

Fear and Doubt
Sunday School Lesson 5
The Fearful Christian
1 Timothy 2:8
5/17/2020

Introduction: Throughout this lesson series, we've alluded to the fact that fear and faith are at odds with each other; however, we haven't yet taken the time to look at the specifics of that dynamic. In this lesson, we will be examining exactly how close fear and doubt work in connection with one another. The simple definition of doubt is to question what one believes. It is indecisiveness. Doubt is not the same as unbelief, as unbelief is the absence of faith. Doubt says, "I'm not sure if this is true" Unbelief says, "I'm sure this isn't true." Consequently, it is more accurate to say that Christians struggle with doubt more often than we struggle with unbelief. To add to that thought, doubt is the corroding element that will ultimately lead to unbelief if not addressed. The disciples had several moments of unbelief that came as a result of their growing doubt. The relationship between doubt and fear is interesting because both can be caused by the other. Sometimes, our fears cause us to doubt, and there are other times where doubts cause us to fear. Both are a result of a lack of total faith in God. This morning, we are going to look at the significant damage that doubt can do, and we'll see how fear plays a fundamental role in assisting with that damage.

I. DOUBT IS THE SEED THAT SATAN PLANTS IN OUR HEARTS AND MINDS TO TURN US AGAINST GOD. (GENESIS 3; JOB 1-2; MARK 4:15)

- A. **Notice that Satan often starts his attack by having us question God (Genesis 3:1; Job 1-2).** If Satan started his attack on our faith by bluntly denying what God has said, most believers would likely reject this temptation. Satan knows this. He is deceitful and conniving. This is why he often starts his attack by asking questions. He wants us to question our faith. Instead of trying to knock down our entire wall of faith at one time, he is often content to pick away at it by taking down a stone at a time. Sadly, our faith is so weak that it truly does not take many stones coming down for us to falter. In our example, Satan only had to ask Eve one question in order to get her to doubt what God had said! He did not even have to pester her into turning away from God. From looking at the New Testament, we have so many examples from the disciples to show how easy it was to get them to doubt. While we do not have an account of Satan directly challenging the disciples, we do know that they were sensitive to the questions that were asked by the Jewish leaders.
- B. **Notice that Satan then acts on our doubt by denying God and His Word (Genesis 3:4-5; Mark 4:15).** Once the seed of doubt has been planted, Satan moves quickly into phase two of his attack on our faith. This phase is where he flatly denies God and presents his own version of the truth. Doubt can quickly grow to unbelief when it is presented with some alternative to believe in. Doubt without an alternative may only cause hesitation before a person moves forward. Satan's ultimate goal is to stop us from continuing in our service for Christ. Satan's alternatives are always attractive. We know that he is able to make something bad look like it is something that is good. Eve saw the fruit as something that was good to eat. Previously, she had seen it as something that was bad to eat. Satan wants us to think that good is evil and that evil is good. Jesus warned us about calling evil good. Relating to fear, Satan wants for us to fear God's way. That starts with doubt. He gets us to doubt the goodness of God and His purposes. He then shows us how good his own way is, and he causes many to be tempted to sin and an evil way.

II. DOUBT CAUSES UNGODLY FEAR BECAUSE IT LEAVES THE CHRISTIAN IN A POSITION OF UNCERTAINTY. (2 COR. 5:6; LUKE 12:22-32; MATTHEW 6:34)

- A. **Notice that doubt takes away our firm expectation of the future and puts us on unstable ground (2 Corinthians 5:6;).** As Christians, we have an expectation of what the future holds. We expect to spend eternity with the Lord. We expect all things to work together for good to them that love God and are the called according to His purpose. We expect that Christ will give us the strength to accomplish all the things that we are called to do. There is great confidence in Jesus Christ. When we let doubt creep in, we are taking away our certainty of the future. We no longer can say that we have an expectation. A person may happily go along with a plan as long as that person has a reasonable expectation of its outcome. When the outcome is brought into question, the person may quickly abandon the plan. The disciples had confidence in Christ. They had put all of their expectations in Him. Once He was arrested, thoughts of doubt crept in. They no longer felt certain about the future. As a result, they feared what would happen, and they fled.

