

43 - Facts and Fiction About Faith (Part 3)

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"There lives more faith in honest doubt...than in half the creeds." Alfred L. Tennyson

Misconception # 3: I have been taught that it is sin to doubt and that matters of faith should be accepted without question.

In religious circles especially, this viewpoint often surfaces. People must not admit to doubts about religious faith. But, if crucial questions remain unanswered, this attitude can repress doubts into the subconscious mind where they fester and grow. Rather, when rightly understood, the Bible confirms that we shouldn't be ashamed or afraid of doubts because they can actually play a positive role in our understanding of faith. As Paul Tillich wrote, "Doubt is not the opposite of faith, it is an element of faith."

The great believers of the ages – Saint Augustine, Martin Luther, Mother Theresa, Dietrich Bonhoeffer – all had honest doubts at times. They became great because they went on to doubt their doubts and find a stronger, more mature faith. They refused to rest their unbelief on a structure of prejudice and ignorance.

Sometimes doubts stem from one's disappointment with God over unanswered prayer. For example, suppose someone incorrectly thinks that if they have sufficient faith, they can always expect God to grant them excellent health and abundant wealth. Then, if these expectations do not materialize, they entertain doubts about God's power and love. They have not yet learned that God always wants the best for them; and He knows what is best. They need to rest in His unconditional love.

Having faith does not always mean that we will always possess positive emotional feelings toward God or life. Some people equate faith with a perpetual religious high. When the high wears off, as it inevitably does, they may doubt if their faith is genuine. Remember, faith is a choice, not a feeling. It is your decision to follow the best light and knowledge you have about God and not give up.

Doubts can only be resolved on the hard road of obedience and service. The great believers in Christ have always been the great followers of Christ. For anyone truly interested in discovering the truth about Christ, His challenge still stands. "Anyone who wants to do the will of God will know whether my teaching is from God" (John 7:17 NLT). Saving faith requires a sincere desire to know and do the will of God. The world says, show me and I will believe. God says, believe, trust me, and I will show you.

Without some risk there is no faith. When our faith is challenged by adversity and tough questions it can become stronger. In Mark 9:17-24, we have a meaningful story of a father bringing his afflicted son to Jesus asking, "If you can do anything...help us?" Jesus answered, "all things are possible to him who believes." The boy's father cried with tears, "Lord, I do believe, help my unbelief." – I can really connect with that prayer.