



WHAT TO DO WITH DOUBT

QUEST LESSON D-12

The Problem: What changes an unbeliever into a believer? H. M. S. Richards senior, the founder of the Voice of Prophecy, told the story of an infidel who died many years ago. "He had been an unbeliever for many years. For several years he had been ill, and it was quite clear that the end was near. His friends had argued, prayed, and talked with him, but all to no avail. At least someone just left a little Bible there, and when no one was looking he opened the book and began to read in the Gospel of John about the lovely character, the fairest of ten thousand. After a few pages, he became interested, and after a few chapters more he was convicted and then converted. Before he finished the Gospel he was in love with Jesus. He gave his heart to Him and died professing faith in Christ. A few days later, after he was gone, they found a slip of paper in this Bible that had changed his life, the words of a little poem that he had written, a poem of his own experience:

"I've tried in vain a thousand ways
My fears to quell, my hopes to raise;
But what I need, the Bible says,
Is ever only Jesus.

"My soul is night, my heart is steel,
I cannot see, I cannot feel;
For light, for life, I must appeal
In simple faith in Jesus.

"He died, He lives, He reigns, He pleads;
There's love in all His words and deeds;
There's all a guilty sinner needs
Forevermore in Jesus.

"Though some should sneer, and some should blame,
I'll go with all my guilt and shame;
I'll go to Him because His name,
Above all names is Jesus."

What was it that changed that dying man's life? It wasn't an argument, scientific proof, or an outstanding miracle of healing. It wasn't an audible voice from heaven, or a vision or dream from God. It was something less dramatic than any one of those. Yet it was mightily effective to change a man's mind and change his heart. It was the deep conviction of the Holy Spirit bearing down on his heart as he read the story of Jesus. The evidence was overwhelming because it was the man's own experience.

When God speaks to you by the Holy Spirit, you know you are being spoken to. There is no doubt in the world about it! What converts an unbeliever into a believer is what happens when he responds to that mighty, powerful, convicting voice. Then the doubts vanish like the fog on a summer's day, and the love of Christ becomes a real, present, comforting, saving reality.

The Bible tells us what to do without doubt. Let's see what it says:

Objectives

First, we are reminded that there are many mysteries in the Scriptures.

Second, it is important to understand that faith rests on evidence, not on ultimate scientific proof.

Third, the Word explains how we receive a progressive understanding of truth.

Fourth, we are told very plainly what causes doubt and skepticism.

Fifth, there is no evidence like that of personal experience. The person who drinks the water of life has an inner assurance because he has tasted it for himself.

I. The Bible Contains Many Mysteries

A Bible that contained no mysteries would not be credible as an ultimate source of truth. If we could explain the nature of God, He would not be the infinite Being whom the Bible presents. If we could explain scientifically how Jesus rose from the dead, He would not be the Savior and Lord whom Christians adore. Divine power transcends science, and the nature of God is beyond human discussion. There are many mysteries that will never be made plain until we reach the Kingdom of Glory.

The Word

1. Does God intend us to understand everything about Himself? Why? Deuteronomy 29:29.
2. How capable is the human mind of understanding the infinite God? Job 11:7-8; Romans 11:33.
3. What did Peter say about difficult matters in the Scriptures? 2 Peter 3:15-16.
4. What should be our attitude to suffering and sorrow that we cannot explain? Romans 8:28; 2 Corinthians 4:17; (compare Job 23:10; Psalm 119:67).

Explanation: Since the Bible was written to explain to us the plan for our salvation, there is much that relates to that subject left untouched. God has kept many things as mysteries for man because knowledge of them would not help in the least to save him from sin. The infinite God cannot be understood by finite minds. Nor can any human being grasp all scientific knowledge. If the realm of nature presents mysteries to the world's greatest minds, why should we be surprised if the infinite realm of God confronts us with much that is inexplicable?

