

GNITN

#710

The Struggle Within: A Crisis of Faith

Things I Thought Were True

I think we all were told things by parents or people we trusted when we were young. I had a relative who always had an answer for everything. Sometimes he would answer a question given to him but there times when he just decided to tell us things he knew almost randomly. As a young person I looked up to him and believed what he said without question. Now, to be fair, he was right more often than not, but as I grew I began to learn that not everything I was told was as correct as I thought. And also to be fair, what we know to be true can change as knowledge expands in our world. We are living in the information age so things can change overnight in some cases. But with this person, I got to the point than when what I learned from them was challenged I was careful to do a little research on my own before parroting what I heard and believed at one point. Such is life I will tell you. Many of us can believe in irrefutable facts and switch to grand conspiracies without signaling a lane change. In another conversation I had recently we were discussing such theories without missing a beat and then I brought up a topic that seemed to fit the flow of things and was met with a look of disbelief. I filed away the moment so if it came up in the future I'd either avoid it or just keep my opinions to myself. The point is that we need to trust but verify when we hear just about anything these days. Rest assured, an opposing opinion will rise up more often than it used to. But what about the Bible?

Things To Avoid

You have heard it said that there are topics you don't bring up in conversations if you want to avoid an argument. The tried and true topics are sports, politics, and religion. And in my experience that is a good list. The reasoning behind this is that people usually have strong opinions on all three and these stances will also bring out strong emotional responses. Things can get rather heated if you have parties that have decided that there are things that they have drawn the proverbial line in the sand on and woe be to anyone who crosses that line. It happens. But as a Christian who believes the Bible is the inspired word of God there are some topics that are not up for debate. Forget politics and sports, religion is by far the most contentious of the three in my opinion. I can't tell you how many times I've debated bible beliefs with someone and before I learned a little more tact, it got downright heated and went far from a civil debate to a knockdown, drag out fight. Was there blood drawn? Not literally, but you get the picture. Going back to a previous point, we are living in the information age and if one wants to get support for their particular view of the Bible it is easy to do, perhaps too easy really. Camps can be built and joined with the flip of a finger as we scroll from one video to the next listening to people opine on exactly our view of topics like the inerrancy of Scripture, salvation, prophecy and the Rapture just to name a few. But are there things that we can all agree on? Sadly, there aren't.

It's OK To Have Questions

A casual reading of the Bible shows us men and women of God who didn't either believe what God told them or simply didn't understand Him. And there are examples of people who went off the rails when they had such disagreements and doubts. The worst thing any of us can do is to

draw a line in the sand as I said earlier and close our minds to any other view. I sometimes joke about this verse:

Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord... (Isa 1:18, AMPC)

My usual quip is that when talking with God it is highly unlikely that He's going to change His mind and really, that is true. However, in this case God offers us the opportunity to air things out as it were. While He isn't going to change His truth to match ours there is merit to hashing out differences of opinions with Him. We are human and it is in our nature to question things, a curiosity put there by a Heavenly Father who wants people to work out their salvation:

Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling... (Phil 2:12, NKJV)

The Greek word for "work out" means *to continually work to bring something to completion or fruition*. Basically it's perfectly fine to come to God with questions or even objections. He not only can handle them, He encourages us to work them out. And God does use other people to sharpen us:

A friendly discussion is as stimulating as the sparks that fly when iron strikes iron. (Prov 27:17, TLB)

I know that a good friend of mine back in my hometown of Springfield, Illinois spent one evening hashing out the Rapture and the Tribulation and we diagrammed it on a whiteboard which we used in a discussion with a young adult group we were a part of. It was fun and we congenially debated questions we had. Unfortunately, not all discussions, debates, or dialogues are that friendly. But there is one point that needs to be fleshed out and that is when such conversations lead to a crisis of faith.

Doubting Thomas Moments

One of the disciples, Thomas, "The Twin," was not there at the time with the others. 25 When they kept telling him, "We have seen the Lord," he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands—and put my fingers into them—and place my hand into his side."

26 Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them and greeting them.

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger into my hands. Put your hand into my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

28 "My Lord and my God!" Thomas said.

29 Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. But blessed are those who haven't seen me and believe anyway." (John 20:24-29, TLB)

I'm sure if you've been a believer for any amount of time you've heard of Thomas and his crisis of faith. It's not like he didn't know Jesus and it's also not like he didn't believe Jesus when He said He would rise again after the cross. It's just that when it came time to actually put his faith to the test he struggled. If you want an Old Testament example, Abraham and Sarah are good ones to study. They were on a journey of faith and when God told them they were going to have a child when Sarah was well beyond child bearing age:

So Sarah laughed silently. "A woman my age have a baby?" she scoffed to herself. "And with a husband as old as mine?" 13 Then God said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh? Why did she say 'Can an old woman like me have a baby?' 14 Is anything too hard for God? Next year, just as I told you, I will certainly see to it that Sarah has a son." (Gen 18:12-14, TLB)

Finding Faith Now

Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8, NKJV)

In this verse and in context, Jesus was musing about finding people with real faith, faith that would be strong like the woman who literally wore down an ungodly judge simply because of her persistence. So we're encouraged to persistently and doggedly pursue our beliefs, something Jesus told us would be rare just before He comes. But what happens when someone we trust, a person who is a mentor to us and always helped us understand the Bible tells us something we later find to not be true? Or when a leader we respected and revered justifies a decision that is clearly unbiblical. It could be a person who we stood by when others decided to leave them in a time of struggle. But it could just be an interpretation of a doctrine that upon further research wasn't as clear cut as they made us believe it was. Or it was simply their opinion but portrayed it as fact. When we lauded it as the gospel truth and were challenged on it and discovered it wasn't Biblically sound, what did we do? This crisis of faith is not a new one and will occur more and more in the last days as Jesus told us it would be since the faith of believers will be severely tested. I can tell you from experience that we need not throw these leaders under the bus in every situation. We should give them the grace we want extended to us and the room to respond to the issue. However, if the disputed view is one that can be debated and doesn't change your salvation, well it could be set aside to avoid hurt emotions or strain your relationship. Agreeing to disagree is not a bad approach either. And if there is to be any heated talk it should be done in prayer before any public words are uttered if uttered at all.

Our Leaders Are Human

King David surely disappointed family, friends, and supporters during the whole Bathsheba debacle. He paid the price for his sin, but still remained king. Peter was what we call EGR or extra grace required at times and still became the leader of the early church. There are countless examples of church leaders who quarreled with their peers and stayed on good terms. One respected theologian had fierce disputes with another and at the end of his ministry he died from an illness he got during a trip to reconcile with him. It happens. Right now it seems like a lot of Christians are getting all up in a tizzy over the Rapture and prophecy. I get it. But do we need to build walls up over them at a time when we need to work together to win the lost at any cost? The song says they will know we are Christians by our love, but more often we are known by our fights and divisions. It's not a new development, but we can certainly do our best to temper those views by this well-known [statement](#):

“in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, and in all things charity”

Ironically, there is debate over who said it and a fair amount of infighting on whether it is a good proverb to follow, but I for one see value in it. There are what I call essentials in faith and we should rally behind them. And there are a whole bunch of non-essentials where collegial debate can and should occur. But at the end of the day, we need to still love each other and follow the admonition of this verse:

How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along! It's like costly anointing oil flowing down head and beard, Flowing down Aaron's beard, flowing down the collar of his priestly robes. It's like the dew on Mount Hermon flowing down the slopes of Zion. Yes, that's where God commands the blessing, ordains eternal life. (Ps 133:1-3, MSG)

