

## “Asking Questions is Better Than Having Answers”

Half-Truth #7

Pastor Dan Erickson

July 11, 2021

If you are driving down the road and realize you are dangerously close to the ditch on the right side of the road, your reaction may be to quickly crank the steering wheel to the left. In doing so, however, you lose control and end up plunging into the ditch on that side of the road. Folks, that illustrates some of the harmful half-truths that have become popular in our current culture. Today's half-truth certainly is an example of that. Some believe that the Christian church has often discouraged people from asking honest questions. They claim people in the church are told, “Don't ask questions, just believe what we tell you.” In reaction to this, these folks veer sharply toward the other side of the road and claim we should just ask questions and not be too concerned with answers. Folks, that type of thinking puts us in a deep and dangerous ditch. Yes, it is good to ask questions, but the questions should lead to answers, and those answers should lead us to the truth. Friends, let's pause and pray the Lord would help us see that truth more clearly and experience it more deeply this morning.

Asking questions is a good thing. A teacher once said, “The best students are not those that give the right answers, but those who ask the good questions.” Indeed, asking good questions is something all of us should seek to do in order to better understand the truth. It is part of **Matthew 22:37 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.** And **2 Peter 3:18a But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** Asking good questions is key to learning more about the bible, more about the Christian faith, and more about God. And though, that knowledge by itself is of limited value, it is the foundation which enables us to know God better and grow in our relationship with Him. Yet, gaining more information is not the only reason to ask questions. When we have doubts, when we wonder whether or not various beliefs we hold are actually true we will ask questions. Now, sometimes we merely ask those questions in our minds, but never articulate them out loud. That can be very dangerous. If we have doubts it is good to talk about them and seek answers to questions we have.

I think that was true of John the Baptist. Matthew 11 tells that after John had been put in prison by Herod Anitpas, he began to have doubts as to whether Jesus was truly the Messiah. He sends a messenger to Jesus who asks, **Matthew 11:3 “Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?”** Jesus then recounts the evidence that He is indeed the Messiah. Yet, it is important to note that Jesus does not condemn John for his doubt or his questions. Instead He tells the crowd, **Matthew 11:11 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.** Doubts and questions do not prevent the Lord from giving John that title. I suspect, however, that if John would not have articulated his doubt, if he would not have expressed his questions, that doubt would have grown and eventually eaten away at his faith. Friends, if you start having, or maybe are already having doubts about whether God really exists, about whether the bible really God's Word, about whether Jesus is truly the eternal Son of God, about whether salvation really comes by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ alone, you need to be asking some questions. Find a spiritually mature Christian friend or family member and sit down with them, explain your doubts, ask your questions and listen to their answers. If you don't know anyone like that, or if you don't find their answers satisfactory, you can sure call pastor Mark or me. We would be glad to chat with you.

Now, please remember that there is a big difference between doubts we have about the truth and doubts we have about things we think are true, but really are not. All of us hold some false beliefs that we have somehow developed. For example, you might think your new neighbor's name is Jennifer, when it is really Jessica. It is good that you doubt your belief and then ask a question to see what her name really is. I think we all have false beliefs when it comes to theological and moral issues. For example, at one time I was convinced that Sunday should be set aside for worship and rest. Work, recreational activities, going out to eat, those activities were not appropriate for what I considered the Sabbath. And I thought others should avoid them as well.

Then, I started to have doubts. I started to ask questions. If I am following the Sabbath instructions given in the Ten Commandments, why am I doing this on the first day of the week, rather than the seventh, as Exodus 20 commands? I began to examine what the bible actually says and reached these conclusions... 1. Jesus' statement in **Mark 2:27** always should be kept in mind. "**The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.**" 2. All the Sabbath regulations found in the Old Testament are indeed part of the Old Covenant and New Covenant believers, like us, are not required to follow them. 3. The principal of the Sabbath, is part of God's creation, not just the mosaic law. This means it is a good idea, for our sakes, to set aside time each week for rest and a time to focus on worshipping the Lord. That does not, however, mean that it is wrong to go out to eat or play pickle ball on Sunday. Nor is it a sin to work the weekend shift.

