

Doubting and Damnation

Some time ago, I received a really interesting e-mail letter from man named Rodney. I do not know him personally. I am pretty sure that he is not, and never has been a Church of God member, and I have no idea where he lives.

But in his letter, Rodney asks some very thought-provoking questions – some of which we may have asked at one time or another.

In this article, I would like to read Rodney's intriguing letter to you and to go through my responses to his questions.

Rodney's Letter

O.K., I really want to believe. I want to be saved. I am willing to give up TV, parties and other stuff to live forever.

My only problem is that I am trying to believe; I am trying not to doubt; but I can't seem to shake those doubts.

Am I condemned because I have not 100% without a doubt believed?

I try to live a Christ-like life. When someone insults me or whatever, I turn the other cheek and don't fight back. I don't cuss. I try my best not to think sexual thoughts. I try my best to be good to people.

But I am not sure that I am saved – because now my mind is asking “Is Jesus really the Son of God?” and the worst one – “Is there really a God?”

Am I condemned? Or is now just not my time to be called?

Some of Rodney's questions I have sometimes thought myself. Perhaps you have too.

My Response

I thanked Rodney for his questions and then went through them line-by-line in order to make sure that all his comments and questions were covered.

I believe that we can all learn from Rodney's questions and the answers from God's Word. So let us go through them line-by-line:

I really want to believe. I want to be saved.

I told Rodney that both of these desires are good start. No, a **great** start! O that more human beings would follow his example in wanting these things!

I am willing to give up TV, parties and other stuff to live forever.

I told Rodney that there is nothing inherently wrong with watching TV – as long as we watch programs of the right kind. Of course, TV is not mentioned in the Bible. However, there are many other scriptures that give guidance on what we should and should not allow to enter our eyes, ears and minds:

Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

For more detail on this topic, please see <http://www.tcog.ca/movies%20new.htm> and <http://www.cgg.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Audio.details/ID/2732/Dancing-With-Darkside.htm>

I also told Rodney that it is fine to attend parties – again, parties of the right kind:

To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:... A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (Ecclesiastes 3:1, 4)

What was Jesus' personal example? We read of Him attending dinner parties at which alcoholic beverages were likely served (Matthew 11:18-19; Mark 14:3; John 12:2). Even before His ministry began, we read of Him attending a wedding party:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. (John 2:1-2)

Yes, Jesus attended this wedding party; and we know for sure that wine was served at that wedding. This fact and example, however, does not give us permission for drunkenness, which is soundly condemned in many other scriptures. Please see <http://www.tcog.ca/Drunkenness.htm> and <http://www.tcog.ca/wineok.htm>.

Back to Rodney and his concerns:

My only problem is I am trying to believe.

I told Rodney that trying to believe is certainly *not* a problem! Rather, it is great start towards God's way of life.

I am trying not to doubt, but I can't seem to shake those doubts. Am I condemned because I have not, 100% without a doubt, believed?

To this question, I gave the short answer, "Yes and no." I then went into a more detailed response of "Why yes" and "Why no."

"Yes" because all men are condemned to receive the just penalty for our sins – that is, eternal death:

For the wages of sin is death... (Romans 6:23)

All of us stand condemned – until we take the necessary steps to have Christ's death and innocent blood blot out and cover the death penalty which we have all brought down upon ourselves. Part One of Romans 6:23 is a dire warning. Part Two is this very encouraging promise:

...but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is what "grace" is. It is God's free gift of forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. However, grace is part of a "covenant":

Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of *the covenant* by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of *grace*? (Hebrews 10:29)

Grace is one part – a major part – of what is called "**the New Covenant**" – the everlasting covenant. In simple terms, a covenant is merely a two-sided agreement. In God's New Covenant, He guarantees that He will fulfill His part and we agree to do our very best – with the aid of His Holy Spirit – to fulfill our part.

One of the Christian life's big questions is this: What is our part in the New Covenant? What must we do? You and I? And what must Rodney do in order to get started?

