



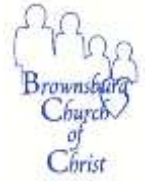
Believing God: It's Not Always Easy

Brownsburg Church of Christ

by Edwin Crozier

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PM Assembly



Introduction:

We often like to divide people into groups. As one person once said, there are two kinds of people: those who divide everybody into two kinds of people and those who don't. We might be tempted to divide people into two groups: those who believe in God and those who don't. But just making this statement can be misleading. For instance, we could subdivide these groups even more. There are those who are confident no God exists. We call them atheists. There are those who believe God may exist, but they are not convinced. We call them agnostics or skeptics. Then on the side of those who believe in God, we could subdivide further. There are those who believe in God but don't believe God. And there are those who both believe in God and believe God. "What is the difference?" you may ask. A great deal. One accepts God's existence. The other also unquestionably accepts God's way as truth. Most of us sit between these two extremes, daily growing in our commitment and faith. **II Peter 1:5, 8** demonstrate faith is a growing aspect of our lives. Our trust in God and in following His way increases as we surrender more and more of lives and actions to His will. Our goal is to follow the direction of **Proverbs 3:5**, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding." We strive to reach the point that we unquestionably follow God's will in all areas of life. Yet, as we grow, there are still times of doubt. Consider Peter's situation when he walked on water as an example of this faith in flux (**Matthew 14:22-33**).

Discussion:

- I. Peter heard, saw, and believed Jesus.
 - A. We have no doubt Peter believed in Jesus. It was Peter who, in **John 6:68**, said Jesus had the words of life. It was Peter who, in **Matthew 16:16**, said Jesus was the Christ, God's Son.
 - B. Peter believed the person standing on the water was Jesus. It was none other than the Jesus who had calmed storms, fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish, cast out demons, and healed the sick. Peter responded, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (**Matthew 14:28**). The issue was not proof. Just saying "Come," did not prove it was Jesus. Peter already believed or he would never have gotten out of the boat.
 - C. When Peter sank, Jesus' response was, "Why did you doubt?" (**Matthew 14:31**). Did Peter doubt it was really Jesus on the water? I don't believe so. After all, when he began to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me" (**Matthew 14:30**). Peter believed in Jesus. Peter believed it was Jesus. But Peter still had a struggle with faith. He needed to grow in faith, not growing belief in Jesus, but grow in believing Jesus.
- II. Peter committed to doing what Jesus commanded.
 - A. Peter went beyond just mental assent. He committed himself. The boat was being battered by waves, not the easiest water to swim in. He would not be easily pulled out if he couldn't walk. But he committed himself to following the Lord's command.
 - B. We learn that mature faith is not just an initial decision to obey. Mature faith is not attained because we take the first step onto the water. Or can I say, that first step into the water, speaking of baptism. That is the beginning, but making that step does not equal mature faith.
- III. Peter started his walk with Christ, but looking around, he began to sink.
 - A. Peter's doubt was not about who was on the water. Peter's doubt was not about wanting to obey. Peter's doubt was about whether or not Jesus' way was best. Jesus said, "Come." Peter got out on the water, but then began to look around. Seeing the wind, Peter became afraid. He suddenly doubted the wisdom of walking to Jesus. This is where we get to the heart of the matter. I think this happens to us at times. Look at several areas where we allow doubt to get in the way of our walk with God.
 - B. Consider how doubt wreaks havoc over us personally in our emotional lives. We have faith that God exists. We believe serving God will bring numerous blessings of peace and contentment. However, doubt often surfaces. Sometimes we may not even realize we are expressing doubt, but when concerns arise, instead of letting our requests be made known to God (**Philippians 4:6**), instead of casting our cares upon Him (**I Peter 5:7**), we try to handle problems on our own. Have you ever noticed the context of Peter's statement? He immediately talked about the devil seeking to devour us. When we try to overcome our anxieties on our own, Satan will devour us. Trust God. Turn your anxieties over to Him; He'll care for you.

