

Stop Doubting and Believe  
John 20:19-31 (NIV)  
April 3, 2016

*On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it." A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

Doubting God is nothing new. People have been doubting God since the beginning of the human race. Adam and Eve listened to Satan and doubted God's Word. Abraham and Sarah laughed when God announced to them that they would have a son in their old age. Gideon questioned God's word after God assured him of a victory over the Midianites. Even John the Baptist had his doubts as to whether Jesus was the promised Messiah.

So, if you have ever doubted God, you're not alone. Today, we are going to consider some things about the subject of doubt.

The first thing we should consider is that doubting, like all other aspects of life, has consequences. One of the surest things in life is that for every action there is a reaction. The reactions that stem from doubting are not very pleasant.

If you doubt the Lord, you will not experience the fullness of joy that accompanies being a Christian. Jesus told his disciples: *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full* (Jn 15:9, 11).

When your heart is full of doubt, your joy cannot be complete. Instead, your life is filled with turmoil, fears, and anxiousness. That's not the life God has in mind for you. God intends for the lives of his people to be complete and joy-filled. That's why Jesus tells us: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly* (Jn 10:10).

In the concluding remarks of his first letter, Saint John explains the purpose of his letter. He writes: *I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life. And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us* (1 Jn 5:13-14).

Just knowing, not hoping but knowing, we have eternal life is sufficient to fill our lives with an unending joy and peace. However, doubting will steal that joy and peace from your life. Doubt and joy cannot both be present at the same time – and doubt always defeats joy.

Doubt will also hinder the work we do for the Lord. Doubt will cause us to hold back when we should be witnessing. Doubt will stop us from using the gifts and talents God has given to us for the building up of his kingdom. Doubt will stop us from giving to God as we should so his work on earth might move forward.

Doubt might also limit what God does in your life. The Gospel according to Saint Matthew chapter 13: *Coming to his hometown [Jesus] taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?” And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief* (Mt 13:54-58).

As destructive as doubt is, it’s important to know what causes doubt. What I say next may seem like a real no-brainer, but it is as true as anything can get. Doubt is caused by not trusting God’s Word. It almost sounds too simple, doesn’t it? But the fact is, you either believe what God says or you don’t. Beyond that, you either believe everything God says or you will end up believing nothing that God says.

The world is changing at an ever increasing rate. The values and morals of yesterday are being replaced by an unbridled tolerance for everything, political correctness, and an incredible effort by groups like the ACLU and Hollywood to undermine Christianity.

All of these plant seeds of doubt in the believer’s heart. Their goal is to deceive God’s people into doubting the promises of God; to convince people that faith in God is outdated; to make the author of the book of Hebrews out to be a liar when he writes: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever* (Heb 13:8).

There is another cause of doubt. This doubt comes from Satan using our humanness against us. There are those who teach that salvation must be accompanied by some sort of physical or emotional experience.

Consider the conversion of Saul to Paul. He was knocked off his horse. He was blinded by a light from heaven. He heard the audible voice of Jesus. That’s a real experience. But did Paul say that everyone who is saved must have an experience like this.

When the jailer at Philippi asked Paul, “What must I do to be saved?”, did Paul tell him to go on a horse ride toward Damascus and wait for a special experience for feeling? Paul answered the jailer’s question with these words: *Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household* (Ac 16:31).

Feelings have nothing to do with salvation. Our salvation is based solely on complete faith and surrender to Christ as our Lord and Savior. Feelings come and go. Feelings can be, and often are, wrong. When you were a young teenager, did you ever feel for sure you were totally in love with someone only to be totally in love with someone else a month later? That’s the work for feelings.

Martin Luther said this about salvation and feelings: *The comfort men give consists in external, visible help, which one can grasp, see, and feel. The comfort God gives consists only in the Word and promise, without seeing, hearing, or feeling.* In fact, one of the paradoxes of Christian life is the believer’s possession of peace in the midst of conflict, his calm in the midst of the storms of life.

We know the harm doubt does, we know what causes doubt, so what can we do about doubt? We take God at his word. Again, it sounds too simple to be true, but that is the only cure for doubt. Your life must be all faith or no faith. While it’s true that even weak faith saves, anything less than complete faith brings the negative consequences of doubt into your life.

All doubt will leave your life as soon as you have complete confidence in the fact that you are saved. When there is not a single “maybe” in your heart regarding your eternal status, all doubt will be gone. That being the case, let’s turn to Scripture for the promises on which we base our faith.

Of course, the first foundation for our faith comes from the Gospel according to Saint John. Jesus told Nicodemus: *God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him* (Jn 3:16-17). Our faith is in a God who loves us more than he loves himself.

Furthermore, our faith is not in some impersonal god, dreamed up by man. Our faith is in a God who knows each of us personally. God knows each of us so well that Jesus tells us: *Even the hairs of your head are all numbered* (Lk 12:7). God told the prophet Jeremiah: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations* (Je 1:5).

The God we believe in is not a God that might some day defeat Satan and this sinful world. The victory of our God is complete. It’s a done deal. We just celebrated Christ’s resurrection. His resurrection was the fatal blow to our final enemy – death. That’s why we have this promise from our Savior: *In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world* (Jn 16:33). We have absolutely nothing to fear.

In the upper room, the night before Jesus was crucified, he made this promise to his disciples. If you can fully believe in the truth of this promise, you will find the peace that passes all understanding. *Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also* (Jn 14:1-3).

Doubt is not incurable. Doubt is simply a byproduct of our sinful nature. There has never been, and will never be, a Christian that doesn't experience some doubt at one time or another. But that doesn't mean that doubt isn't a serious problem. Doubt can be the ruination of your faith, and friends, if you lose your faith you lose your salvation.

There are Christian denominations that claim you can never lose your salvation, but that isn't true. It is true that no one can take your salvation away. It is also true that God will never change his mind about wanting you to be saved. But remember, salvation is a gift and, like any other gift, it can be given back. Doubt is a cancer that will eat away at your faith until there is no faith left.

For the times when you have held doubt in your heart, rejoice in the fact that our God is a forgiving God. If there is doubt in your heart right now, if you are unsure of your salvation, turn to God's Word. Let the promises of the One, who has never broken a promise, comfort your heart with the knowledge that he loves you and he holds you in his hand. Every day do you best to follow the command our Savior gave to Thomas: *"Stop doubting and believe"* (Jn 20:27).