

Faith vs. Doubt

By Jason Jackson

Faith does not need to avoid doubts; it deals with them. If we understand where uncertainties come from, we will be better prepared to deal with them. We are not the first to wrestle with faith issues.

As the tomb news reached the apostles, “these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them” (Luke 24:11, ESV). Afterward, the Lord appeared to them and said, “Peace to you!” (v. 36). They were shocked and afraid, and Jesus asked them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” (v. 38).

Questionings (ASV) entered their minds, but the Lord’s question for them was: “Why? What is the basis for these uncertainties?” How is it that their questions were stronger than his resurrection promises (cf. Matt. 16:21)?

The Gospel accounts reveal several reasons. One, they were severely distressed. Two, they were terribly confused. And three, they were without any point of reference.

First, consider their distress. Just the talk about Christ “going away” distressed the disciples (John 14:1ff). Later, their grief overwhelmed them with exhaustion in Gethsemane (Luke 22:45). And the betrayal, denial, trial, and crucifixion were as yet only ideas. If they were overcome with sorrow already, what kind of distress filled their hearts when the taste of death filled the Savior’s mouth (cf. Heb. 2:9; Luke 24:17)?

Grief tests faith. Elijah experienced this (1 Kings 19:14), and so do we. Suffering is hard to understand, but trials should not nullify our trust in God. Jesus promised a third-day resurrection, and he rebuked the disciples for their lack of trust. Never doubt God’s promises or love, no matter what (cf. Rom. 8:31–39).

Second, the disciples were terribly confused. The Jews stumbled over a crucified Messiah (1 Cor. 1:23). Unverified beliefs leave the heart exposed. Gideon saw his trials as irreconcilable with the promise of divine presence (Judg. 6:13). The disciples also assumed that Jesus as the Messiah was incompatible with the cross (Matt. 16:22). How could the nation’s hero die at the hands of his enemies?

False Messianic assumptions complicated their faith. Once corrected, the apostles realized that the slaughtered Lamb of God would reign over death and sin (Luke 24:26; cf. Isa. 53). We also need to check our beliefs honestly and thoroughly against God’s word, otherwise we may experience unnecessary doubts from unsupported assumptions about the nature of God, Christ, suffering, sin, the plan of salvation, and other matters of faith. This is why personal Bible study is so important, and regular participation in Bible study at our local congregations is vital. We may find ourselves with questions, but they can be resolved by looking carefully at who Jesus is and what he has done for us (cf. Matt. 11:1ff). His divine power and love guarantee that his great promises will be fulfilled.

Third, note their lack of a reference point. The disciples had no previous experience like this. Their understanding of the Lord’s promises were being tested in real time for the first time. Some demand a walk of sight before believing. Doubts will arise when we, like Zechariah, have a hard time believing what God says (Luke 1:18–20). If we desire to believe God only when it makes sense to us, we are going to be disappointed. Walking by faith necessarily means believing in what God has said about what we have never experienced or seen. We have to trust God—that He is able and willing to do as he has promised (cf. Rom. 4:20–21). We do not need

an experiential point of reference to test God's trustworthiness. He demonstrated all that we need to know when he gave his Son to die for our sins (cf. Rom. 5:6–11).

By confronting our doubts with God's undeniable existence, his awesome power, and his infinite love, the Father will help us develop such a faith as this: "Let God be true though every one were a liar" (Rom. 3:4). Personal distress, confusion, and our human weaknesses and limitations need not obscure our hope of living eternally in his presence (cf. Rom. 5:1–5).