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#1319

Is It OK To Doubt?

Video Intro (*Questioning Culture*, Highway Video)

Talk about intense! Isn't it amazing how many people would say the most important, pressing issues of life and eternity are something they just don't think about.

Why are we here? How do we connect with God? How do we want to be remembered?

We're in the first week of a 7 week series where we're trying to tackle the tough questions. We're trying to come up with answers to the kind of questions that often seem to stand as obstacles to people's faith.

In the coming weeks we want to grapple with questions like:

- Is it rational to believe in God, or do faith and reason operate on two completely divergent planes?
- What about religions? Do they all lead to the same God? Is religion even a good thing?
- We're going to talk about issues of origin. Can we know where humans came from?
- We're going to wrestle with the question: "Why do the innocent suffer?"
- Can we really trust the Bible?
- Is it rational to believe in a resurrection?

If you're on a spiritual journey and you've had these kind of questions hopefully there'll be some substance for you to add to the mix as you're thinking things through.

This isn't going to be about pat, simplistic answers. But, it is confronting the facts honestly and openly.

Now just to let you know where we're coming from here at Faith Community Church, we believe that God not only exists, but that He has spoken.

We believe that He created all that exists, and that people stand unique in that creation as being made in the image of God. We can know and respond to God.

We believe that our Creator God laid out parameters for life based upon His holy

character. That all of us have repeatedly violated those parameters and stand condemned before God.

But we believe that this astonishing, astounding, amazing creator God actually took the fury of His judgment for our wrong doings on himself in Jesus Christ.

Now at this point you might be thinking, "Wow, that's a pretty wild story."
And I would say to that, "You're absolutely right. It is a wild story."

In fact, it's so wild that all down through the annals of recorded history, with the hundreds of thousands of varieties religions that have ever existed, only one has that message. Only one. That's how wild it is.

But you say, "I have doubts and questions. In fact, I don't know that anyone can know the answers to my questions. What do I do with my doubts and questions?"

Charles Haddon Spurgeon was the original mega-church pastor. He was England's best known Christian preacher in the last half of the 19th century. He preached to crowds of up to 10,000 back before they had PA equipment. He said this, "We believe on evidence. Now the most foolish part of many men's doubts, is, that they do not doubt on evidence."

I've had the opportunity to talk with a lot of people over the years who said they didn't believe in God, or if they did they didn't believe the Bible was God's word for the inhabitants of the planet.

And what I've found so many times when you asked the "How do you know?" they didn't have an answer.

To use Spurgeon's words, they don't doubt on the evidence.

Now I'm not about to claim mind reading skills or anything like that, but if I was going to guess, I'd guess that their doubt was more morality driven than evidentiary driven.

In other words, it's more convenient to get rid of God than it is to have to recon with God and His moral standards for life.

If we're going to doubt in the spiritual realm let's examine the evidence.

We need to know that it's actually OK to doubt.

It's OK to have questions. It's completely OK with God for us to say, "I'm not sure."

It's OK to pray things like, "God if you're really there, show yourself to me. Help me to know you."

If there's no God, no problem, right? Life just goes on.

But what if there is a God? What if spiritual things do matter? What then? What if you suddenly, or gradually depending on how it all works for you, come to the realization that God is not only real, but He's got a claim on your life?

Doubt is OK. In fact, doubt is a plus, if it drives you to look for answers. If doubt is just your way of avoiding answers, that's a different story.

I get the feeling that that's where a lot of people are. But we're not a lot of people we're us, here today, February 19, 2006. How about you today?

In the Old Testament book of Isaiah, the God of the Bible makes this invitation; *"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD...* the Hebrew word translated "reason" (*yakach*) means "to argue, to decide, to convince, to dispute." It's a verb that involves thinking on the deepest level.

God is a thinking, rational, communicative being who has made us in His image.

The problem with most people isn't that they think too much, it's that they don't think enough.

The reality is, the only reason anyone can think, doubt, and question is because God made us as thinking rational beings. When the Bible says, God made man in His own image one of the implications is that we can think, reason, and communicate just like God.

News flash, chicken's aren't walking around the hen house asking "Why am I here?" Cows aren't gathering in the field to ask "What is the meaning of life?"

We can think and reason and ponder because we have a God who created us that way.

Not only that, but church isn't supposed to be a place that discourages thinking. Quite the opposite. Church is a place where we ought to be doing the most serious thinking.

Some of the prevailing philosophies of our age are absolutely foolish, but if you don't

accept them then people look at you like you're from a another galaxy, far, far away.

I've had people look at me with a straight face and say, "I'm not going to worry about what's after death, if anything. I'll find out when I die."

I hate to say it, but that's absolutely dumb. No one would say "I'm going on the most important trip of my whole life but I don't care whether I get there or not. I'll just kind of see what happens."

