

From Doubt to having faith

Let me repeat: Doubt is not the same as unbelief.

Unbelief is a conviction: “This is not true.”

Doubt is a question: “Is this true?” “How can I be sure?”

Admittedly, stubborn doubt in the presence of sufficient evidence is essentially the same as unbelief. That’s why Jesus often addressed people as, “O ye, of little faith.”—because they didn’t believe Him even though he gave reasonable warrants to believe, often in miraculous form.

But doubt isn’t always a stubborn unbelief, nor does it always lead to unbelief. It can actually lead you to a more determined commitment to the Christian Faith, and a more personal and devoted trust in Jesus.

In fact, I believe doubt is a natural and necessary part of a growing faith. I’ll even go a step further: You should expect to experience doubt if your faith is going to grow deep roots.

If so, how can doubt strengthen your faith in Christ?

□ DOUBT TESTS THE REASONS FOR YOUR FAITH

Doubt can strengthen your faith in Christ by testing your existing faith.

When I was in Bible College one class made me think for the first time about the fact that the Bible in my hands was a translation of a copy of a copy of a copy of a copy of fragments of manuscripts back through thousands of years to the original writers inspired by the Holy Spirit. We have exactly zero original manuscripts of the Bible.

I was blown away to say the least. How can I believe the Bible is true? How can I trust it? How can I know if it’s a reliable record of God’s dealings with humanity?

If your faith can be shaken, it will be, and probably should be.

Satan will make you lose your faith for he is of lies and confusion
Giving you self doubt of your faith in Christianity

Christian faith is rational. It rests on actual historical events, reasons to believe, not magic, not religious imagination, not superstition, not wishful thinking. There are rational proofs to support the belief that God both inspired and preserved His divine word, The Bible, through the centuries. I had just never been challenged to seek them until I heard something that made me doubt.

Maybe your Christian faith still rests on shifting sands like a religious experience, or your family history, or because someone you respect told you to “let go of your doubts.” No! Answer your doubts. Ask, “Why?” “How can it be?” It’s your doubt—those sudden, hard-to-reach itches, that demand you scratch away until you find a satisfying answer—that can strengthen your faith in Christ.

Doubt can also strengthen your faith in Christ by driving you to understand The Faith (capital “F”) more fully.

At its simplest, doubt is asking new questions and seeking new answers. In the process you often discover new questions you didn’t even know you should think about.

I recall a time in my Christian journey when I began to doubt the existence of God. How did I know, after all, that God exists? I can’t prove God exists, so why believe it?

(Imagine that, a Christian, a pastor no less, who doubted the existence of God.)

I satisfied myself for a while with a pragmatic answer. I reasoned that even if God didn’t exist, from everything I had seen in the world, believing in the Bible’s version of God was the best way to have a good life.

Not very compelling, I know.

As you might expect, this answer seemed less and less satisfying over the years, and, like sand shifting underfoot, my doubt about

God's existence returned. Shouldn't faith in the Christian God rest on something more substantial than, "It's the best game in town?" That doubt drove me to seek what the Christian faith truly rests on. It's what I've already alluded to: the revelation of God in historical events which eye-witnesses faithfully recorded and interpreted. So, why do I believe the Christian God exists and is the only God? Because I believe the eyewitness accounts of His works are trustworthy.

For example, I trust the four gospel accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection because 1) they compliment each other, 2) they show how Jesus satisfied the Old Testament prophets' predictions of the Messiah, and 3) the only reasonable explanation for why they would write and preach such things on pain of death is that they actually were true.

3"For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."—The Apostle Paul (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)

Notice that Paul relates certain historical events (Christ lived, died, was buried and raised), he interprets the meaning of those events (this was "for our sins"), he ties the events to Old Testament predictions (in accordance with the Scriptures), and he provides the names of multiple, prominent eye-witnesses of the resurrected Christ as proof.

And if Jesus Christ is truly raised...

Well, then everything he said about his God being the one, true and living God, must also true.

And this is why I believe God exists.

My doubt drove me over time to many new discoveries about the Christian Faith, and to a more solid ground for my faith in Jesus Christ.

Why do you claim to believe in God? The Bible? The virgin birth? The resurrection? Redemption? Heaven? Hell? The Bible teaches that our faith should be childlike in its personal trust and self-abandon to Jesus, but not childish in its thinking about Him. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so," is a comfort to us all, but is insufficient for a growing, robust trust in Jesus. It fails to pursue the how and why of faith in Him when the how and why can be known.

How do you know Jesus loves you? How do you know you can trust the Bible? What does it matter anyway?

Doubt can drive you to discover the Bible's answers to these and so many other questions.

