

Paul H. Dixon
Christ Above Our Doubts, Part 2
circa 1993

Unedited Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Our theme this year, Christ above all. And we've been directing our attention to that on Monday mornings. And last Monday morning, I delivered the first part, of a two part message entitled, Christ above our doubts. We looked at Psalm:73 and saw that the Psalmist, wrestled with doubts. We went to Job and in chapter 23, he wonders where is God? And somehow he senses that maybe God is not there and God has forsaken him and all others. And yet the scripture says that in the midst of his doubts, Job did not sin. One of the things we started talking about last week, that it's okay. Many of you have come to me. You came to me immediately on the platform. You've communicated with me through email, through notes and saying, "Boy, this is something that I've wrestled with," maybe just in recent years or for a long time. And our outline on this topic is first of all, the certainty of doubt. Secondly, we're looking at the cause of doubt. And then thirdly, the cure for doubt.

Paul H. Dixon:

I recommended a book under the certainty of doubt by RC Sproul. He edited this, it's entitled Doubt and Assurance, look for certainty when the heart doubts. We looked at a quote by Oz Guinness. It says, "I believe in doubt. Knowledge and doubt are inseparable to man. The sole alternative to knowledge, without doubt, is no knowledge at all. Only God and certain mad men, have no doubts. Doubt is not unbelief. It is between Faith and unbelief." George McDonald said, "Doubts are messengers of the living one to the honest." What is doubt? The Latin word doubt, means two minds. In fact when Oz Guinness wrote his book on doubt, that is no longer in print, he entitled it, In Two Minds.

Paul H. Dixon:

There are five Greek words that are translated doubt. In the English, it has the idea of a foot, in one boat and another foot, in another boat. And the Greek words are found in James chapter one verse five, when it talks about the double minded man. In Matthew 14:31 and in Matthew 28:17, Jesus at once reached out and caught hold of him and said, "Why did you hesitate? Or why did you doubt? How little Faith you have." When they saw Him the scripture says they fell prostrate before Him, though some were doubtful.

Paul H. Dixon:

We go through the Psalms and David was a doubter. The man after God's own heart. We looked at Psalm 73, which is attributed to the Psalmist Asaph. In fact, Psalm 73 begins a section of the Psalms, many divide the 150 Psalms into five sections, believing that each section parallels the penitent. And this particular section that begins in Psalm 73, they take back to the book of Leviticus and the first 11 Psalms, were written by Asaph. Now Asaph, was the chief musician. He's the one who led the congregation. He's the one who was able to take the great thoughts about God and put them into song. And he was the doubter. He was the one who wrestled with what in the world is God doing? If God is there, why do the wicked prosper? As we read last week.

Paul H. Dixon:

Jeremiah, wrestled with doubts. You remember the father in mark chapter nine, who came to Jesus. He had a demon possessed son and he said, "Lord, if you can help us ..." What kind of Faith is that? Would you not say that, he was the doubting father? I quoted JJ Stewart Parole, who wrote a book entitled The

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Psalms back in 1878. Where he said, "God permits it in his truest and noblest servants, as Thomas, that he may plant their feet more firmly on the foundation, of His eternal truth.

Paul H. Dixon:

Young people, any Saint, can have an eclipse, of his or her Faith. May I say to our students who are about to leave, over in the NS center at 10:30, I don't often do this, but could I encourage you to pick up the tapes on this topic. In fact, any of the messages, the series that we had on the week on purity, you can get those tapes over in the radio station. Just place your order. Somewhere along the line, this may be your problem. It may not be now, but someday it may. And I would encourage you then to go back and listen to these tapes. There is a certainty of doubt. Why? Why do believers, have such a problem? Before I answer that question, may I suggest that there are different degrees of doubt. For some, it just means that perhaps saved, young, there are times when they question, just have questions that come along about, I wonder if it's true. I wonder if God really exists, or wonder if we have the right answer and the right God, wonder if the scriptures are reliable.