That's preposterous. But somehow what makes no sense in the physical realm suddenly sounds so erudite philosophically in the spiritual realm.

Or people say, "There is no absolute truth. What's true for you may not be true for me." Again that's a totally absurd statement that you'll hear repeatedly from otherwise rational, intelligent, sensible people.

If I recover from Bird Flu by taking the only medicine known to cure the disease and you get the same disease you're not going to say, "I don't think I'll take that medicine. That may be good for you but not for me."

There's a whole lot of people around who have plenty of education but who don't really think. They just repeat the prevailing philosophy no matter how bizarre it may be.

God dosen't want us to put our brains in neutral when it comes to spiritual truth. He wants us to think.

He wants us to ask questions. He wants us to investigate. He wants us to doubt, in the correct sense of the word.

Doubt can come from a couple of places.

I. Doubt Can Come From The Intellect

There are plenty of individuals who struggle intellectually with spiritual things.

Hugh Ross has his PhD from the university of Toronto. He always loved science from little on up. Listen to his story.

My parents were morally upright but non-religious. Our neighbors could also be described as

non-religious. I did not know any Christians or serious followers of any other religion while I was growing up.

By age seven I was reading physics books as fast as I could check them out. By eight I had decided to make astronomy my career. In the next several years my study of the big bang convinced me that the universe had a beginning, and thus a Beginner. But, like many of the astronomers whose books I read, I imagined that the Beginner must be distant and non-communicative.

My high school history studies disturbed me, for it was obvious that the peoples of the world tended to take their religions very seriously. Knowing that the European philosophers of the Enlightenment largely discounted religion, my initial response was to study their works. What I discovered, however, were inconsistencies, contradictions, evasions, and circular reasoning.

The obvious next step was to turn to the "holy" books themselves. If God the Creator had spoken through any of these books (and I thought He probably had not) his authorship would be obvious: the communication would be perfectly true.

I reasoned that if men invent a religion, their teachings will reflect human error. But, if the Creator communicates, His message will be error free and just as consistent as the facts of nature. So, I used the facts of history and science to test each of the "holy" books.

Initially my task was easy.

After only a few hours (in some cases less) of reading, I could find one or more statements clearly at odds with the facts of history and science. I also noted a writing style best described as esoteric and mysterious; it seemed inconsistent with the character of the Creator as implied by the facts of nature. My task was easy until I dusted off the Bible that the Gideons had given me several years earlier as part of their distribution program in the public schools.

I found the Bible noticeably different. It was simple, direct, and specific. I was amazed at the quantity of historical and scientific (i.e., testable) material it included and at the detail of this material. The first page of the Bible caught my attention. Not only did its author correctly describe the major events in the creation of life on earth, but he placed those events in the scientifically correct order and properly identified the earth's initial conditions.

For the next year and a half I spent about an hour a day searching the Bible for scientific and historical inaccuracies. I finally had to admit that it was error free and that this perfect accuracy could only come from the Creator Himself. I also recognized that the Bible stood alone in describing God and His dealings with man from a perspective that demanded more than just the dimensions we humans experience (length, width, height, and time).

Further, I had proven to myself, on the basis of predicted history and science, that the Bible was more reliable than many of the laws of physics. My only rational option was to trust the Bible's authority to the same degree as I trusted the laws of physics.

Dr. Ross' story could be multiplied over and over again. Simon Greenleaf was Dane professor of law at Harvard University. His work *Treatise on the Law of Evidence* was the standard American work on the subject.

One day he was challenged by some students to use the law of evidence to examine the Gospel accounts of Jesus' resurrection. Simon Greenleaf became an outspoken Christian and served as president of the Massachusetts Bible Society.

Our world is filled with learned men and women who studied the evidence and came to recognize spiritual reality.

The NY Times dubbed Dr. Allan R. Sandage the "Grand Old Man of Cosmology." Sandage is known as the greatest observational cosmologist in the world and has pinpointed the distances of remote galaxies, quantified the universe's expansion, he's won almost every prestigious award in his field.

This is what he said;

"It was my science that drove me to the conclusion that the world is much more complicated than can be explained by science. It is only through the supernatural that I can understand the mystery of existence."

- I. *Doubt Can Come From The Intellect*
- II. *Doubt Can Come From The Emotions*

A number of years ago there was a man who lived in our area. Through a series of events his wife and children became very involved here at church so I went to visit him.

Here's a grown man. This is what he told me. "When I was 5 years old I was in an evening church service in a small country church. I fell asleep and the pastor walked down from the pulpit and slapped me."

He said this, "I've never been back to church since and I'm not interested in the Bible."

That's being driven by emotion. That's letting feelings determine our spirituality or lack

thereof.

