionable. What else?

Statement: "I struggle believing that the Bible is really God's Word."

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that some things in the Bible are morally questionable
2. I believe the Bible includes man-made myths

Here's another doubt that might feed this whole thing—or belief, rather. I believe the Bible includes manmade myths.

Here's something else people love to say. And they love to bring up some of the stories in the Bible and talk about how fanciful they are, how ridiculous it is for you to believe such a thing. And pretty soon, that starts to wear on you. And you begin to wonder, well, you know... and then you see Christians starting to waffle a little bit on things.

Well, the story of Noah and the Ark—it could be figurative. It sure could be figurative. Yeah, I'll give you that. And they start to waffle on some of these things as if these are myths that someone came up with. I think what's really going on here is God's just trying to tell a story, so He came up with a story about a man and a boat and the animals and the flood. But I'm not saying it happened, but it sure makes a great story and it provides a good lesson. Guess what? Boom. Doubts. I'm wondering if some of these things are really real.

Statement: "I struggle believing that the Bible is really God's Word."

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that some things in the Bible are morally questionable
2. I believe the Bible includes man-made myths
3. I believe anything as old as the Bible must contain copying errors

Here's another one: I believe that anything as old as the Bible must contain some kind of errors, like copyist errors. Good grief. Something that's potentially four or five thousand years old, as far as the writing of it goes. And you're telling me that there aren't significant errors in the Bible in the copying? I mean, they didn't have copy machines back then. It had to be written down by hand.

Who's to say that some of the people didn't just inject their own little comments in the Bible, so that what we have today isn't even a shadow of what it was

originally? Have you ever heard that one before? Sure you have. Of course you have. You've probably thought it yourself. But do you understand that to doubt the Bible, you have to believe other things? So doubt is not the absence of faith. Doubt is faith in the wrong things.

Let me give another quick example—another statement that might be a statement of doubt:

“I struggle believing that God is One God in three Persons.”

I struggle believing that God is one God in three persons. This is essentially doubting the doctrine of the Trinity. And by the way, this is not uncommon. A lot of people struggle with it.

Well, let's look at some of the beliefs that can feed this doubt.

“I struggle believing that God is One God in three Persons.”

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that if it doesn't make sense to me, it can't be true

First of all, I believe that if it doesn't make sense to me, it can't be true. How's that one sound?

That's one of the biggest objections people have to believing in the Trinity. You talk to them about the Trinity. You show them in the scripture. And then what they finally say is, well, I just don't get that.

Do you want to know what my response is? I don't care. That doesn't change anything. It's simply, this is what the Bible says.

But when people doubt things like the Trinity, what they're saying is, I doubt this because I believe something else. And what I believe is: if it doesn't present itself to my reason, boom, I reject it. Right?

What they're actually saying is, I have faith in my brain. More faith, in fact, than the Bible. I choose to accept my reason above revelation.

So when they say, well, I don't believe in the Trinity, what they're saying is, I just believe in other things that contradict the Trinity.

“I struggle believing that God is One God in three Persons.”

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that if it doesn't make sense to me, it can't be true
2. I believe the Bible does not teach the Trinity

Here's another one: I believe the Bible doesn't even teach the Trinity. You have to believe something to not believe the Trinity. And people who don't believe in the Trinity don't think that's what the Bible really teaches.

I've looked at those verses. I don't think that's what they're saying. So they do believe something. You with me? They're putting their faith in things.

“I struggle believing that God is One God in three Persons.”

Beliefs that feed this doubt:

1. I believe that if it doesn't make sense to me, it can't be true
2. I believe the Bible does not teach the Trinity
3. I believe that those who embrace the Trinity are in error

How about this last one: I believe that those who embrace the Trinity are in error. You have to believe—if you're going to say, I don't believe in the Trinity—you have to believe that those who do believe are wrong. You have to believe that.

So you have to, again, in order to doubt something, you have to believe something else.

So the best way to challenge your doubts—remember that's the point that we're making here—challenge your doubts. The best way to challenge your doubts is to test what you do believe. Okay? Test what you do believe.