- C. Consider how doubt wreaks havoc in the family. We believe marriage is God's pattern for relational fulfillment. It was designed to provide personal happiness because men and women alone and separate are incomplete (**Genesis 2:18**). So we get married. But then turbulence arises. Perhaps we think we moved too quickly. Perhaps we discover the person we dated and the person we married are two different people. Perhaps we discover we want more time for independence. Perhaps we had kids too quickly. Who knows? But we look around us at the wind of married life and, suddenly, we are not so sure God's pattern for the family is best. We never express it that way. Instead, we just don't follow God's plan. Perhaps the husband moves into isolation pursuing his own goals instead of being the sacrificial, servant-leader. Perhaps the wife rebels and refuses to be in submission. Perhaps parents will not train children. Perhaps one or both spouses decide they would be happier with someone else and they pursue affairs or divorce. Our society, with its broken homes and ensuing problems, is a result of doubting God's word. God has a pattern. Grow your faith, don't just believe in God; believe God about your family.
- D. Consider the havoc doubt has caused regarding salvation. We know God will save us by grace through faith based on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We understand we must believe, confess our belief (**Romans 10:9-10**), repent of our sins, be baptized for the remission of our sins (**Acts 2:38**), and grow in Christ (**II Peter 1:5-8**). However, doubt creeps in, rearing its ugly head in two ways. First, some begin to doubt the aspect of God's grace, constantly plagued about whether or not some sin they committed is going to condemn them to hell. They do not recognize their fear and regret demonstrates their own repentance, which leads to salvation. Far too often, these will convince themselves they can never be saved and give up. The other aspect of the doubt is facing the wind and waves of controversy that surrounds the Bible doctrine of salvation. Some take this step and then, when they come in contact with those who are adamantly opposed to water baptism as part of salvation, they begin to back track. They have doubt and start to equivocate, eventually abandoning the truth all together. God's plan for salvation is clear. It consists of grace and faithful surrender. We have no need to fear those who oppose. Nor do we need to fear that God will forget His promise of grace. Grow your faith and follow God's pattern unashamedly.
- E. Consider the trouble caused by doubt with the church and its worship and work. We recognize Jesus established His church for a purpose: to bring glory to Him (**Ephesians 3:20-21**) and to uphold His truth (**I Timothy 3:15**), which sets men free (**John 8:32**). Since our job is to glorify God His way and help people be set free from sin by God's truth, we refuse to get distracted with other works. When we worship we do what we see God authorize in the New Testament. For example, we refuse to sing with instrumental accompaniment because we find no authority for it. Also, we have refused to become involved in patterns of church work for which we cannot find authority. The church's work is not feeding the homeless, helping cure cancer, educating the poor. Those are all good things; they are just not the church's job. However, we sometimes see the wind of opposition. We are attacked with slanderous statements, false accusations, and names. Additionally, we see some churches getting involved in these things and they seem to have success. We wonder, "Is the way we find authorized in Scripture the best way?" Doubt sets in. Perhaps a little change here and a little change there, but then the church has abandoned God's mission. Grow your faith. God's pattern for the church is what is best. Follow it without shame.
- F. Given time, we could think of other areas where doubts arise. But these four demonstrate we can believe in God, but not believe Him. Whether in these or other issues, we must recognize God's way is best. There is no need to doubt based on any wind or waves we face while walking on the water with Jesus.

IV. When doubt overcame Peter, he turned back to Jesus.

- A. Having demonstrated that doubt causes problems, we need also consider how to deal with doubt. First, recognize that having doubted is not going to condemn us to hell in and of itself. Peter did not drown as a result of his doubt, even though he began to sink. Why not? Because, when Peter recognized he was sinking, he turned back to Jesus (**Matthew 14:30**). Sadly, too often we turn to other sources: our own intelligence, the wisdom of the world, personal experience. Instead, we need to go headlong into Jesus, turning our efforts toward getting to know Him.
- B. If we turn back to Jesus, we may sink for a while, but we will not drown. The trouble is, for Peter, it was evident he was sinking; for us, it is not always so clear. Thus, we must be on the alert (**I Peter 5:8**). Only by diligence, rightly dividing the word (**II Timothy 2:15**), can we be aware of sinking from Christ's standard. When we have parted from Christ's path on the water, cry out to Him. Lean on His hand and do what He says. Peter did not grab hold of the boat when he began to sink. He cried out to Jesus. Jesus lifted him and together they walked on the water back to the boat. That is what we must do.

Conclusion:

There are those, of course, whose doubts keep them from even stepping out on the water. They don't think serving God will bring happiness. They don't think it is for them right now. God created us. He wrote the manual for our lives. He knows what we need to do right now. He knows what will provide us with peace. You believe in God, why not believe God, accepting what He says about all things, no matter who disagrees with Him?