

What We Need To Know About Spiritual Doubt



(Mat 11:2-6)

The exchange between Jesus and John the Baptist's disciples found in the above verses present us with a textbook case of spiritual doubt. In it we find everything we need to know about this malady including its causes and cure.

(DEFINITION) spiritual doubt (SD) = To lack confidence or trust in relation to God (His person and ways) or the things of God (Our Christian Faith).

What we need to know:

1. Even the best Christians are afflicted (at times) w/(SD)

(2-3) = John – as in John the Baptist is exhibiting doubt by his question. How we know that to be the case: b/c of his prior testimony regarding Jesus (Joh 1:29, 34). John's question is therefore NOT for the purpose of discovery but rather to shore up present doubt. As a means to destroying any thought that John was a lightweight or flake b/c of such doubt, Jesus reminds the crowds as to John's credentials in the latter verses (7-11a) = John was a prophet (9), the prophesied messenger to Messiah (10-11 w/Mal 3:1) and the greatest follower of God in all of human history (11, better than Noah, Abraham, David, Moses, all the other prophets, etc.) -YET he too suffered (at times) w/doubt. Other examples of saints doubting:

1.1. David and the Psalmists ("How long, O' Lord?" – David = Psa 6:1-3, 13:1-2; the authors of Psalms 74 and 94 = Psa 74:1-10, 94:1-7).

1.2. The Apostles (Mat 28:16-17)

*Could this be the reason Jude says what he does (Jud 1:22)?

(Though it is something that affects/afflicts even the strongest/best Christians),

2. (SD) is something that must be quickly remedied/removed when it comes up – otherwise it will lead to sin (or offenses against Christ).

Hence the reason Jesus says what He does in (6 – "offended by Me") = Resentment leading to rebellion (e.g. Gen 3:1-5) = The serpent accomplishes his mission of getting Eve not only to doubt God's goodness, but also to resent Him for keeping from her and Adam what she now believes they both need to be happy. The result is rebellion against God.

3. Before we can remedy/remove (SD), we must know what causes it.

There are three things that cause spiritual doubt:

3.1. Adverse/undesirable circumstances which produce adverse/undesirable feelings

(2 – "in prison") = John had been imprisoned by Herod for speaking against his affair w/his brother's wife. It would also lead to his death – something he probably suspected given this was Herod's desire at the time of his imprisonment (Mat 14:3-5). Adverse/Undesirable things happening in our lives (like being thrown in prison), often produce the adverse/undesirable feelings of doubt or ill-confidence in our present course or commitments. Every human being who has lived long enough has experienced this. It is an axiomatic fact. With certainty then, one of the reasons John was doubting was due to this very common phenomena: adverse circumstances producing adverse feelings - including the adverse feeling of doubt – ("Is this the right course? Should I continue in my commitment to this/that?").

3.2. Listening to the wrong people or receiving the wrong information (i.e. bad intel)

Though the text is not explicit on this point, we can be pretty confident that John was listening to the wrong people - possibly the crowds who were wrestling w/their own doubts (Mat 16:13-14; Mar 6:3), or his disciples. The latter of these two options can (at the very least) be inferred based on Jesus' most recent correction of them (Mat 9:14-17). They obviously possessed their own doubts in relation to Jesus and His ministry and were the ones most in John's ear (especially during his confinement). What then John was making his current assessments on (and as a result doubting Jesus) was bad intel. And bad intel (or company) corrupts – or leads to doubting (e.g. 1Co 15:12, 33-34).

3.3. Not knowing or reflecting on the facts.

(4-5) = It is not clear whether John already knew what Jesus tells him or it was meant to function as a reminder of the facts. What is clear however, is that IF Jesus had to tell him these things (actions all related or pointing to the One Who w/ Messiah), THEN it is b/c they were NOT readily being put in the forefront of John's mind. And the result is again, doubt. This is especially true when we are in the midst of trials (as John was). Not having God's Word present in our minds – either b/c we don't know it – or b/c we are just too lazy to take the time to pull it up and reflect on it, is a sure fire way to fester spiritual doubt.

4. The cure or remedy for (SD) (then) is to reverse/remove the above causes.

We do this in the following three ways:

4.1. Stop listening to your feelings.

Feelings cannot think – and therefore have no ability to discern truth. God did not give them for that purpose (i.e. as a means to discern truth). That ability has been given to our minds. People who operate (make decisions as to what is right and what is wrong; what to trust and who to doubt) based on their feelings will suffer the same fate as animals since they are acting just like them. Animals are enslaved, hunted and ultimately destroyed b/c they lack the ability to think, operating instead on only instinct/feelings (Jud 1:10).

4.2. Consider your sources

Anytime we face spiritual doubt, we need to be asking ourselves, “who have I been listening to?” Or, “who have I been hanging out with?” By determining the answer to those two questions, you can tell not only where a person's doubt is coming from – but (also) predict its presence in the future (again, 1Co 15:33!; also Pro 13:20)

4.3. Know and recall the truth about God and the facts found in His Word.

We have great examples of this practice w/David and the Psalmists mentioned earlier. Their response to their own doubts was self-counsel in the truth about God and facts from His Word (Psa 6:8-10, 13:3-6; Psa 74:12-17, 94:8-15)

This practice is also mentioned in the Psalms as the means to keeping confident and committed (Psa 119:105 = It removes the darkness of doubt and confusion).

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION: Refusing to do the work (prescribed by God's Word) to remedy (SD) is itself rebellion/sin (Jam 1:5-8 = We are considered by God to be rebellious people – “unstable in all [our] ways”). So shore it up the moment it arises!