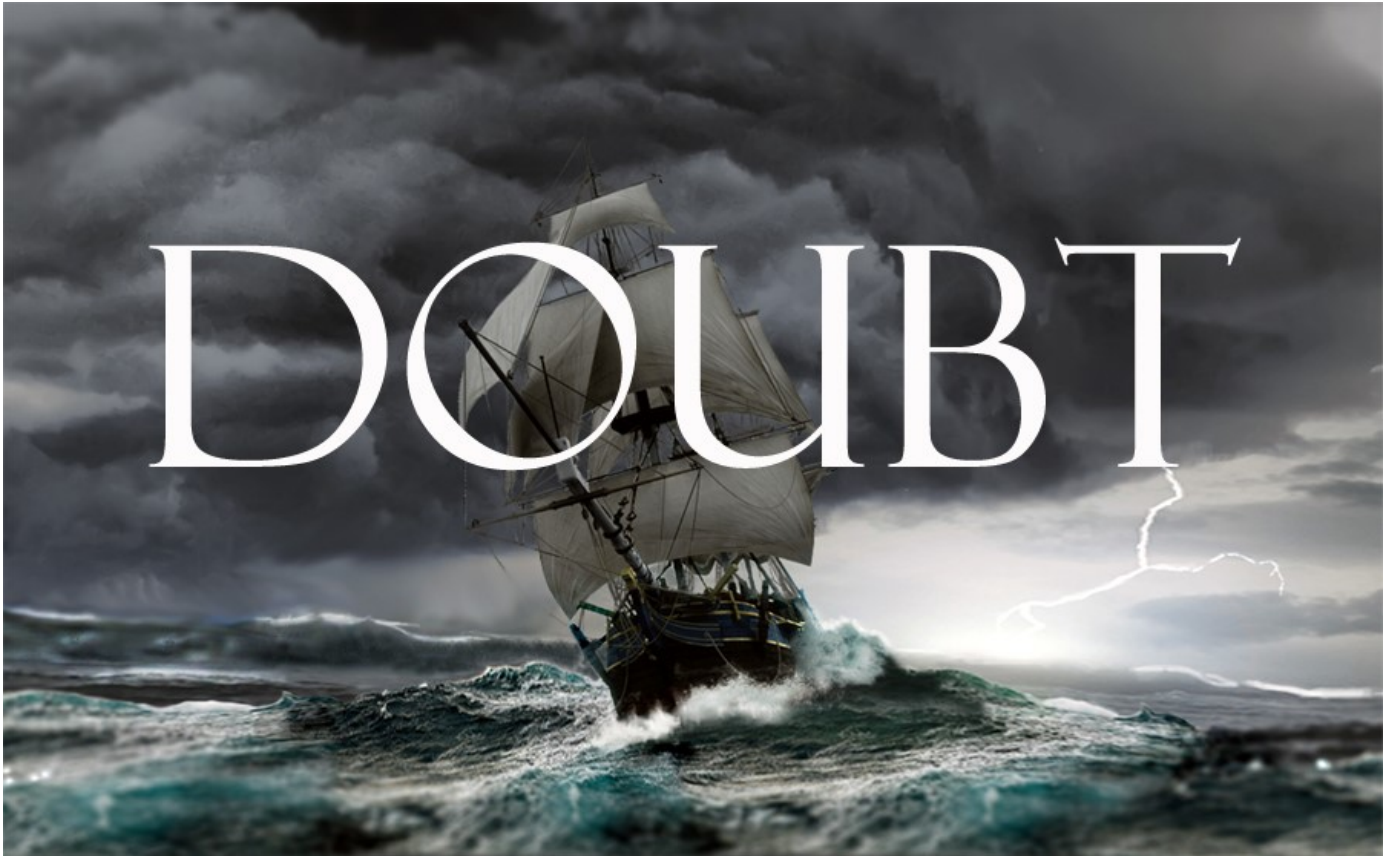


# Theology for Life

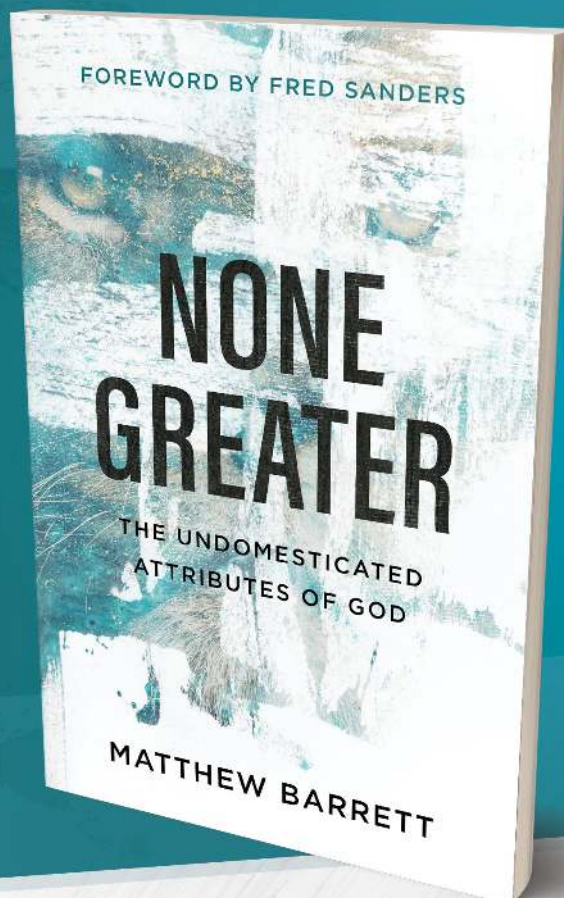
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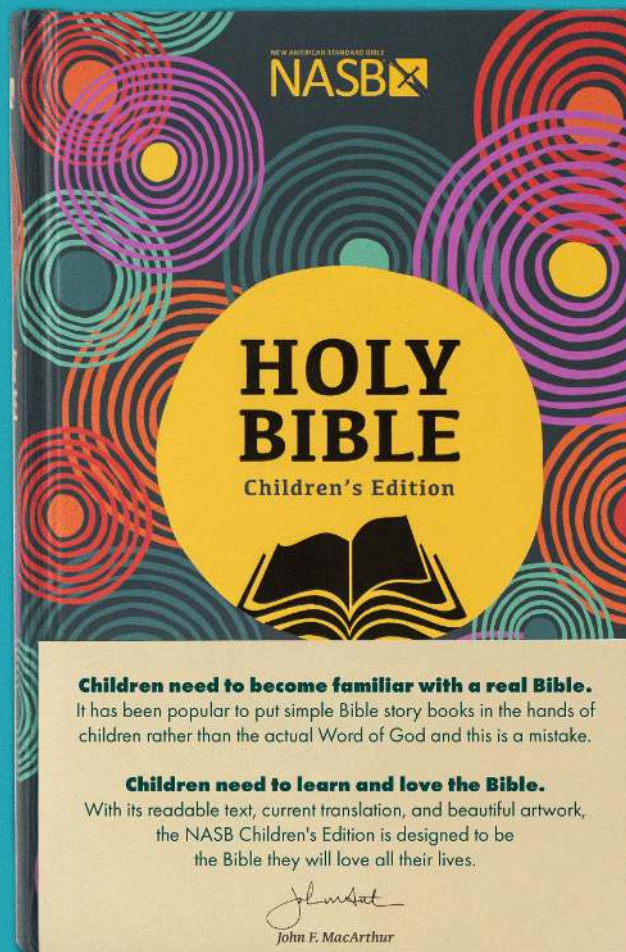
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## Editor's Corner

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Doubt is a topic that many Christians want to avoid, but shouldn't—in particular because many non-Christians view Christians as “anti-intellectual” and afraid to ask questions of what they believe and why it matters. There is a difference between asking questions about our faith and questioning our faith. The difference lies in our attitude and motivation. Those with faith in the Lord may struggle with doubt and say with the man in Mark 9:24, *‘Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”*” Some people are greatly hindered by doubt, while others, see it as a springboard to life. Others still see it as an obstacle to overcome or avoid at all costs. The Bible has a lot to say about doubt and provides examples of people who struggled well with it.

Classic humanism teaches that doubt, while uncomfortable, is essential for life. René Descartes, a philosopher, said, “If you would be a real seeker after truth, it is necessary that at least once in your life you doubt, as far as possible, all things.” The founder of Buddhism Siddhartha Gautama once said, “Doubt everything. Find your own light.” If we take this advice, we will have to doubt everything, including what they said. Instead of taking the advice of skeptics and false teachers, we have the clear, authoritative, sufficient, and inspired Word of God.

