

DOUBT: THE SILENT ARSONIST

DR. BRENT STRAWSBURG

EQUIPPING & OUTREACH CONSULTANT, CB OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

SUMMARY

There are many people in the church who are struggling with doubt...

- They may have doubts about the claims of the Christian faith.
- They may not be feeling His presence in their life.
- They may wonder whether they can trust the Bible in light of the theory of evolution or discoveries of science.
- They may doubt whether prayer really works because it just doesn't seem that God answers their prayers.
- They may simply look at the world and say, "How can God be all-powerful and all-good and still let all this stuff happen?"

BIBLICAL BACKGROUND:

EXAMPLE #1...THE FATHER OF THE DEMON-POSSESSED BOY... Mark 9:17-18,21-22

Jesus saw an element of faith...He understood the reality of doubt!

EXAMPLE #2...JOHN THE BAPTIST... Luke 7:18-22

John the Baptist had a genuine moment of doubt late in his public ministry.

Jesus didn't insist on "blind faith"; he supplied evidence!

STEP #1...SEE THE FACES OF DOUBT

There is not just one face of doubt! There is not just one reason why people doubt! There are many different faces of doubt! Dr. Larry Anderson, who is probably the foremost Christian expert on doubt identifies four general categories or faces of doubt. Each of these "faces" of doubt will provide a unique opportunity to deal with the doubt in the best way possible!

- **INTELLECTUAL DOUBTERS**...don't over-react; may sound like doubt when it is just a question!
- **REBELLIOUS DOUBTERS**...distinguish independence from rebellion; some need to learn on their own; pray for wisdom!
- **DISAPPOINTMENT DOUBTERS**...time to be sensitive to the emotional hurt!; "I can understand why you would feel that way"!
- **INTELLECTUAL DOUBTERS**... Allow people to ask questions; develop a systematic plan to provide answers!

STEP #2...BALANCE FAITH & REASON

Too many Christians doubt because no one has ever explained the divine balance that God has created between faith & reason. The Scripture teaches that there is a role for faith (Hebrews 11:6) and a role for reason (1 Peter 3:15). The question is how do we balance these things the way God wants us to balance them.

KNOWING OUR FAITH IS TRUE

INTERNAL WITNESS
SPIRIT BY FAITH

EXTERNAL WITNESS
REASON/ARGUMENT



SHOWING OUR FAITH IS TRUE

EXTERNAL WITNESS
REASON/ARGUMENT

INTERNAL WITNESS
SPIRIT BY FAITH

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE BALANCE?

- **BLIND FAITH**...too many people hide behind "blind faith"! This creates deep inner tension that causes a person to live a split life--- things they believe and things they don't believe!
- **WEAK FAITH**...other people have "weak faith" because they never really exercise their faith. You see some folks are always on a quest for "certainty"...they need 100% proof for everything and anything!
- **TIMID FAITH**...still other people have "timid faith" because they don't ever share their faith and/or don't have the confidence in their faith to want to share. They are afraid of what others will say because deep down they don't think their faith is reasonable!

STEP #3...LEARN TO DISARM YOUR DOUBT

We all face doubt at different moments in our lives. When doubt, uncertainty and questions threaten to overwhelm us it's absolutely necessary that we learn to disarm our doubt. I want to give you some very practical suggestions on how to do that...

✓ VERBALIZE YOUR DOUBTS

When we verbalize our doubts we realize the following...

- We are not alone! Other people have doubts also and may struggle with the same exact issue!
- We realize that there are answers & resources that can really help our faith!
- We realize that even if we can't get all the answers that our faith can still be strong!

✓ DISTINGUISH DISAPPOINTMENT FROM DOUBT

Life is full of disappointments and it's important to distinguish between doubt & disappointment! Disappointment is part of living in a flawed and fallen world...but it is different than doubt!_Philip Yancey, gifted Christian author and thinker makes this observation...

"We tend to think, 'Life should be fair because God is fair.' But God is not life. And if I confuse God with the physical reality of life- by expecting constant good health for example- then I set myself up for crashing disappointment."

Philip Yancey, Disappointed with God

✓ RESOLVE DOUBTS ONE AT A TIME

If it feels like you are neck deep in doubt or skepticism it is important to realize that it is impossible to resolve all those feelings/issues at once. There is only one approach that works...resolve your doubts one at a time! Take them issue by issue! Here's how this works...

- If you have a problem with a verse in the Bible...study it until it is resolved in your head!
- If you have a problem with a particular issue...study it until you feel that you have a reasonable explanation!
- If you are overwhelmed by the questions of skeptics...take one at a time and find a reasonable answer!

✓ DON'T MINIMIZE THE BATTLE

There is nothing that the evil one would want more than for individual Christians to struggle with doubt and to be overwhelmed and defeated. Listen to the description of the battle from the perspective of Scripture and the perspective of a great Christian intellectual...

³For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. ⁴The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2 Corinthians 10:3-5 NIV

False ideas are the greatest obstacles to the reception of the gospel. We may preach with all the fervor of a reformer and yet succeed only in winning a straggler here and there, if we permit the whole collective thought of the nation or of the world to be controlled by ideas which, by the resistless force of logic, prevent Christianity from being regarded as anything more than a harmless delusion. Under such circumstances, what God desires us to do is to destroy the obstacle at its root.

J. Gresham Machen

Professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary, 1912

Sounds like the same battle doesn't it? Here's the rally cry in our day n' age...

- Take every thought captive and make it bend the knee to Jesus.
- Take every doubt and lay it before the cross and ask God to help us see the reality of it.
- Take every concern and ask for God's grace.
- Take every intellectual issue and ask God to remove it as an obstacle to the Christian faith.

If you are struggling with doubts...you are not alone! You can get the upper hand! You can re-take back that part of your mind that has been defeated by doubt!