For example, concerning the Trinity: is it really true that my personal understanding of things is what defines His truth? Is that really true? Ask yourself that question. Is that a smart thing for me to believe—that if it doesn't appeal to my brain, it can't possibly be true?

Is it really true that the Bible doesn't teach the Trinity? I mean, have I really gone through the scriptures and looked at them one by one and really investigated this thing?

And is it really true that those who embrace the Trinity are wrong? Have I gone and talked to them? Have I really investigated? Have I sat down with someone who believes in the doctrine of the Trinity and said, okay, explain to me why you believe that God is one God manifest in three persons. I want to know, because I got problems with this. So talk to me here.

Have I really done that? Or do I just believe it, without really ever having investigated it?

Or, to go back to our original question about doubts about the Bible: are there really things in the Bible that are morally questionable? Does the Bible really contain man-made myths?

And then finally, are there really copying errors in the Bible? Is there proof that shows that there are copying errors in the Bible from the process of transmission?

So you see, these are the kind of questions that we have to ask, and they're critical. It's critical that we question ourselves in what we believe. We're never going to resolve our doubts if we don't start challenging what we do believe about those things.

Let's take a look at the last of the four points that I want to bring up. First of all, we said doubt is normal. And then we said we need to question why we're doubting—it might be something that we're feeding ourselves. Thirdly, we need to challenge our doubts and ask ourselves, why do I believe what I do believe?

- **Doubt is normal.**
- **Question *why* you doubt**
- **Challenge your doubt**
- **You *must* reach a conclusion**

And then lastly—this is an exhortation really from me—you must reach a conclusion. You must, in fact, reach a conclusion. You cannot let your doubts linger.

And I've already made the point why. Earlier I said that life, or some really smart fool, is going to come along and have their argument down. And your doubts are going to explode onto the scene.

And like that quote said, people's faith can be destroyed in a very short period of time because they have not honestly looked at their doubts and said, why do I believe these things? Or why am I struggling to believe these things?

I'm going to close with this, but I'm going to end with three reasons why you should address your doubt and always reach a conclusion.

All right, so three things that I'm going to put up here.

Doubt that is left to linger...

- ...is the devil's playground

First of all, doubt that's left to linger is the devil's playground. This is very important. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:11:

2 Corinthians 2:11 (ESV)

...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs,

...so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs, The NIV says "...schemes..."

Now Paul is writing this statement in the context of his writing about forgiveness. And he says, we need to be careful to forgive. Why? Because we don't want to be outwitted by the devil, because we're not unaware of the kind of games he plays.

But this statement applies to anything that we would allow to linger that is ungodly. And doubt is something that we have to be very careful not to allow to linger. Because the enemy is going to exploit that in your life. The enemy is going to try to magnify that and turn it into this enormous stumbling block for you as a believer. Very important.

Doubt that is left to linger...

- ...is the devil's playground
- ...will torment you

Number two, doubt that is left to linger will ultimately torment you—to the point where you don't want anything to do with the Bible, or church, or praying, or anything after that—because you are just being hammered by doubt.

In the Old Testament, doubt was something that God told them would be a byproduct of their disobedience. He said—and God laid all this out ahead of time—but He told them, He said, listen, first of all, if you keep My law, I'm going to bless your socks off. But if you basically throw My law under the bus, and you just decide, I don't want anything to do with this junk, then He began to outline for them all the things that were going to happen in their lives.

But He made a statement that I don't often hear talked about from Deuteronomy that talks about doubt. Look at this. He says,

Deuteronomy 28:66 (ESV)

Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life.

"Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life."

This statement is a statement that God gives to the nation of Israel in the context of their disobedience. But it talks to us—it paints a picture to us—of just how tormenting doubt can be, to go through life with no real assurance.

One of the beautiful things I love about the Christian faith: it encourages questions and it isn't afraid to address doubt.

You got doubts? Bring them on. We're not going to shut anybody up. We're not going to make you feel guilty. We're not going to say, if you really had faith, you wouldn't have doubts. And you just keep those to yourself, and I don't want you spreading those around anybody else.

