

Curious – Is it a Sin to Doubt

4/25/21

Matthew 11:1-11

Sunday AM

Who am I? I was born in Germany in 1879 and did not begin speaking until around age 4. At age 5, my father gave me a pocket compass that captivated my mind stirring in me a curiosity for all things math and physics. Throughout my life, I was known for my work in relativity, thermodynamics, and quantum physics – and I was even asked to be the President of Israel. I'm famous for many profound quips including:

We cannot solve our problems w/ the same thinking we used when to create them.

The true sign of intelligence is not knowledge but imagination.

Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity – and I'm not sure about the former.

The difference b/w stupidity/genius is genius has limits

Who am I? **ANSWER** – I am Albert Einstein

Now, let me share my favorite Einstein quote: I have no special talent. I'm only passionately curious.

To be **curious** is to be eager to know/learn something new. It's to be inquisitive/investigative. *Curiosity is one of life's greatest pure motivators.*

A few weeks ago, we began looking into a few of our **curious** questions pertaining to faith, religion, and culture. So far, we've looked at the question of God's existence and is Jesus the only way to God. Today I want to answer the question – *Is it a sin to have doubt?*

Now, I'm not sure who asked this question, but let me make this simple and then go back and explain – **NO! Having doubt is NOT a sin.** Yet what a person does w/ their doubt will either lead to belief/unbelief.

To be sure, doubt is **NOT** just a Christian problem; it's a human problem. We've all had doubts at some point in time b/c in the absence of certainty, by nature, it's nearly impossible not to have questions. Why? B/c doubt is part of the human condition.

Now faith... is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods. For moods will change, whatever view your reason takes. I know that by experience. Now that I am a Christian, I have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable; but when I was an atheist, I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable. This rebellion of your moods against your real self is going to come anyway. That is why faith is such a necessary virtue – unless you teach your moods 'where they get off, you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, w/ its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. *C.S. Lewis*

Doubt is seen thru-out the Bible w/ Adam/Eve, Abe, Moses, David, and more struggling w/ moments of uncertainty. In **Matthew 28:16**, some of the disciples had doubts when they met Jesus after the resurrection. There's one particular disciple, who said he wouldn't believe until he touched the holes in the nailed scarred hand. We know him today as Doubting (Thomas).

POINT – if you've had doubts, you're not the first person (nor will you be the last) to ever have them.

Reality is, if someone says, “I’ve never had doubts,” more than likely, that’s not a testimony of a deep faith but of a shallow, superficial faith, b/c wrestling w/ doubt is what builds our faith muscles. It’s in searching we grow stronger in our faith. ***God allows us to struggle w/ doubt to ignite our passion for Him.*** So, we don’t have fear doubt, if we engage/use it.

I don’t believe there ever existed a Christian yet, who did not, now and then, doubt his interest in Jesus. I think, when a man says, “I never doubt,” it is quite time for us to begin doubting him. *Spurgeon*

Personally, I believe doubt can be a blessing b/c it tells a person they’re finally ready to make an honest effort to discover if something is really true or not. Doubt screams a commitment to truth. So, doubt doesn’t scare me, b/c I’m confident if a person is truly committed to finding truth, they’ll eventually find their way to Jesus – b/c He’s the embodiment of Truth!

At least that’s what it did for people like C.S. Lewis, Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, Francis Schaffer, Charles Schutz, geneticist, Francis Collins, and many more. More times than not, when doubt moves a person to search; their searching leads them to Jesus!

TBS – Doubt is **NOT** the enemy unless we’re lazy in doubt, then it becomes a millstone around our soul leading to our demise b/c instead of being inspired to seek the truth, we allow ourselves to be set adrift on the sea of ambiguity/relativity.

I The **DEFINITION** of Doubt?

doubt (*diakrino*) to be in (2) minds or to have a divided mind. *Doubt is to be caught in b/w questions of belief/unbelief and certainty/uncertainty.*

Meaning in a world w/ uncertainty, everyone struggles w/ doubt. It doesn’t matter if you’re a Christian, an atheist, or something else – we all have questions. So, practically speaking, to doubt means to waver or vacillate w/ uncertainty as we struggle w/ our faith.

Maybe this is why St. Augustine said – *Doubt is but another element of faith.*

Truth – Doubt has been around since creation. We see in Adam/Eve the potential for doubt. So, if Adam/Eve had to struggle w/ doubt in Paradise, how much more are we going to struggle w/ doubt in Paradise lost?

II The **DISTINCTIVES** of Doubt

So, what are we to do w/ doubt? What are some key truths about doubt we need to understand.? I have (3).

A **DIFFICULTY** Can Often Foster Doubt

There’s nothing that can take our faith from **sizzling to fizzling** like difficult moments. Who hasn’t asked, “God, where are you?” when life throws a curveball? BTW – God’s best pitch is the curveball!

Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, b/c you know the testing of your faith produces endurance. Let endurance finish its work so that you may be mature/complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all w/out finding fault, and it’ll be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, b/c the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do. James 1:2-8

James was explaining that God allows, and sometimes authors, challenging moments to stretch/strengthen us to bring us into alignment w/ His purposes/will.

IOW – God is using difficulty to bring us into absolute dependence upon Him for our good and His glory.

Isn't this what happened to Joseph. Remember his story? God allowed Joseph to be falsely accused and imprisoned so that Israel could be rescued from famine. Yet, I'm certain, Joe thought, Why me God? Where are you? What did I do to deserve this?

We learn from his life that God is working in us, on us, and thru us for what's ahead of us for His will/plan.

Neither Joseph, Pharaoh, nor Israel were ready for what was ahead. So, God had to humble Joseph, break Egypt, and prepare Israel thru a time of sifting.

In times of difficulty, doubt is likely to challenge us, but it doesn't have to destroy us – if we see that God is in it to grow us and prepares us for His purposes.

B Doubt Can be Fueled by **FAULTY** Expectations

More often than not, when God doesn't act or show up in the way we think He should our faith can be shaken.

When God doesn't heal a loved one this side of heaven even though we asked. When our hopes/dreams for an opportunity in life don't occur even though we prayed. When someone else gets our break or we get a set-back although we laid it at His feet. Or when God isn't the God, we thought He'd be in the time of our need – we can often experience a **faith-quake**.

Isn't this what happened to Habakkuk. When Israel was far from God, he called out to God for help. He thought God would show up and gently deal w/ Israel causing them to return to Him. Instead, ***God moved differently.*** God sent the pagan Babylonians to deal w/ His people. And Habakkuk was like, "God, have you lost your mind?" You're going to use a Godless nation to deal w/ our ungodliness? Don't you think that's a little extreme? **Listen to Habakkuk 2:3**

How long, Lord, must I call for help, but you don't listen? Cry out to you, 'Violence!' but you don't save?

W/out a doubt, Habakkuk's frustration had hit code-red. He couldn't figure out why God was silent and hadn't engaged Israel. So, he gets blunt w/ God, as if to say, "***I know you're not dead, but are you deaf?***"

Habakkuk was looking at his country and said, "God, we're messed up! Judah is messed up. Our families are messed up. Truth/justice are up-side-down – why are you not stepping in and making things right?"

Don't Miss – Habakkuk had pinpointed a problem we all face w/ God. ***God, I know you can; so why aren't you? You say You will, so why haven't You?***

It's b/c He's a sovereign, omnipotent, holy, gracious God who sees beyond our circumstances, issues, wants and desires to a plan that is greater and beyond us.

And even though it may stir doubt w/in us – God will not abdicate His responsibility as God to satisfy our doubts or frustrations. He will not set aside His will for you or for humanity – but will instead let you wrestle w/ what you might not fully understand or appreciate.

Don't ever judge God by what you think you would do if you were God, b/c you're not God.

There will be times in our lives that God is not going to be who we want or think He should be, but that doesn't make Him any less God. Never let your faulty expectations of God sabotage your faith thru doubt.

Which brings us to our last truth – and it's a big one...

C Our Doubt Doesn't **DISTRESS** God

IOW – Jesus can handle our doubt. God isn't irritated, frustrated, or exasperated by our struggle's w/ doubt in times of uncertainty – b/c He knows they're tools to cause of to seek and find Him.

In Matthew 11, we see how Jesus responds to John the Baptist. Jesus knew John, was baptized by John, yet at a defining moment in John's life, when he was imprisoned and facing death, doubt crept into his mind. So, he sent a few of his disciples to ask Jesus if He was truly the Messiah.

After Jesus had finished instructing his disciples, He went on from there to teach in the towns of Galilee. When John (the Baptist), who was in prison, heard about the deeds of the Messiah, he sent his disciples to ask Him, "Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?" Jesus replied, "Go back and report to John what you hear/see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me." As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings' palaces. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John; yet whoever is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matthew 11:1-11

Does Jesus' response say He was put off or frustrated w/ John's moment of uncertainty? Absolutely not! And neither is God put off when you have questions and moments of doubt. B/c God knows this is just part of the human condition. And so long as it moves you to seek the truth, doubt is not an enemy but a friend.

I like the way former evolutionist now creationist, Gary Parker explains the blessing of doubt.

If faith never encounters doubt and truth never struggles w/ error, if good never battles w/ evil, how can faith know its own power? In my pilgrimage, if I have to choose b/w a faith that has stared doubt in the eye and made it blink or a naive faith that has never known the firing line of doubt – I'll chose the former.

Doubt – **NO... it is not a sin.** But if we're lazy in doubt, it'll likely lead us down a road of no return where our apathy to truth will leave us vulnerable to the trappings and mis-teachings of our world. But if our doubt moves us, it'll more than likely set us on a course of discovery that will identify/fortify our faith.