

1) Recognize the Assumption or Belief Underlying Your Doubts

- a) Where is my understanding clashing with the revelation of Jesus?
- b) John is doubting whether Jesus is just another great prophet (v16) or the "one to come" (Mal 3:1; 4:5; Dan 7:13) whom Isaiah promised (Isa 40:10; 62:11; 63:1)
 - i) John is in prison for calling Herod to repent of his inappropriate relationship with his brother's wife (thus he sends some of his disciples to ask Jesus)
 - (1) The reality that his preaching hasn't brought freedom from injustice for John (in prison) has John wondering
 - ii) Is Jesus the Messiah promised?
 - (1) "the coming one" is a messianic title used in Luke 19:38 and 13:35, quotations or allusions to Psalm 118:26
 - (2) Luke brings this story up on the heels of "a great prophet has arisen before us!" of v16 in order to keep the true identity of Jesus at the forefront of his gospel
- c) John's doubt is based upon his perception of what the Messiah was supposed to be like, and Jesus wasn't fitting his expectation

2) Doubt Your Doubts – or Better, Doubt Yourself

- a) Notice that John wanted to hear from Jesus to inform his doubts
 - i) The disciples of John didn't come to Jesus to judge Him, but to learn from Him
- b) How do you approach Jesus?
 - i) Is your wisdom so great that you can see all things, know all things, choose wisest in all things?
 - ii) Don't trust your feelings, or even your thoughts, for the heart is deceitful and the natural man cannot even ascertain the things of God.
 - iii) Start battling your doubts by doubting your own wisdom and ability to see rightly (log in eye, foundation of house, etc.)

3) See Jesus and His Works

- a) John seeks to hear from Jesus in order to inform his doubts and correct his perceptions
- b) Jesus compassionately reassures John by reminding him of the promises and their fulfillment in Himself
 - i) "in that hour"
 - (1) You get the picture of Jesus patiently bringing John's disciples with him to see with their own eyes what his ministry was about
 - (2) For the next "hour" they watched him do the miraculous things that were prophesied of "the one coming" (Isa 29:18; 35:5; 61:1, all alluded to in Luke 4:18-19)
 - ii) Jesus tells them just to "go and tell John what you have seen and heard"
 - (1) By two or three witnesses a thing is established (2 Cor 13:1, cf. Deut 19:15)
 - (2) Jesus is giving testimony to John using the OT imagery, promises, and Law
 - (a) While the envoy for John the Baptist retold his question word for word, Jesus wants them to use their own words to testify to his works
 - (b) This is to give John certainty that Jesus surely is the one promised by God to bring about the redemption of God's people
 - (3) What they "were hearing and seeing" (active) were signs of the "coming age", the Kingdom of God, promised in the OT
 - (a) God's rule and redemption is established

4) Come to Jesus to Wrestle With Your Doubts Knowing That He is For You

- a) Jesus never *values* doubt, but he doesn't shy away from it, either

- b) Note that Jesus does not reprimand John for a lack of faith
 - i) Jude 22 – “have mercy on some who are doubting”
 - ii) Jesus showed great mercy to John by patiently showing Him who He is and confronting his false assumption of what the Messiah would bring
 - (1) It seems that John was looking for a Messiah who came with judgment, like his message (“the axe is at the root of the tree”, 3:9)
 - (2) Jesus seems to have a more redemptive concern *at this point* that John did not emphasize, at least not as strongly
 - (a) Healing, freedom, release from demonic strongholds
 - (b) “preaching the gospel to the powerless”
 - (3) This does not mean that Jesus’ message does not include a tone of judgment as well (it does here at the end of the chapter, and more greatly in Luke 11-13)
- c) Humility Should Lead Us to Jesus as the Sovereign Lord
 - i) Jesus points out that what drew people to John was not his appearance or the beauty of the wilderness, but rather the prophetic words of God
 - ii) He then points out that John was a preparer for Himself
 - iii) Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 which shows that John prepared the way for the LORD, thus Jesus is saying that He is the LORD come to redeem His people and defeat His enemies
- d) Those who grasped repentance rejoiced to hear this word because it meant that the Lord was coming to rescue by His grace, but those who rejected repentance rejected it
 - i) The ‘baptism of John’ indicates that those people had humbled themselves and saw their deep need for complete and utter salvation by God’s grace
 - (1) Luke will mention a group like this as well later in Acts 19
 - (a) “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, speaking to the people *so that they might believe* in the coming one after him, that is, Jesus.”
 - (b) “so that” is a particle of purpose, indicating that John either spoke or baptized so that people would believe in Jesus, the One coming after him.
 - (2) They understood repentance, but the object of their faith was not yet Jesus
 - (a) “baptized into repentance” vs. “baptized into Jesus”
 - (b) One is the forerunning, the groundwork for the greater
- e) To reject ‘John’s baptism’ meant that they were trusting in something in addition to God’s grace (Jewishness, moral ability, self-righteousness)
 - i) The rejection of this last group led to the final parable by Jesus to the crowd

5) Accept Jesus’ Word and Works as Authoritative Over Your Doubts

- a) “Blessed is the one who does not stumble over me”
 - i) Jesus is the One who can see rightly, so doubt your doubts and trust in His wisdom, even when your feelings and your desires are screaming to trust yourself
 - (1) This beatitude is particularly for John, but worded in a way that it is also an appeal to all who are listening
 - ii) Jesus is telling John that this gospel is about Him, redemption is about Him, and blessing is found in Him
- b) All doubts are based upon the perception of truth, and the problem of doubt always comes down to a simple question: Who are you going to trust to define Truth?
 - i) While John had sincere doubts about Jesus, his doubts were more about confusion than hard-hearted rejection of Jesus
 - ii) But, the Pharisees refused the message of repentance and redemption both from John and from Jesus
 - iii) Jesus gives a parable to summarize the hard-hearted rejection of the Jewish leaders:
 - (1) They rejected John’s message even though he avoided “bread and wine”, disdain him as having a demon for this asceticism