Paul H. Dixon:

For others, it becomes something to much greater degree, becomes quite obsessive. In fact, they can't think of anything else. They know the Lord. And yet day in and day out, doubt just bury them. Someone sent me, this particular clipping, it was entitled after I preached yesterday's message, The Nightmare of Unbelief. There I was, somewhere in the middle of my 50th year, minding my own business, when I received a visit from an uninvited guest. My uninvited guest was doubt. Raw, terrifying, brutal doubt. Up until that moment, doubt had always been a minor disturbance. This was no minor disturbance. This was doubt of hurricane proportions crashing through the intellectual ducts of 40 years, like they were sand castles.

Paul H. Dixon:

It wasn't doubt that I had experienced. It wasn't doubt that had followed me around. Most of my life, if I had had doubt that were questions, believe me questions are irritating, bothersome, frustrating. Questions are speed bumps on the road of Faith. Some questions I am sure can derail a person's Faith, but doubt, real doubt, doubt is a wild uncontrollable enemy that strikes without warning, bursting through any obstacle as though it were not there, it cannot be controlled. It cannot be stopped. It cannot be defended against. One can only stand there, be ravaged by it and hope that one's Faith, will stand the test.

Paul H. Dixon:

This person went from one degree of doubt, to perhaps one of the greatest degrees of doubt. Why? May I suggest that, one reason is because of Satan. We do have a very real enemy. And those of us who know the word of God, are well aware that from the beginning, in Genesis chapter three, verse two, he tried to make Adam and Eve doubt. Did God say? In John 8:44, he is called the father of lies. One of my favorite verses in personal evangelism is, 2nd Corinthians 11:3, "I fear less by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through a subtlety, so your minds, should be corrupted, from the simplicity, that is in Christ." And I think that's not only true for the unbeliever, but even for the believer, there come times when Satan comes in and we begin to wonder, it's so simple.

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Maybe too simple to be true. And that's what Satan's attack is. According to 2nd Corinthians 11:3. Matthew 13, when we see the sowing of the seed, Satan comes along and he tries to cause doubt. In revelation 12:9, the great dragon was thrown down, that serpent of all that led the whole world astray, whose name is Satan or the devil. So Satan certainly has a hand, creating doubt.

Paul H. Dixon:

Secondly, sin can do that. Police understand, not always. Everyone who doubts, has not necessarily fallen into sin, but it can bring doubt. I would say that my experience in dealing with some doubters, usually it's immorality, if it is sin. And when immorality enters into the life, you either have to change your lifestyle, or you have to change your belief system. They don't go together. Follow that? If you keep your belief system, you are so miserable, you can't stand yourself. So the best thing to do is begin to put this whole thing under an intellectual umbrella. And I've known, many of my very bright friends, down through the years, to do that. You can't live with yourself. How could I be saved? Can't forgive myself. So I wonder if there's anything to it at all.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number three is personality differences. We often say this, but we are wired differently. The optimistic sanguine, the choleric, are less given to introspection. And if you're not given to introspection, if you're not given to looking at things deeply, you probably do not have as much of a problem with doubt, as the melancholic, as the one who looks at everything deeply. And as they do much introspection. Somehow I think, usually the sanguine may suddenly have a battle with doubt, but is able to focus on something else and go right on with life. But some personalities can't do that. There it is. And they dwell on it and the more they dwell on it, the more of a problem it becomes. So some temperaments, are given to doubt. I would be quick to add, that does not mean that one is spiritual and the other is not. Or that one is more spiritual than the others. I would not say this dogmatically. But generally, I believe that many who doubt are perfectionists.

Paul H. Dixon:

Perfectionism is a very real problem. In fact, may I be quick to say that perfectionism is sin. For the Christian who is a perfectionist, I believe that they do not view God properly. In fact, what happens for the perfectionist, is the perfectionist, has unreal expectations of everything and everybody including themselves and including God. And all of us who are here today, who are perfectionists, know who we are and know this battle that we have. And I would say that we have to admit that this certainly can add to our doubting.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number four, physical or emotional illness, can cause us to doubt. There are some people who begin doubting when they're children. There are others when they are teens. And it just continues to some degree right on through their lives. There are others who seemingly have no doubts whatsoever and then all sudden in the course of living, there it is. It raises its ugly head and it may be physical. It may be some kind of emotional disorder, a chemical imbalance, stress, a dramatic change in life, that brings about doubt.