Anyway, my point is that my doubts about my beliefs concerning the Sabbath caused me to ask questions that led to a clearer understanding of the truth. Those doubts helped me grow spiritually. They were good doubts. So, when someone who professes to be a believer in Jesus Christ starts doubting whether or not he/she is truly saved, is that a good doubt or a bad doubt? It all depends. It all depends on whether that person is truly saved or not. The reality of indwelling sin, the fact we all still sin, or as **James 3:2** says, **We all stumble in many ways**, combined with a misunderstanding of the gospel and what it means to be justified by faith, causes many Christians to doubt their salvation. That is not a good thing. There is a ton of anxiety and uncertainty that can cripple your soul if you are not confident you are truly a forgiven, child of God. It is very important that believers in Jesus Christ have assurance of their salvation. However, there are other folks, like my friend, Joe, who repeated a prayer when he was ten years old, things he is a Christian, and is confident he is going to heaven when he dies. The problem is Joe has zero interest in anything to do with the Lord. It appears he believes some things *about* Jesus, but doesn't really believe *in* Jesus. There is no evidence that he has been born again or that the Holy Spirit is dwelling inside him. Now, I am not the judge. God is. But I think it would be a good thing for Joe to have some doubts and ask some

questions about his own spiritual condition. He should follow the admonition of the apostle Peter. **2 Peter 1:10 Be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.** Joe needs to make sure he really is a believer in Jesus Christ. His life, his eternal life, may depend on him asking those questions.

Asking questions, especially good questions, is a very important thing to do. It is a big part of discovering the right answers. Yet, today there are some who insist that when it comes to religion, asking questions is actually the end, not just the means. In other words, you should ask questions, but you don't want to really find answers. That maybe sounds goofy, but they say something like this, "You Christians are so dogmatic, arrogant, and close-minded. You think you have discovered the truth, so you have stopped exploring and listening to others. Religion should be about being on a spiritual journey and should continually involve exploring for ourselves what we think about spiritual matters. We should be open to learning from many different sources, including other religions." And they would add, "You certainly don't want to believe Jesus alone is the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to God." Now, this type of thinking is rooted in what is called "post-modernism." There are many aspects to this philosophy, but at its core it is a rejection of what they call the "meta-narrative," meaning it refuses to believe and accept that there is one story which explains everything, that there is the one true story.

Now, it should not take too many guesses to figure out what the prime example of the meta-narrative is: biblical Christianity. From Genesis to Revelation the bible tells us the one true story that explains everything. Some of you might be thinking, "Pastor Dan, the bible doesn't explain everything. It doesn't tell us how to build an automobile engine, how to hit a curve ball or how to do calculus." No, it doesn't give those details, but it does tell us that all those things are under the umbrella of the sovereign God who created and graciously rules the universe. The bottom line is that post-modernism is opposed to Christianity. It embraces a subjective view of truth, claiming that if any objective truth does exist it is impossible to know it. All we have is each individual's perception or understanding of the truth. As a result, what is true for you, may

not be true for me. And what is true for me, may not be true for me tomorrow. This attitude was reflected by the college student who said, "Some people say God exists. Others say God does not exist. I think they may both be right."

"Pastor Dan, that seems pretty confusing. It doesn't really make sense." I agree with you. That is why I am not a post-modernist. Yet, I have devoted considerable time trying to understand this philosophy because it is seeping into people's lives and preventing them from trusting in Jesus as Lord and savior. Friends, Christianity is built on truth. I call it truth with a capital "T." It is objective, universal truth that applies to all people in all places, at all times. Frankly, we don't have the power to create truth. Truth already exists and needs to be discovered. This is the truth as God defines it. And the key to discovering this truth is not through empirical tests or rational argument, but through what God has revealed to human beings. The primary way He does this is through His Word, the Bible. In fact, Jesus as He prays to the Father, says, **John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.** The bible is God's word because **2 Timothy 3:16 says All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.**

As Christians, we believe it is important to use our minds to seek to understand truth. That is why we should ask questions. But our minds cannot create truth. Only God can do that. Knowing, understanding, believing and applying the truth God has revealed should be one of our primary goals. Many folks, however, insist, that there is no clear revelation from God. They claim the bible is simply a book written by men recounting their personal religious thoughts and experiences. As Professor Michael Krueger puts it, "These folks think religion is about humans finding God, rather than about a God who has revealed Himself to humans." This is quite a contrast to the apostle Paul's description of what the Lord has revealed to us. **2 Corinthians 4:5,6 For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.**