Even the Scriptural message as we have it is not always easy to grasp. Peter referred to some of Paul's writings, "in which are some things hard to be understood" (2 Peter 3:16). Scholars have wrestled with some of Paul's statements for centuries and still disagree as to what they mean. But fortunately, truth is not just for scholars, and Paul's epistles were written for sinners. Jesus indicated how we can come to understand sufficiently well to be saved: "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Just as deep as the theological mysteries are the unexplainable events of human existence. Why does God allow innocent people to suffer? In the final analysis, we can only offer suggestions. But there is a reason, and the divine message is that, if we love God, all that happens to us, whether good or bad, is miraculously used by the Lord for our blessing and the good of those influenced by us. He is not the author of evil and death. What He allows He does not necessarily cause. And what He allows for His believing followers He overrules to make a blessing for them in this life or in the life to come (Romans 8:28).

Relevance: It is the part of the humble disciple of Jesus to admit that he cannot explain the divine mysteries. Yet the Word of God sheds great light on his pathway, and he enjoys present salvation in Christ because he believes it (John 3:36).

II. Faith Rests On Evidence, Not Ultimate Proof

The Bible provides us much prophetic and historical evidence for the truth of Christianity, but never does it claim to present scientific proof. Faith would cease to be faith if we had ultimate scientific proof for the existence of God, the Deity of Christ, and the doctrine of the resurrection. Faith is not blind; it is built on very convincing evidence. But that evidence does not follow the dictates of the scientific method.

The Word

5. What is faith? Hebrews 11:1-3.
6. Are there special blessings for the one who has faith in God? Matthew 17:20; Mark 9:23.
7. What did Jesus say about people who believe without having proof? John 20:29.
8. What kind of evidence of the Deity of Jesus Christ did Peter extol as even more certain than the witness of his own senses? 2 Peter 1:16-19.

Explanation: The Greek of Hebrews 11:1 may be translated literally: "And faith is the assurance of things being hoped and certainty of things not being seen." The New International Version captures the meaning by its paraphrase: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Jesus emphasized that there are great blessings for the person who has faith in Him. He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). There is power in faith to accomplish what the Lord expects of us. He provides the evidence of conviction and then asks us to believe in Him. When we do, unlike Thomas who had to see before believing, we are made sons and daughters of God, filled with the Holy Spirit and empowered to live new lives of victory over sin.

The Bible provides much prophetic evidence of the truth of its teachings. This is the kind of evidence that Peter was referring to when he said "we have also a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Peter 1:19). He was comparing prophecy as evidence for the truth of Christianity with the things that he had himself seen during the ministry of Jesus. He was with Jesus in the mountain when He was transfigured (Matthew 17:1-3). He heard the voice of God claiming Jesus as His Son. This was very convincing evidence of the Deity of Christ. But later Peter presented the fulfillment of prophecy as greater evidence.

Christ's birth in Bethlehem was predicted hundreds of years before (Micah 5:2). His sacrificial ministry and atoning death were foreseen by the Old Testament prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53). His resurrection was predicted by the Psalmist (Psalm 16:10; compare Acts 2:25-34). These are just a few of the hundreds of prophecies of Scripture that have been fulfilled in detail. Daniel foresaw the sweep of human history from his day right down to the second coming of Jesus (Daniel 2; 7; 8). And he very remarkably predicted that Christ would be anointed in A.D. 27 and crucified in A.D. 31.

Relevance: There is very convincing prophetic and historical evidence for the truths of the Bible. But faith remains faith because evidence is not ultimate proof. Study the prophetic Word and see for yourself that faith is based on a very solid foundation.

III. How To Receive Progressive Understanding Of Truth

God's truth is always truth; it never becomes error. But we do not know all of it at once. The Bible indicates that our knowledge and understanding of truth will progress until the end of life or the second coming of Jesus.

The Word

9. What should be our attitude when we come to the study of the Scriptures? Mark 10:15; 1 Peter 2:2.
10. Who only can reveal the truth to our hearts and minds? 1 Corinthians 2:10-13.
11. For how long is the believer to go on learning the truths of God's Word? Proverbs 4:18; 2 Corinthians 3:18; (compare 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Explanation: We are to come to the Word with the trusting openness of little children. Peter would have us regard ourselves as newborn babes who are partaking of the life-giving milk of divine truth (1 Peter 2:2). Only the spirit of a humble learner will be rewarded by the Holy Spirit with spiritual enlightenment. Learned people who reject Christ miss the most magnificent truth because they have separated themselves from the Source (1 Corinthians 2:7-8). What are mysteries to them are readily revealed to humble, unlearned people. "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit" (verse 10). Such enlightenment does not occur once or twice; it is to go on as long as the person is surrendered to Christ and delving into the recesses of His Word. Light for the individual believer is progressive. "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18).