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Number five, I have written down our humanness. Or in essence, our depravity. The very fact that we are depraved, that we are sinners by nature, says that we can very well have to wrestle with doubt. Martin Luther made an interesting statement, when he said, "The art of doubting, is easy for it is an ability born within us." You follow that? The art of doubting is easy for us in essence, because we are so wretched, we are so deprived.

Paul H. Dixon:

Number six, the trials of life may cause us to doubt. In fact, just life itself. As you go through the Psalms, whether it's Asaph or David, that's what was tough for them. They couldn't get their handle around, how the wicked could prosper. How here they were knowing God living for God and the bottom was falling out of life and all these wicked people were going along with smiles on their faces and their coffers full.

Paul H. Dixon:

Saturday morning, Mrs. Dixon's sister called. I want to make a comment about, Mrs. Dixon and the yearbook. As president, I am very appreciative of our 10 years of leadership and those of us who were around when she came knows what's happened and the quality of the yearbook and reflecting what we are about as Cedarville and excellence in quality. But, I can tell you like no other person, the amount of time that she spent right on through the summer. This was a 12 month, investment of time, but also how God is used her in the lives, especially the editors. Her editors, are her very, very special friends, going all over the 10 years. And as she said, some time ago, one of them is in heaven. But she has a twin sister.

Paul H. Dixon:

One of the first times I ever heard her say this, you talk about having a roommate, she said, "I had a womb mate." And her twin called and she was gone and I chatted with Linda, for a few moments and she said, "I have very bad news." She said, "Pastor, Pat Fortner, Committed suicide this morning." They'd been attending that church.

Paul H. Dixon:

It was really tough to take. I knew Pat. I met pat when I preached the ordination of one of his staff members, probably about three summers ago. Really a neat guy. I would say in his late thirties. Two children, young children, but I can remember how he shared with me his heart and some of the things he was wrestling with. And then I remember when he went off and just two years ago, we sat at a hospital table, as he had come over to visit Pat's mom, who was in the hospital and we sat there and we must have talked for an hour, about how he'd been off to some counseling center, I believe it was in Texas and how he's still trying to get ahold of things and the depression that he wrestled with. And he just couldn't live with it anymore. Saturday morning took a gun and took his life. I got up this morning thinking about it.

Paul H. Dixon:

I don't understand that young people are really dumb. I don't understand suicide. The guy was blessing his church. They tell me his preaching was just really getting better and better all the time and we're quite encouraged. I don't know how to understand what's going on in the world. I don't understand what's going on in churches. I don't understand what's going on with a lot of chri ... I don't understand what's going on with me. And this is what we see in the scripture wrestling with all that. Rabbi Kushner,

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the Jewish writer, he wrote, "When bad things happen to good people. For us, that is absolutely contrary to scripture. That is not the issue. There are no good people. Only bad people. The question is not, why do bad things happen to good people? The question is, why do good things happen to us? Bad people? Isn't that really the question?"

Paul H. Dixon:

That's the marvel of the Grace of God and somehow we have to give it that perspective, but oh, the trials of life, cause people to wonder, where is God? Why doesn't God do something? Doubt. Well, what is the cure? I certainly don't have all the answers for the cause, but I present those six things. The cure, may I give you three. Number one, talk to God. He is the ultimate answer to all doubt. Martin Luther said it well, "God is no skeptic." Talk to Him about it. Like David, tell Him that you doubt. See that's the great thing about the Psalms, that's why they are so wonderful to us. Because David and Asaph, the Psalmists, they would go to God and they'd say, "Look Lord, I don't understand. Where are you? What are you doing? And we don't pray much like that."

Paul H. Dixon:

We aren't really very transparent in our prayer lives. We kind of live before God and talk to God, like we live before one another and talk to one another. Like everything's okay. Everything's wonderful. You listen to our vocabulary. How are things today? Wonderful, terrific, fantastic, great. No, they aren't. Not all the time. They really aren't. And you don't have to put that on. You don't have to put that mask on, especially when you go before God. Just tell him how you feel. Tell him what you're wrestling with. Talk to God.