Friends, I think one of the most important verses in the bible for Christians today is **Deuteronomy 29:29 The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.** This verse highlights two virtues that are very important for Christians to demonstrate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: humility and confidence. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." Friends, that is the humility part because we don't know everything. I hope you believe me, because if you think you know everything, you really have no way of finding out you don't. Limited knowledge characterizes almost every aspect of life, but especially the spiritual realm. "The secret things belong to the Lord our God." Yet, it seems we sometime forget that. Sometimes we pretend to know things we really don't and can't know. For example, "The reason God allowed that devastating hot weather out in Washington and Oregon is because Seattle and Portland are two of the most secular and anti-Christian cities in the country." Maybe. But a lot of good Christian folks, especially farmers in Idaho, like Candice's parents, Roger and Sandy Riggers, have suffered from that weather as well. Why God allows certain events to happen or not happen is really one of those secret things that only He knows.

Now, folks who think they know everything or act like they do, are often not really fun to be around. One response to a "know-it-all" is "hey, unless your name is Google, stop acting like you know everything." Of course, there are many things Google doesn't know. Only God knows all. Because we as Christians, realize this, we should demonstrate humility and never act like a "know-it-all." And Friends, if we do that, I think we are going to be more effective ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Humility enables us to speak the truth with gentleness and respect, just as the Lord tells us to do in 1 Peter 3:15. Oh friends, remember, the secret things belong to the Lord our God.

Yet, **Deuteronomy 29:29b** also reminds us **the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever.** The things God has revealed, the truth He has revealed, is meant for us to know, understand, believe, and obey. On certain issues it is wrong to say, "Oh, I'm not sure," or "I don't think anyone can be certain about that." When God is silent, it is wise for us to be silent. Yet, when the Lord speaks with

clarity, we should speak with clarity as well. And we can speak with confidence, not because we are so smart, but because God has revealed the truth through His word. What does it look like when we speak with humble confidence? Let me give a couple of examples. When talking about the second coming of Jesus, we should humbly acknowledge that we don't know when this will happen. Yet, we should confidently, and joyfully proclaim that Jesus Christ will return to this earth. The bible speaks clearly to both part of this.

In **Acts 1:17** the Lord Jesus tells us His disciples, including us, **“It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”** Jesus said, **Matthew 24:36 “But concerning that day and hour** (referring to His return) **no one know, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.”** We don't know when Jesus will return, but we do know that He will. And we know we are one day closer to His second coming than we were yesterday.

**2 Peter 3:8-10 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief.** That latter phrase reminds us that many will be surprised and unprepared when the Lord Jesus returns, but we should be ready, because we can be confident that He will come as He promised.

Another topic on which we need to speak with both humility and confidence is the eternal destiny of people around us. “The secret things belong to the Lord God.” Who truly is a believer in Jesus and who is not, is something God alone knows. We don't have the ability to always discern between genuine and artificial faith, between a faith of the heart, generated by the Holy Spirit, and a faith that is nothing but empty words. It would be good for all of us to remember what John Newton, the wonderful 18<sup>th</sup> century pastor who authored the hymn, “Amazing Grace,” said. “When I get to heaven, I suspect there will be numerous people there whom I did not expect to see. And I suspect there will be people missing who I thought would be there. But most important of all, I will be in awe that, I, John Newton, a sinner, is by the grace of God in heaven.”

Yes, we humbly need to acknowledge, that we don't know the true state of anyone else's soul, however, we should affirm with confidence, “salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone.” That is a great summary of **Ephesians 2:8,9 For by grace you have been save through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that on one may boast.** We can also confidently remind people what Jesus said in **John 14:6 I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.** In a world that suggests the topic of eternal salvation is very uncertain and complicated, we can confidently proclaim, John 3:36 whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them.

Friends, because the secret things belong to the Lord our God, we should humbly admit that there are many things we don't know, but because the things that are revealed belong to us, and to our children, we should confidently affirm the truth God has revealed through His Son and His Word. In this confused and often seemingly hopeless world in which we live, we are the ones who can point people to the truth and hope found in Jesus Christ. May the Lord enable us to do that today and in the days ahead, but His grace and for His glory.