- B. Notice that uncertainty is one of the primary reasons that people fear (Luke 12:22-32; Matthew 6:34).** Not knowing what will happen can be very frightening. People in this world fear death because it is an unknown to them. Many kids fear going to school for the first time. Adults fear starting a new job. Many fears are a result of uncertainty. It's hard to keep control or even to properly prepare when we don't know what is going to happen. In Luke 12, we find a lesson that Jesus was giving to His disciples regarding life. He encouraged them not to worry about the necessities of life. He told them that those necessities would be provided. For the disciples, though, this was a hard lesson. In the text, Jesus mentions both doubt and fear. First, He encouraged them not to doubt that their supplies would be met. If they doubted, it would then lead to fear. In Matthew 6:34, Jesus speaks about tomorrow. The reality is that tomorrow can be a scary thing because we don't know what it holds. Thankfully, as Christians, we know Who holds tomorrow. We must not let doubt creep in. We have been given promises that we are supposed to claim. Who has caused you to doubt these promises?

III. UNGODLY FEAR CAUSES DOUBT BECAUSE IT LEAVES THE CHRISTIAN IN A POSITION OF UNCOMFORTABLE CERTAINTY. (ACTS 12:1-17; MATT. 14:30-32; ROM. 14:1; 1 JN. 2:19)

- A. Notice that ungodly fear may present us with a certain future that directly contradicts our faith in God (Acts 12:1-5; Matthew 14:30-32).** While doubt naturally leads to uncertainty, fear will often lead to certain conclusions being made. Fear is a genuine concern for something that is real, even if that realness is only in our own minds. The friends of Peter had faith that God could deliver him from the clutches of a wicked king. For that reason, they committed to praying daily for him. However, they were all very afraid. Their fears grew each passing day that Peter was in prison. In most of the other instances where God delivered one of His followers from prison, it happened on the same evening as the arrest. Peter's friends undoubtedly had heard of the many other arrests that were taking place during that time as well. The threat against Peter was very real. The likely conclusion was his death. That's the conclusion that their fear led them to reach. Of course, this conclusion ran directly counter to what their faith was instructing them to believe.
- B. Notice that the potential for alternative outcomes is one of the primary reasons that people doubt (Acts 12:6-17; Romans 14:1; 1 John 2:19).** When there is only one possible outcome, there really is no reason to doubt. If you were in a room with only one door, how long would it take you to determine how to exit that room? Doubts will increase when our mind plays out the various possibilities of a matter. As mentioned in the first observation, the Devil places alternatives in front of us to cast doubt on the path and plan of God. Fear gives place for those alternatives. In many cases, fear even creates alternatives that we would not have previously considered as possible. Our mind is deceptive. It can convince us of things that we would not otherwise believe. When Rhoda reported that Peter was there, the fellow believers doubted her report, despite the fact that they had been praying for that exact outcome! Why were they so quick to reject Peter's deliverance? Their fear had created more likely outcomes in their minds, and those outcomes increased their doubt in his deliverance.

IV. UNGODLY FEAR AND DOUBT ARE BOTH SIGNIFICANT HINDRANCES TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD. (MATTHEW 28:17; MARK 11:23; ROMANS 8:15; 14:23)

- A. Notice that doubt prevents us from worshipping God, causes us to sin against God, and keeps us from receiving what we need from God (Matthew 28:17; Mark 11:23; Romans 14:23).** We cannot worship God as we should if we are filled with doubt. That's because doubt does not please Him. Romans 14:23 further shows us that doubt is most certainly a sin against God. Sin is what separates us from the Lord. Additionally, our doubts hinder the work of God, as we are not able to access the power that He has made available for us. The Lord warned the disciples that their doubts would limit the answers to their prayers. Whenever we let doubts creep into our hearts and minds, we ought to quickly confess those doubts before the Lord and keep our total trust and faith on Him and His Word.
- B. Notice that ungodly fear shows a broken relationship between the child of God and his Heavenly Father (Romans 8:15).** The book of Romans tells us that we have received the Spirit of adoption. This Spirit causes us to cry out to our Heavenly Father. We are not in the spirit of bondage anymore, so there is no reason to be afraid. If we find ourselves living in fear, it speaks to a very unhealthy relationship with our Heavenly Father. A small child cries out to his parents when he is faced with a frightening situation. Our faith in Christ is to be like the faith of a small child. When we let fear and doubt control our spirit, it shows us that we have become estranged from the Heavenly Father. Who are we looking to for help if we are not looking up and calling out to the Lord?

FEAR AND DISCERNMENT (LESSON 6)
FEAR AND DISOBEDIENCE (LESSON 7)
FEAR AND DEDICATION (LESSON 8)