We hold a service every 6 weeks for the men in the Ordnance Road Detention Center. By the way, if you'd like to help out we can use a couple of more guys on the team. If you want to find out more see Pastor Jim Johnson.

But last time we were there we asked if there were any guys who wanted to give a testimony.

A man stood up who had been there back in 1995. He had been a student in Jim's Self Confrontation Discipleship class he taught in the prison. He had made tremendous changes.

When he got out he was serious about God. Then his mother became ill and eventually died. That caused him so much confusion that he eventually got back into drugs and ended up back in prison.

He doubted God because his heart was broken for his mom. His emotions clouded his belief system.

I've had people who were abused as children ask me, "Where was God when that was happening?"

I know a young lady who was in NYC on September 11, 2001. She saw people jumping to their death from the towers.

When you talk to her about God she struggles. If there's a God where was He?

Elie Wiesel, who survived the Holocaust, wrote in his book, Night: Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my Faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never....

Emotion can cause monumental spiritual questions and turmoil. Emotions can cloud us from seeing things as they really are.

- I. *Doubt Can Come From The Intellect*
- II. *Doubt Can Come From The Emotions*
- III. *Doubt Can Come From The Heart*

Luke 6 pg 911 Read vs 45

In the Old Testament individuals like Abraham, Essau, David, and Jeroboam (good and bad) are described as saying in their hearts certain things.

Psalm 14:1 says *The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."*

This is where a lot of doubt comes from, the heart, not the head.

It seems that some people can find an unlimited number of reasons and arguments not to believe.

We might reason with them and never get any where. They come up with more reasons and arguments. With some of those people, we could debate until the Second Coming and it won't make any difference.

Why? The facts aren't the problem. It's the heart that's the problem. Their heart looks for reasons not to believe. They seem to be able to raise more objections in an hour than someone can answer in a life time.

Notice, the Bible dosen't say it's foolish to ask questions and seek answers about God.

In Jeremiah 29:13 God says, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."*

Turn to Matthew 7 pg 854

Here's the principle from the words of Jesus: **Read vs 7-8**

God says I'm here. My truth is here. Ask and look and you'll find it.

But see, the person who wants to avoid God because they don't want to be responsible to someone else is a fool.

The fool says, without evidence, there is no God.
It's a whole lot more convenient that way.

John Blanchard, In His Book, *"Does God Believe In Atheists,"* writes, *"When people refuse to accept divine revelation, they are inevitably reduced to human speculation, to tossing around*

religious and philosophical ideas in hope of finding something that will be intellectually and morally satisfying. It's a hopeless quest, because when God is not in His rightful place man's entire world view is out of focus."

RC Sproul, in his commentary of the NT book of Romans, writes, *"It should not surprise us that brilliant thinkers compose very intricate, complex systems of philosophical thought that rise up in opposition against the character of God. In fact, if a person is logically consistent, there is a certain sense in which the more brilliant he is, the further he will remove himself from the conclusion of the existence of God."*

The kind of doubt that's deadly is cynicism. Cynicism questions but never attempts to resolve the questions. Cynicism questions merely to question.

It isn't a genuine quest. It asks only asks questions to mock and joke.

The cynic enjoys doubt. He looks for ways to doubt.

He says things like, "If God is real, where is He? If He'd show up, I'd believe."

By the way, according to the Bible, God did show up in an amazing way and people still didn't believe. Just read through the Gospels.

Cynicism is dishonest doubt. The Bible calls this hardheartedness.

There's a cure for honest doubt, but cynicism is a condition of the heart which prevents faith.

Cynicism wants to call all the shots and doesn't want to submit to divine authority. Cynicism is deadly.

So let me encourage you to Question if you want to. Wrestle with doubts, and even with God. Investigate and look into things, but don't become cynical. Cynicism hardens the mind and heart.

The opposite of doubt and unbelief is faith. At the heart of faith is the question of the character of God. For a lot of people, the question isn't whether or not to believe in God, but what kind of God do we believe in?

Do we believe in a God of love who wants to be near us and has our best interest at heart? Or will we believe in a God who plays games with us, and is ultimately cruel and

uncaring? Do we believe in a God who stands beside us in our troubles, or one who is distant and cold?

Whether your struggling intellectually, or emotionally, or even from a hard heart, let me challenge you with this.

The Bible presents a God who loved the world in this way: *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”

Philip Yancey, *“Reaching for the Invisible God: What Can You Expect to Find?”* says this: *“Doubt is the skeleton in the closet of faith and I know no better way to treat a skeleton than to bring it into the open and expose it for what it is: not something to hide or fear, but a hard structure on which living tissue may grow.”*

Let me challenge you to take that step and pray that prayer, *“God if your really real show me. Help me to know how and what to believe.”*

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.”