

Are You in Error?

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Key Scripture

John 20:26-29 (ESV) Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Sermon in One Sentence

Genuine faith is not built on empirical proof or personal preference, but on the authoritative witness of God's Word, calling us to believe even when our senses fail or challenge what is true.

Introduction

The human mind, in its earnest pursuit of truth, often finds itself clinging to what it deems logical, observable, and verifiable. We live in an age that prizes skepticism and critical analysis, often to the point where even the most foundational truths are questioned or dismissed if they don't pass muster with our personal experiences or scientific reasoning. This very human tendency to doubt, to demand proof, can be a great asset in many areas of life, safeguarding us from deception and manipulation.

However, when this impulse to verify translates into our spiritual journey, it can become a significant stumbling block. We find ourselves, much like a disciple of old, declaring, "Unless I see, unless I touch, unless I can explain, I will not believe." The problem arises when our finite understanding and limited senses become the ultimate arbiters of divine truth, placing us in a precarious position where our perception, rather than God's revelation, dictates our beliefs.

Today, we delve into a pivotal encounter that illustrates this timeless tension between doubt and belief, between human demand for proof and divine invitation to faith. It's a story that challenges us to examine the very foundations of what we believe and how we arrive at that belief, ultimately asking us whether we are in error by demanding empirical evidence for spiritual realities or if we are willing to embrace a higher form of blessed assurance.

Historical & Biblical Context

Our key passage comes from the Gospel of John, the last of the four New Testament accounts of Jesus' earthly ministry. Written by the Apostle John, likely in the latter part of the first century, it is distinct from the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) in its thematic focus and chronological arrangement. John's primary purpose, as stated in John 20:31, is evangelistic: "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." He presents Jesus

as the divine Son, the Word become flesh, emphasizing His deity, His miracles as signs, and the critical importance of belief in Him for eternal life.

The specific context of our passage is the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. The disciples are grappling with the astonishing reality that their crucified Lord is alive. John records several of these appearances, each building powerful evidence for the resurrection. Eight days prior to our text, Jesus appeared to the disciples when Thomas was absent, and when they shared the incredible news with him, Thomas's famous declaration of doubt underscored the immense hurdle of belief in the face of what seemed utterly impossible. This account serves not only to confirm the resurrection for the early church but also to address the perennial human struggle with faith, particularly for those who, like Thomas, crave tangible proof. It calls us today to consider the nature of true belief and the source of our understanding about God.

Main Point I — The Error of Empirical Exclusivity

Scripture: John 20:25b – "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."

Thomas's declaration is not merely a moment of doubt; it's a profound statement of intellectual and experiential criteria for belief. He insists on empirical evidence, demanding to see and touch the physical scars of the crucifixion before accepting the testimony of his trusted friends. This showcases the common human error of limiting truth to only what can be validated by our five senses. For Thomas, the spiritual realm, the miraculous, and the divine resurrection simply could not be true if they existed outside of his immediate, tangible verification.

This error – prioritizing personal empirical experience above all other forms of testimony, especially divine revelation – can lead to significant spiritual blindness. While empirical evidence has its place in scientific and worldly pursuits, it is fundamentally inadequate for comprehending the full scope of God's reality. Many people today make the same mistake as Thomas, demanding that God conform to their scientific models or personal experiences, effectively putting God in a test tube. When we insist on empirically verifiable proof for spiritual realities, we are setting ourselves up for failure, for God's ways and His kingdom often operate beyond the reach of human instruments and finite senses. The Christian faith is not anti-reason, but it is super-reason, inviting us into truths that transcend our natural capacities.

Main Point II — The Grace of Divine Accommodation

Scripture: John 20:27 – "Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.'""

In a moment of profound grace and compassionate understanding, Jesus directly addresses Thomas's very specific demands. He doesn't rebuke Thomas for his skepticism but rather meets him at the point of his doubt. This incredible act of accommodation reveals the generous heart of God, who, though not obligated to prove Himself to our every whim, often condescends to meet us where we are, even in our unbelief. Jesus offers Thomas the very proof he demanded – the opportunity to touch His wounds – not because it was the ideal path to faith, but because it served as a bridge for this particular disciple.

This divine accommodation underscores a crucial truth about God's character: He desires for us to believe, and He will often go to extraordinary lengths to remove obstacles to that belief. However, His accommodation is always geared towards genuine faith, not simply satisfying curiosity. His gentle invitation, "Do not disbelieve, but believe," is a call to move beyond the mere verification of facts to a personal trust in Him. It's a reminder that while God might grant us glimpses of His truth through our senses, the ultimate goal is not the proof itself, but the resulting faith in Him.

Main Point III — The Blessing of Unseen Belief

Scripture: John 20:29 – "Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.""

