

The Just Shall Live by Faith

2 Corinthians 4:8-9

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 reads like this in the Greek, "We are often troubled, but not crushed; sometimes in doubt, but never in despair; there are many enemies, but we are never without a friend, and though we badly hurt at times, we are not destroyed." Galatians 3:11 says, "The just shall live by faith." Last week we looked at the fact that we do not need to give up on God when it comes to our prayer life. Today I want to talk about overcoming doubt!

Listen carefully to this statement: everybody has doubts. We all have a tendency to second guess ourselves and say, "Did I do the right thing? Did I make the right decision? Should I take it back to the store?" These are the kinds of things that come into our minds when we have doubts.

There are many different kinds of doubt. When we doubt the future, we call it worry. When we doubt other people we call it suspicion. When we doubt ourselves we call it inferiority. When we doubt God we call it *unbelief*. When we doubt what we hear on news we call it *intelligence!* When we doubt everything we call it cynicism or skepticism. Men typically go through a period of doubt that we call the *mid-life crisis*. We doubt our *virility*, our *ability* and our *senility*. Mid-life crisis is the age of the 3 B's - *Bifocals*, *Baldness* and *Bulges*.

James says in James 1:6, "If any man doubts he's like a wave bashed back and forth. He's unstable in all of his ways."

Do Christians ever doubt? Should a Christian ever doubt? 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 the Greek reads like this, "We are often troubled but not crushed. Sometimes in doubt but never in despair. There are many enemies but we are never without a friend and though we badly hurt at times we are not destroyed." The point Paul is making here is that *it is possible to have doubts but not be defeated by them.*

Tonight I want to do a couple of things. I want us to look at *three causes of doubt*. And then I want to talk to you about *how do you deal with your doubts?* How do you overcome them?

What are the causes of doubt? The Bible says there are three different causes of doubt.

1. Critics cause us to doubt God. Those people who challenge us, who ridicule your beliefs. The Bible talks a lot about scoffers. **All of us have been in a classroom or at work where our faith was criticized and challenged.** I read about a young man in school. The teacher stood up and said, "The Bible doesn't make sense. It is hard to understand and nobody should even try to read the Bible. You can't understand it at all." The young man raised his hand and said, "Sir. The Bible is God's love letter to Christians. And that's what you get for reading somebody else's mail." **Critics cause us to doubt God.**

David had to deal with critics in Psalm 73, "They scoff at God. How proudly they speak so God's people are dismayed and confused and they drink it all in. Does God realize what's going on, they ask." **Critics can cause us to doubt.** We drink it all in. **Whether we want to be or not, we are affected by critics.** The Bible says, "They are proud." Most critics are *egotistical*. Their attitude is "You are a dummy if you are a believer."

But the Bible says, "The fool has said in his heart there is no God." **I don't care how many degrees a person has behind his/her name, if they don't not believe in God he is a fool.** That is what the Bible says. All you have to do is look at the overwhelming evidence that the *creation* was made by a *creator*. **To say this all just fell into place is like saying I take a watch, take it all apart, put it in a bag, shake it up and out comes a Swiss watch that fits perfectly.** That is the odds of all this just coming together in the right balance.

Critics often cause us to doubt God. I have heard people make dumb statements like, "I accept only what I can understand." **Then you are going to doubt a lot.** And you will not be able to accept a lot of

things that happen in life. You cannot accept that Neil Armstrong walked on the moon because how can you understand all of that. If God could be completely understood then He wouldn't be God.

David said, "Again and again they scoff, 'Where is that God of yours?' But O my soul, don't be discouraged. Don't be upset. Expect God to act." Critics cannot stand to be around joyful Christians. They want us to be miserable too. So they are always trying to criticize us, and the church, and that can cause us to doubt.

2. Conscience causes us to doubt God. How does our conscious cause us to doubt. When you feel guilty you have a tendency to rationalize your beliefs in order to fit your lifestyle. 1 Timothy 1:19 reads like this in the Greek, "For some people have disobeyed their consciences and have deliberately done what they knew was wrong. It isn't surprising that soon they lost their faith in Christ, after defying God like that." If you have a guilty conscience you are going to start denying your belief. It's like if I go out and get a ticket on the Interstate and then I come in and announce to everybody, "I don't believe in State Troopers. I don't believe in traffic court. I don't believe in judges. And I don't believe in the 55 mph speed limit." That doesn't change anything. It is still a fact that I got a ticket. Unbelief is often an excuse to justify our lifestyle.

I was talking to a young man about church, and he said, "I don't believe in going to church because I don't believe in God." I think he expected me to be shocked by that statement. I said, "So? I am not really interested in the fact that you do not believe in God as much as I am interested in why you don't believe in God. Let's suppose that God exists. If God really did exist, would there be some changes you'd have to make in your lifestyle?" He said, "Yes, of course there would. There would be some things that I am doing now that I do not want to give up." I said, "Then the real issue is not whether you believe in God or not but are you willing to change."

You see, our morality determines our theology and the way we want to act. We start saying things like, "That is just your interpretation,

but I believe..." or "I don't care what God says. I believe ..." Our conscience can cause us to doubt God.

3. Circumstances cause us to doubt God. This is the number one reason people doubt God. Circumstances can cause us to doubt God. When our prayers are not answered, when there is a tragedy that strikes, when we are faced with an impossible situation.

Jesus is out on the Lake of Galilee with His disciples. He is asleep and a great storm comes up. In Mark 4:35-41 they wake Jesus up and they say, "Jesus, don't You care if we drown?" **That is a typical reaction when we get under pressure.** We start doubting. Don't You care God?

Gallup has pointed out in a recent Gallup poll that 96% of all Americans believe in God. It is the type of God that they doubt. What is He like? Is He personal? Is He loving? Can He be depended on? Is He interested in me? Those are the kinds of doubts that people have.

Remember the story of Thomas, one of the twelve disciples. He missed the first reappearance of Jesus and when He came to be with the other eleven, he said, "I won't believe it till I see it for myself," regarding Jesus' resurrection. **When Jesus did reappear again to see Thomas what did He do?** Did He put him down? Did He criticize him? No! He opened His arms in love to Thomas and Thomas' doubts subsided into reality.

The point is that not even your doubts can stop God from loving you. Even if you doubt Him, He loves you. That is really what the story of Thomas is all about.

In Jude 1:22 we have these words, "Be merciful to those who doubt." **There is a great difference between doubt and unbelief.** Doubt is when honestly you just do not know what God wants to do in a situation. You honestly do not know how to even pray about it. Doubt

is when you really want to know the truth, but cannot seem to find the answer.

Unbelief is when you know exactly what God wants to do. You have read the Bible and you still say, "I am going to choose to do something different" or "I see what the Bible says but I choose to believe differently." That, my friend, is unbelief. And that is a sin.

1 John 5:13 says this, "These things I have written to you who believe so that you may know that you have eternal life." The things are written in the Bible so that you may know absolutely for sure and develop certain confidence. The Greek word means to know experientially. That you can know without a shadow of a doubt that when you die you are going to heaven. That does not mean you won't make mistakes, that you will not sin, that you will not disappoint yourself and other people, that you are going to be perfect for the rest of your life. But you don't have to be perfect to get to heaven. You do have to put your faith in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way. No man goes to the Father except by Me." You put your faith in Him, not in your own efforts. And you can know for sure.