Paul H. Dixon:

Focus, when you talk to God, on what you do believe, rather than your doubts. I picked up this quote someplace, "Doubt, is like an attention seeking child. The more attention you pay to it, the more attention it demands." And, ladies and gentlemen, you can have a morbid preoccupation, with doubt. And it'll come to a point, where you almost can't control it. What I'm saying is when you talk to God, focus on what you do believe. Not just your doubts. And get into the word of God. Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God and most of us, have known the Lord for a long time and we know what we were taught, about getting into the word and reading through the scripture, about doing Bible studies, about memorizing scripture and the more we get into the word and it gets into us, the better hand we're going to have on defeating our doubts. Hey, you guys, in the back, you listening?"

Paul H. Dixon:

It's very real, very serious. This is what we need. We need to talk to God. Number two, we need to talk to ourselves. Psalm 43:5 says, "Why aren't thou cast down on my soul?" That's why we were singing about why aren't thou disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise him as the health of my accountants and my God. Talk to yourself. Remember when David was down in Psalm 103 and then he says, "Bless the Lord oh my soul and all that is within me bless His Holy name. He took himself in hand and he set himself down. He gave himself a good preaching too."

Paul H. Dixon:

You know you better than anybody else. I know me, better than anyone else. And we need to talk to ourselves. We need to preach to ourselves and tell this to yourself, will you? Be patient with yourself.

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You don't come out of a major battle with doubt overnight. It is a long struggle, generally. It's not like all of a sudden you read a book or you hear a sermon or you read some scripture or you go to prayer and it's gone the next morning. Be patient with yourself, as you work through coming out of the darkness of doubt.

Paul H. Dixon:

I went up to evangelist John Guest, I told you about that last week and I said, "John, have you ever had a problem with doubt?" And he said, "Most of my life." But what I didn't tell you last week. I said, "John, how did you get victory over doubt?" He said, "I tried everything. I talked to all kinds of people, great Christian leaders," but he said, "It finally came down to this. I had to tell myself, I am absolutely going to stop doubting. I had to will, to not doubt." I ask God to help me to do that. I did it. And over a period of time, I can honestly tell you that it's not a major problem in my life anymore. Talk to God, talk to yourself and number three, talk to others.

Paul H. Dixon:

If it's a medical problem, a sudden change that's happened in your life medically, or a maybe even psychologically, or change of life that we've talked about, perhaps you need to talk to a doctor, a good Christian doctor who can check out your chemical balance or imbalance. Talk to a Christian counselor. Our counselors are available. All of our faculty, our staff, our administration. We're here to talk with you. In fact, I know that many go to Pastor Green and talk to him about this. Talk to your pastors, whether you're here, whether you've graduated, whether you're home in the summertime, feel free to go to your pastors. What I'm telling you, is you don't have to be a closet doubter. Okay? For years, I think in the church, we've had all kinds of people with doubts, but no one talked about it. And I'm saying, let's admit it and let's come out. And it's okay to talk to someone. Find someone who will listen. Possibly someone on this campus, who's having the same struggles, who's had the same struggle.

Paul H. Dixon:

A few years ago, I brought this message or a message like it and I was amazed, as a result, the students on their own, put together care groups. Kids who were really wrestling with doubt found one another and started meeting on a regular basis and sharing their problems and sharing how they were getting victory and for one another. And oh, it was such a phenomenal thing. And I think that went on for a couple years. Maybe it still goes on. I really don't know. But I know at that particular time, there was a good bit of it going on. Find someone on campus. Be open even in dorm meetings to talk about this.

Paul H. Dixon:

Over a hundred years ago, someone pinned, "Yet so it is, belief strips springs, still in souls, that nurture doubt. And we must go to Him, who wild the painful weed cast out. Did never thorns thy path be set, beware. Be not deceived. He who has never doubted yet, perhaps has never yet believed." Dr. John Hutton said, "A man who gives up his Christianity, only surrenders a life of Faith, troubled by doubt. The man who surrenders this life of Faith troubled by doubt, does so for a life of doubt, troubled by Faith. I don't know where you are in the continuum, all I know is that there is victory. There is victory in the one who is the author and the finisher of our Faith. Have a great day.