This statement from Jesus shifts the paradigm of belief. While Thomas's faith certainly increased after seeing and touching, Jesus immediately elevates another, higher form of blessedness: that of believing without empirical sight. This is not a condemnation of Thomas, but an affirmation of a more profound and ultimately more accessible path to faith. For all future generations, and indeed for most of humanity, direct physical encounter with the resurrected Christ would not be possible. Therefore, Jesus pronounces a special blessing upon those who embrace belief based on the testimony of the Spirit, the Word, and the witness of others, rather than relying on their own personal, sensory confirmation.

This "unseen belief" is the very essence of faith described in Hebrews 11:1: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." It's a trust in God's character, His promises, and His revelation, even when our circumstances or our limited understanding might suggest otherwise. To be blessed in this way means living by a conviction that is not dependent on fluctuating feelings or the constant need for personal verification but is anchored in the unshakeable truth of God's Word. It is a call for us today to move beyond the Thomas-like demand for proof to a Spirit-led conviction that finds its foundation in Christ and His authoritative revelation. Are we willing to embrace this blessed path, trusting in what God has revealed, even if we have not physically seen?

Illustration

In the late 19th century, a renowned British scientist, Professor John Tyndall, was giving a lecture on the nature of light. During his presentation, he conducted an experiment. He would shine a beam of light through various mediums, demonstrating how light could be bent, reflected, and diffused. At one point, he decided to demonstrate the phenomenon of phosphorescence. He showed the audience a specially prepared piece of paper which, when exposed to a strong light source, would glow in the dark for a period afterward. He explained the scientific principles behind it. A young woman in the audience, skeptical of the perceived "magic," raised her hand. "Professor," she asked pointedly, "I still don't believe it. I want to hold that paper myself and ensure there's no trickery." Tyndall, a patient man, obliged. She examined it, and as she held it, the paper did indeed glow. Still, she pressed, "But I don't understand how it works." Tyndall simply smiled and replied, "My dear young lady, your understanding is not a condition for the light to shine."

This story, though not directly spiritual, beautifully mirrors our topic. Like the young woman, many demand complete comprehension or empirical control before believing. Like Tyndall, Jesus, in His grace, sometimes

accommodates our need for proof. But ultimately, the truth, the light, the divine nature of God, does not depend on our ability to fully grasp it with our finite minds or verify it with our limited senses. Our understanding is not a prerequisite for God's reality or His blessing. The blessing comes to those who, having not seen, still choose to believe.

Practical Application

1. Examine Your Foundations of Truth: Are your beliefs about God and spiritual realities primarily based on personal experience, human reason, or cultural consensus? Or are they firmly rooted in the authoritative and revealed Word of God? Commit this week to spending time discerning which foundation truly undergirds your convictions.

2. Cultivate a Spirit of Trust (Not Blindness): While healthy skepticism has its place, actively practice cultivating a trust in God's promises and character, even when explanations are scarce or circumstances are challenging. Look for areas where you tend to demand empirical proof from God and intentionally choose to believe His Word instead.

3. Embrace the Journey of "Unseen Belief": Recognize that the Christian walk is often about trusting what you cannot see. Engage in practices that strengthen this unseen faith: regular Scripture reading, prayer, and fellowship with other believers. Seek to understand why those who "have not seen and yet have believed" are called blessed.

4. Share Your Testimony, Not Just Your Proof: Remember that your personal testimony of faith, even without empirical "proof," is a powerful witness. Be ready to share how God has worked in your life, not just through verifiable events, but through unseen grace, peace, and transformation.

5. Pray for Discernment and a Believing Heart: Daniel 2:22 states, "He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and light dwells with him." Pray daily for the Holy Spirit to grant you discerning eyes and a believing heart, so you may grasp truths that transcend human understanding and embrace the blessedness of unseen faith.

Discussion Questions

1. In what areas of your life do you find yourself most prone to Thomas-like doubt, demanding empirical proof before believing?
2. How does an over-reliance on empirical evidence hinder our understanding and experience of spiritual truths?
3. What specific "unseen" truths of the Christian faith are most challenging for you to believe, and why?
4. What does it mean to be "blessed" for believing without seeing, and how can we cultivate this kind of faith in our daily lives?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your Word, which illuminates our understanding and corrects our errors. We confess our human tendency to limit Your truth to what we can see, touch, or fully comprehend. Forgive us for our unbelief and for the times we have demanded You prove Yourself to our finite minds. Grant us, by Your Holy Spirit, a deeper trust and a more profound faith, enabling us to embrace the blessedness of believing without seeing. May our lives be a testament to Your unseen but ever-present reality. Amen.

Benediction

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.