

## Doubt, Part II

In the November issue of *Christianity Today*, Drew Dyck wrote an alarming article entitled, *The Leavers*, subtitled, *More than in previous generations, 20 and 30 somethings are abandoning the faith. Why?* He says, “There has been a corresponding drop in church involvement. According to Rainer Research, approximately 70 percent of American youth drop out of church between the age of 18 and 22. The Barna Group estimates that 80 percent of those reared in the church will be “disengaged” by the time they are 29. Barna Group president David Kinnaman described it in stark terms: ‘Imagine a group photo of all the students who come to your church (or live within your community of believers) in a typical year. Take a big fat marker and cross out three out of every four faces. That’s the probable toll of spiritual disengagement as students navigate through their faith during the next two decades.’” Toward the ending of his article, Dyck remarked about an unsettling pattern that emerged in his interviews of former professing Christians, “Almost to a person, the leavers with whom I spoke recalled that, before leaving the faith, they were regularly shut down when they expressed doubts. Some were ridiculed in front of peers for asking ‘insolent questions.’ Others reported receiving trite answers to vexing questions and being scolded for not accepting them. One was slapped in the face, literally. At the 2008 American Sociological Association meeting, scholars from the University of Connecticut and Oregon State University reported that ‘the most frequently mentioned role of Christians in de-conversion was in amplifying existing doubt.’ De-converts reported ‘sharing their burgeoning doubts with a Christian friend or family member only to receive trite, unhelpful answers.’”

There are answers to stem the tide. I am praying and believing God for a revival and resurgence of the “...*faith once delivered unto the saints...*” (Jude verse 3). To see this reality, I am convinced we must follow the command of the Scripture which tells us, “*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*” (1 Peter 3:15). Last week we began our article on doubt by addressing the fact that doubt is being in two minds. Today we continue with:

### **2. Doubt is like being suspended in mid-air.**

Jesus said in Luke 12:29, “...*neither be ye of doubtful mind.*” The Greek word for “doubtful mind” in this verse is “μετεωρίζω” (meteorizo). This is the root origin of our word “meteor.” Literally rendered, it means to raise in mid-air, i.e. (figuratively) to suspend. The best example I can give you is the feeling I received when we were kids and the giant Ferris wheel we were riding came close to the top and suddenly stopped and rocked our seat back and forth. My only comfort was knowing that directly, we were going to

proceed with the ride and eventually be safely lowered to the ground. Emotionally this is what many a youth is experiencing who is going through doubt - they are suspended in mid-air. It is the pain of non-resolution and spiritually troubled due to the suspense of not knowing.

### **3. Doubt is an inner argument.**

The Risen Lord was still dealing with some doubtful believers and He asked, *"...Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts?"* (Luke 24:38). The Greek word for "thoughts" is "διαλογισμός" (dialogismos) meaning: "a man with an inward debate, the thinking of a man deliberating with and arguing with himself." In Luke 24: 37, it says, *"But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit."* Christ challenged them to touch His wounds. Then he asked them for something to eat. This ended their doubts as to His identity. Remember, Thomas said, *"... Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe"* (John 20:25). Eight days later, Jesus walks into a room with the door shut, *"Then saith he to Thomas, reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God"* (John 20:27, 28). In all of inspired Holy Scripture, you will not find a more dogmatic statement affirming the Deity of Christ. And who gave this declaration? The man often referred to as "Doubting Thomas." God doesn't give up on the doubter. He wants to end your inner arguments. Jesus said following this incident, *"...because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed"* (John 20: 29). Our Lord challenges us to stop arguing within ourselves and believe.

### **4. Doubt is faltering.**

Peter walked on the water with Jesus, but soon he looked at the turbulent waves around him and began to sink. The Lord extended His hand and pulled Him up and asked, *"...O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"* (Matthew 14:31). Here our Lord uses "διστάζω" (distazo), meaning to falter, to hold back and to distance oneself. Don't believe your doubts and doubt your beliefs; believe your beliefs and doubt your doubts! The essence of faith is described in Hebrews 11:1, *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"* (Hebrews 11:1). If we can see it, faith is not required. This is why we are commanded to *"...walk by faith, not by sight"* (II Corinthians 5:7).

In conclusion, what can deliver us from being in two minds, suspended in mid-air, carrying on an inner argument and faltering? The answer is found in I Corinthians 13:13, *"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the*

*greatest of these is charity.*” (Charity is God’s agape love). Paul told Timothy, a young man reared in the faith, *“If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself”* (II Timothy 2:13). This means God can no more deny a believer who doubts than He can deny His Son who took that believer’s place on the cross. *“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31). Jeremiah said, *“...great is thy faithfulness”* (Lamentations 3:23)! Our response to faith and hope (the two intangible unseens) is love. We lovingly give our belief from a heart of trust. God’s response to our faith is more faith and more hope. *“...In thy light shall we see light”* (Psalm 36:9).

-Pastor Pope-