- (a) He came with an austere life and a message of judgment and they didn't like him
- (2) They rejected Jesus' message even though he came "eating and drinking" disdaining him as a glutton, drunk, and sinner
 - (a) He came with a celebratory life of normal food/drink and a message of repentance for forgiveness and salvation for sinners, but they didn't like him, either
- (3) The point is that they are like children who get mad when people don't do what they want them to do, even when it is inconsistent
 - (a) "We play dance music and you don't dance!" Wah, wah, wah!
 - (b) "We play funeral dirge and you don't weep!" Wah, wah, wah!
- iv) The issue is that the Pharisees refuse to submit to the authority of John's message or of Jesus Himself, trusting instead in their own definition of good/evil.
- c) Questions of doubt are often a smokescreen for a heart that wants to play by its own rules and does not want to submit to Christ
 - i) Most people today don't reject the Word of God because of historical grounds, but rather because of moral grounds, things they consider offensive morally.
 - (1) They will say, "The Bible teaches some good things, but we can't take it all literally because it teaches things that we know today are wrong and I can't believe in a God like that."
 - (2) Usually it involves the Bible's apparent teachings on sexuality, gender ethics, and slavery
 - ii) Is it possible that you are subconsciously holding to the idea that your understanding is superior to all other understanding?
 - (1) On what basis do you judge the Bible as "wrong?"
 - (a) Is it not your own perceived wisdom and judgment?
 - (b) Is it not really because your heart and your mind perceive yourself to be as wise and good and righteous as God Himself?
 - (2) What is it to say that your wisdom is superior to Christ's?
 - (a) This is why Jesus proved to John that He was the Messiah, to prove His superiority
 - (b) Note also that John had to trust the eyewitness accounts of his disciples, just like you and I must trust the eyewitness accounts of the New Testament
- d) If Jesus is the Son of God, should he not contradict every culture and every heart at some point?
 - i) Doesn't the reality of a relationship by necessity include the opportunity to differ and offend?
 - ii) If Jesus is above us, created us, knows us perfectly, would it not also follow that the Bible, His revelation of Himself and His works, have places where it contradicts us?
 - iii) Therefore, if the Bible does contradict our sensibilities, it is proof that the Bible is not some cultural creation but the very Word of God, for it contradicts every culture in some way.
 - (1) Rather than your offense with Jesus being a reason to disbelieve, it ought to be a reason to believe.
 - (2) What makes you think that because something contradicts you, that you can just throw it out? It may be proof that the Bible is truly the Word of God.
- e) The issue at stake is whether or not one is going to take Christ Jesus on his terms and submit to the One who can see rightly, stop trusting in one's own wisdom and righteousness, and instead rely upon His wisdom and righteousness
 - i) John had sincere intellectual confusion, but the Pharisees doubt came from a moral position of authority
 - (1) John submitted to Jesus' answer as determinative of the Truth
 - (2) The Pharisees rejected Jesus' answer because it didn't meet their moral determination and required them to submit themselves at great cost to His rule over them

Romans 15:13 – It is the God of hope who can fill you with joy and peace *in believing*, so that you might abound in hope.

What John the Baptist was missing was hope. Trapped in a cell, beheading on the way, surrounded by enemies who wanted his life and he could not figure out why the coming One had not rescued him from such suffering and danger. This suffering led to doubt and doubt led to a lack of hope. What was Jesus' response to his doubt?

Jesus did not give him empty platitudes about life. He didn't promise him that he would escape beheading or be set free from jail tomorrow. He didn't promise that the road would get easier or that his cousin would take Herod and his mistress down.

What Jesus did was show John who he was. Look at me and my works and know that I am the Christ. It is in the knowledge of Jesus that hope is displayed most fully. It is in knowing Jesus as the sovereign Lord who is full of mercy and grace to the ones who, though confused and wondering, entrust themselves to him even when they can't figure out what is to come. Does death lay at the door? I trust that Jesus, the bringer of newness, knows what he is doing, even if he lets me die. He is good and he is wise. He will work it out in the end.

However, Jesus is also very clear that if you reject him, complaining that he doesn't fit your system or deliver what you demand, then you have nothing in him. Just as those who don't reject him are blessed, so those who do reject him are under the curse. Hard-hearted rejection that places oneself at the pinnacle of wisdom and the judge of righteousness is an affront to the Blessed King and a mutinous attempt on his throne.

So, there is a difference between the doubt that submits to Jesus and the doubt that rejects Jesus. If you are wrestling with the former today, confused as to how it all works, see Jesus and his works and entrust yourself to his goodness. But, if you are the latter, rejecting Jesus because he doesn't fit your system or deliver what you demand, you need to question what you are really basing your system upon and if it is more capable than Jesus of delivering hope. You are trusting in something in order to make your assertion, but can that something really uphold your moral ground and your expectation of life? Jesus saw all that heard his words and did not submit to them to be building a house on a sandy foundation: it will come crashing down. Take heed and entrust yourself to the Master Builder, the Wise Builder, whose foundation is divine and gives hope to the blind incapable builders that know they need a divine contractor.