Relevance: Your doubts will be progressively dispelled if you accept Christ as Lord and allow Him to instruct you by the Holy Spirit.

IV. What Causes Doubt and Skepticism

Very often, people who have serious doubts about the Bible do not want to follow its lifestyle. The real issue is that God's truth would deny them certain favorite habits and practices. Little do they realize that they are trading eternal life for a very inferior, temporary kind of existence.

The Word

12. Who did Jesus say would understand His teaching? Who would not? John 7:7.
13. What does the "natural" man think of God's truth? 1 Corinthians 2:14; (compare 1:18-23).
14. How much spiritual knowledge does the Lord give to the proud person? John 9:39-41; (compare Romans 12:16; 1 Corinthians 8:2).

Explanation: Jesus explained that the person who is willing to do His will is the one given knowledge of His teachings. The "natural" man is the person who has not accepted Christ and has been given the born-again experience. He cannot begin to grasp the significance of spiritual things because his mind is under the influence of the evil one. Doubt and skepticism are the result of refusal to receive Christ. Reason does not lead us to God. Our human reason becomes effective in grasping divine truth after we have humbly surrendered to Christ. The person who thinks his philosophy of life is adequate without Christ is in the category of the Pharisees, who were so sure that they had spiritual insight but, in fact, were lost men. Pride of opinion, the certainty of one's intellectual grasp, and the unwillingness to learn at the feet of Jesus are major causes of incurable doubt.

Relevance: Faith based on solid Scripture's evidence will dispel your doubts. Invite Christ to teach you His word, and you will become a trusting, immovable Christian.

V. The Evidence Of Experience

The evidence for the truth of Christianity that transcends all other evidence is that of personal experience. When your heart is surrendered to Christ, you know that a change has occurred which could not have happened any other way. You love and serve the Lord because of what He has done for you personally.

The Word

15. What evidence did John present as so significant? 1 John 5:10; (compare 1 John 3:18-19; 4:12-14).
16. Of what does the Holy Spirit convince us? Romans 8:16; John 3:33.
17. What are we invited to do? Psalm 34:8.

Explanation: It was John who told the story of Nicodemus coming to Jesus and learning of the new-birth experience (John 3). Over and Over in his writing, he stressed the importance of the Holy Spirit's presence in the heart of the believer. This is the evidence that is greater than any humankind of evidence. The believer knows and is sure that Christ

is living out His life through Him (Galatians 2:20). There is a power present in the life that was not there before and could have been received from no other source. The Holy Spirit testifies to us “that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16).

Relevance: You are invited by the Psalmist to “taste and see that the Lord is good” (Psalm 34:8). There is no substitute for experiential knowledge; that is the knowledge of personal experience in the things of God. The Lord provides evidence and invites us to believe in Him. If we respond, His presence in our lives becomes the most supreme assurance that He lives and saves the sinner. Our faith will grow until death, or until Jesus comes, and then it will become sight. We will see the Lord in His glory, and our partial knowledge will be supplemented throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity.

Do you believe that Jesus is the living Christ? Will you allow Him to teach you by the Holy Spirit until all your doubts are taken away?

Review Questions

1. True or False
 - a. There is no scientific proof for the existence of God.
 - b. Faith is not based on evidence.
 - c. Human intellect is not adequate to grasp all the mysteries in the Bible.
 - d. Every person is given a different truth.
2. Discuss: If truth is revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, there are very definite limitations to science. To argue that the scientific method is the most important means of discovering truth excludes from us the most significant truths in the universe. And to apply a modified kind of scientific method to the study of the Bible ignores the teaching role of the Holy Spirit.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, Steps to Christ, Chapter 12.