

Cultivating a Godly Skepticism

By Howard Butt, Jr.

IN OUR CHRISTIAN JOURNEY, we often labor with trusting someone who deep down inside we know cannot be trusted. This isn't bad, but it's our deep desire as Christians to become more Christ-like in our every decision, loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves. But, God never called us to be suckers. We dare not be naïve. We need loving trust...but we also need godly mistrust.

We need healthy skepticism.

Trust and mistrust are both essential virtues. We need to be able to shift back and forth between trust and mistrust, wisely and comfortably.

Suppose you caught a ride with a man who asks you to hold his car while he steps into a convenience store for a moment—and as he leaves the car you happen to see a gun in his pocket...well, should I say more? Trust isn't stupid. Flee the premises!

What if your boss asks you to purchase a set of golf clubs for him and write it off to business expense? Suddenly a trust issue becomes ethical. So, it's either a confrontation...or a good time to change bosses.

Not only can wrongly trusting someone damage our own lives, but can lead to further damage to those we wrongly trust. Proverbs is filled with verses admonishing us to use wisdom, to examine every decision carefully, and call on God for help.

Let me make a few suggestions. Can you assess the motives of the person you're being called on to trust? What's in it for him? What's in it for you? What are the risks? Don't rush into a possibly dangerous situation without first taking time to examine the "what ifs." There may be times you're called on to trust someone and it may hurt both yourself and others.

Of course, it's rarely this simple. Yet it illustrates a big point. There are times when trusting needs a yellow caution light. Or a red one saying, "Stop." So examine each situation.

Never court betrayal. Don't be presumptuous: "I can change this person." But wait: You're *not* the Messiah. Be wise.

Thoughtfully and prayerfully decide whom you will trust. Analyze whom you turn to for counsel; pray about your counselors. Often our decisions are made by our choice of advisors. We all continually trust someone. Are we fully conscious of where we're getting our advice, what we're reading, and with whom we're placing our trust? Work to raise your level of self-awareness. Don't live in the land of forgetfulness. Ask God to search your heart. Otherwise, we're too often blind to ourselves and our life-models. So we walk in darkness.

In your analysis, remember this: There will be mighty few times when the risk of pain will be absent. We all walk through life vulnerable to what's around the next corner. Practically every trust situation contains the potential for betrayal. So it's not a matter of determining whether there is risk, but a matter of understanding the risk itself.

We need to cultivate a spiritual maturity with enough understanding—of ourselves and our needs—to make asking for God’s wisdom an automatic reflex. I believe you’ll discover that such a process slows things down and gives us objectivity about our risk in trusting someone new.

As we strive to become Christlike in our daily walk, I encourage you to be cautious of blindly trusting others. Rather, slow down, examine carefully what’s before you, and pray for wisdom. God calls us to be “wise as serpents harmless as doves.”

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