We're not going to do that. Why? God has answers. And if we will just be honest and sincere about looking into those answers— God says, you seek with all your heart, you will find. (Jeremiah 29:13)

And that's a promise. And I've seen it in my own life, that as I begin to just really address myself to those things, God begins to bring the answers to the surface. And I love that.

There's no reason that you and I have to live this reality of having these lingering, tormenting thoughts that leave us in this void of faith in the Word of God and in the plan and the purpose of God, just because we weren't courageous enough to look our doubts in the face and say: Why are you there? Have I done something to bring it into my life? Have I not questioned what's really going on here? Just exactly what's happening?

Doubts will ultimately shipwreck our faith if we leave them alone.

Doubt that is left to linger...

- ...is the devil's playground
- ...will torment you
- ...may be just an excuse

And then the other thing that we have to remember here—and this is the third point about letting doubt linger—you have to understand, people, it could in fact be an excuse on your part.

You might say, well, Pastor Paul, an excuse for what? You have to admit, if I refuse to address my doubts, it could be in fact an excuse for my stubborn and unbelieving heart that doesn't want to submit to God's Word. And so I'm just looking for reasons. I'm looking for excuses to be able to say, yeah, well, I have some serious doubts about that.

I've talked to people over the years—and I'm sure you have too, you guys are in the workplace, frankly, more than I am—but people have said to me before, with kind of crossed arms, I have some real intellectual doubts about the Bible, about God, and all that kind of good stuff.

And you say, well, no problem. Let's talk. Well, I'm busy, but I'm just here to tell you, I have doubts about this stuff. Okay. Well, why don't you come to church and we'll talk about it? We'll go through the scriptures together. We'll study it. You know what? I'm not really interested.

That's a problem, you guys. That's a problem. I think somebody's blowing smoke. I think somebody is creating a facade here so that they can live their life the way they want and they can continue to exist in this gray area of, well, maybe it's true, maybe it's not. Boy, the last thing I want to do is read the Bible and become a radical, as if to accept that, gee, this stuff might actually be true. Then where would I be? I'll be a social outcast. I'm not going there.

Not only that, but if I believe that the Bible is true, then I got to believe that the God of the Bible is true. And then I got to believe that I maybe am really, truly accountable to somebody for the way I've lived my life. And I am not going there.

I am going to be a free moral agent. I'm going to live my life the way I want. And when I'm done with my life, I'll have nobody to blame but myself. It's the way I wanted to live my life.

And let me tell you, no God is going to tell me how to live my life. So I'm just going to just keep diluting myself with the idea that I've got intellectual problems with the Bible.

I'm sorry. That's just dishonest. Because the fact of the matter is God has answers if you're willing to listen, if you're willing to open your eyes and look. But often people aren't. And when they do open the Bible and they do come to church, it's only to get ammunition to reinforce their doubts. Because they want to doubt.

And that's something that we have to deal with. That's something we have to admit to ourselves. In the Gospel of John, chapter 3, verse 20, it says:

John 3:20 (ESV)

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.

And that's just a simple reality. People don't like to come into the light because they want to keep living in the darkness. And so if I can perpetuate my darkness and even give myself an excuse for darkness by saying, I have doubts—although I'm really not willing to do anything about them—then more the better. Because now I can feel better.

And I can say, well, the reason I'm not a Christian is because there's just too many doubts to that whole thing. And then they'll say, I'm not into religion anyway. Religion never excited me.

When people say that to me, I say, hey, listen. You got nothing on me. I have hated religion since I was a little boy, and to this day I still hate religion. I just happen to love Jesus Christ, and I believe He is who the Bible says He is, and that He died on the cross for my sins. You can take religion and kick it to the curb, but I want Jesus all over.

So don't talk to me about religion. I'm not going to defend little men in pointy hats throwing holy water on people. We're here to talk about Jesus Christ and what He did, historically, and whether or not you accept that.

Let's get down to real life issues here. That's where you're going to find not religion, but reality. And there's plenty of answers, if we're just honest enough to look into them and say, I want to know the truth.