□ **DOUBT DISPELS ERRORS ABOUT THE FAITH**

Finally, doubt can strengthen your faith in Christ by being your first step away from believing something false.

I remember as a very young Christian being taught about something that no real Christian could believe. The trouble was that I happened to be reading a section of the Bible in my private study that seemed to teach exactly what I was being told not to believe.

Wow, I had doubts!

Could I believe what I was being taught? Was I misunderstanding Scripture? Who was I to question my teachers? How could I know what was true?

I decided to listen to what they taught cautiously, and to give myself time to grow and learn and think the matter over. After seven years of study and a lot of caution, I finally decided my early teachers were wrong. They were Christians, sure, but they were very wrong about a very serious issue. (For what the issue was, see reason #1 in this post.)

Honestly, I can say that that moment in my life of faith was more spiritually significant than any other, save my conversion at age 16. It was a guidepost that determined the last 25 years of my life, and will be so to the last.

Doubt, plus a fair amount of caution, and a bit of humility, and time, and serious study and prayer led me out of a version of Christianity I now regard as distorted.

But it began with my doubt.

- If God always wants you to prosper financially, then why you are in constant debt?
- If God always wants you to love life, then why would you rather die?
- If God's highest priority is for you to be happy, then why did your spouse leave you high and dry?
- If God is love, then why is there so much suffering in the world?
- If God is just, then why is there so much war and oppression?
- If God weighs the good versus the bad in your life, then how will you know if you measure up?

These are good doubts to have. What turns them bad is stubborn unbelief. Pursue the answers. Pray. Read. Two thousand years worth of great Christians have asked the same questions, and written about it for your benefit.

Just remember that doubt is not the same as unbelief. It can lead you to a more determined commitment to the Christian Faith, and a more personal and devoted trust in Jesus.

What Makes Faith "Christian?"

If you ask the average man or woman on the street if he or she believes in God, you're likely to get a "Yes." In fact, most Americans say they believe in God despite the general secularism of American society.

□ Yes, but...

But, probe a little behind that "yes," and you'll hear a lot of "Yes, but..."

"...but not like organized religion talks about Him."

“...but not like the Bible portrays Him.”

“...but I’m not religious.” (i.e. “I’m not associated with a church”)

The fact is that modern Americans are largely “Yes, but...” believers. This allows them to keep the faith and spirituality they want, while divorcing faith from the religious trappings they don’t want: the Bible and the Church.

□ The American Faith

How did American faith get this way? I blame American churches (of all kinds). On any given Sunday morning you could find a grab bag of boutique doctrines, moralism, false mysticism, superstitions, legalism, emotional drama, psychological manipulation, theological liberalism, or outright heresy that confuses, ignores, and/or denies the central messages of the Bible. In such a confusing theological potpourri, it’s no wonder individuals decide to make up whatever faith pleases them most. And the faith that seems to please Americans most is what Notre Dame sociologist Christian Smith has called, Moralistic, therapeutic deism, that is, God/religion is here to help you get through the tough times of life and teach you how to be a good person so you can go to heaven when you die.

□ What’s missing?

Have you noticed what’s missing in the “Yes, but...” faith I described above? Or, should I say, “Who’s missing?

Jesus.

In the “Yes, but...” faith, there is no need for Jesus. We can relate to God on our terms and achieve everlasting life the same way.

God’s Son? The cross? The resurrection?

Relics!

...the faith recorded in the Bible, the faith entrusted to the Church, is the faith about Jesus.

But, I believe that the faith recorded in the Bible, the faith entrusted to the Church, is the faith about Jesus. There's no such thing as a "Christ-less" Christian faith. What makes faith "Christian" is what we believe about Jesus Christ: Who He is; what He accomplished; and why it was necessary. The extent to which we understand who Jesus is, trust what He has done for us, and understand why we needed it, is the extent to which our faith is truly Christian faith.

Shame on our churches for not making this clear to us.

- Knowing Jesus Christ deep in your heart and soul is a personal relationship and a journey in your life that will also bring you closer to the Heavenly Father.
- Not just know of the name of Jesus is.

If you have faith in Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior and what he did for your life upon the cross for your sins. And have repented your sins and now have a relationship with him in your daily journey walk with Christ. Giving all your worries, troubles trials and tribulations of your life over to Jesus Christ.

Turn over all of your life to Jesus for he will carry all your burdens of your daily life and ease any pains and worries you have on your shoulders and when you do, your life will be a brighter one and changes in your life will begin a new.

Even family and friends will notice the change in you, from the way you talk, walk and in just the way you have changed in everything you do.