Anything? Must we do anything? Hasn't Jesus done it all for us? Absolutely not! Some prospective members of the fledgling Church of God asked virtually this same question:

Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

The clear answer comes in the very next verse – from God through the apostle Peter:

Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Verse 38)

Other scriptures add to this one:

No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:44)

But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. (Romans 8:9)

Considering all these factors, until a person is called by God the Father; until he has repented of his sins and his past way of life – all of it – not just giving up TV, parties, fighting, arguing, cussing and wrong thoughts; until he has been properly baptized (by immersion); and until he has received God's Holy Spirit, he has *not yet even started* on the journey into God's way of life. He is not yet a true Christian.

So that was my "Yes" answer to Rodney's "Am I condemned?" question. Now, here is my "No" answer:

No, Rodney is not permanently condemned at this point. Why not? Because belief and faith are not perfected in any of us all at once. They are things that grow in every Christian along with grace and knowledge and with our ongoing daily experience of living God's way of life:

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby. (I Peter 2:2)

But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. (II Peter 3:18)

Continuing again with Rodney's questions:

I try to live a Christ-like life. When someone insults me or whatever, I turn the other cheek and don't fight back. I don't cuss. I try my best not to think sexual thoughts and I try my best to be good to people.

All these are commendable things. However, there are many non-Christians out there who choose to live by similar good standards. There is much more for us to do!

But I am not sure I am saved.

In some respects, salvation is a one-time event. In others, it is an ongoing process. Salvation is a one-time event in that, once a person has been called, converted, baptized, and has received God's Holy Spirit – if he endures and then dies, God considers him sealed, saved and worthy to be raised in the First (and better) resurrection:

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6)

Salvation is an ongoing process in that, as we have already seen, every Christian is expected to grow from the time of his initial conversion until his death – or until the time of Christ's return – whichever comes first. This is what Jesus meant in Matthew 5:48 when He said, "Be (a better translation is 'become') ye perfect." Again we see that growth is required of us all:

But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the Head—Christ. (Ephesians 4:15)

A lifetime of repentance is required of us; discovering areas where we err from God's way; striving constantly to get and stay on track; growing toward perfection; growing toward being totally Christ-like. This is a tall order; but God promises His Holy Spirit to help us achieve our goal.

During our human lifetime, there is always the dangerous possibility that, if we do not endure and maintain contact with God, we might fall away and lose our salvation and crown.

Back once again to Rodney's concerns:

Because now my mind is asking, "Is Jesus really the Son of God?" and the worst one, "Is there really a God?"

I advised Rodney not to beat himself up over his doubts – especially at this early stage of his race. But how can he allay such doubts? I advised him try to get out of the city occasionally (the more frequently, the better) and into the beauty of God's creation; to behold and meditate on the magnificence of the mountains, the oceans, the lakes, the stars and the wildlife; and to meditate on scriptures such as this one:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and godhead (*a better translation is 'divine nature'*) so that they are without excuse. (Romans 1:20)

There is really no excuse to doubt – no excuse not to believe – when we get up close and personal with God's mighty works.

Now for Rodney's closing questions:

Am I condemned? Or is now just not my time to be called?

I told Rodney that, from what he told me, there may be a good chance that God may be calling him now and, if so, it is up to him to respond to God's call and to get started.

So how *can* he get started? By frequent, regular, daily, fervent prayer and Bible study, meditation and occasional fasting. Why? In order to find out what God's will is in his case; to discover what law-breaking constitutes the sins that he needs to confess and repent of; to determine if he is, in fact, being called at this time; and to determine if and when he is ready for baptism.

Some of us may have asked some of these same questions that Rodney asked. Some of us may have suffered with similar doubts.

If so, the bottom-line answer is the same one as I passed on to Rodney:
Frequent, regular two-way communication with God!

John Plunkett

Building Bridges, The Church of God Canada

Qualicum Beach, British Columbia, Canada

March 14, 2011