The first expression of doubt in Scripture was Genesis 3 when Satan tempted Eve. The Lord God had given a clear command to Adam regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and specified the consequences regarding disobedience. Satan introduced doubt into Eve's mind when he asked, *“Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’”* (Genesis 3:3). Satan, at this moment, wanted to introduce a lack of confidence in the command of God to Adam and Eve. When Eve affirmed the Lord's command and the consequences therein, Satan replied with a denial, which is a strong statement of doubt, *“You will not surely die”* (Genesis 3:4). Doubt is a tool of Satan to make God's people question God's Word—it functions like poison in the soul of God's children, leading them into sin and rebellion against Him, instead of towards obedience and growth in His grace.

It would be a mistake to think we can blame Satan for Adam's disobedience. The Bible holds accountable every person who doubts. For example, when Zechariah was visited by the angel of the Lord and told that he would have a son (Luke 1:11-17),

he doubted the word given to him. He assumed that he and his wife were too old to have children, and in response to his doubt, the angel said he would be mute until the day God's promise was fulfilled (Luke 1:18-20). Zechariah doubted God's ability to overcome natural obstacles. Many people today share the same doubt. Any time we allow human reason to overshadow faith in the Lord God, sinful doubt is the result. No matter what our reasons may be, God has made foolish the wisdom of the world (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:20), and His seemingly 'foolish' plans are far wiser than man's. Faith is trusting God even when His plan goes against human reason or experience.

Contrary to the humanistic view that doubt is essential to life, the Bible says that doubt is a destroyer of life. James 1:5-8 tells us that when we ask God for wisdom, we are to ask in faith, without doubt. If we doubt God's ability to respond to our request, what would be the point of asking in the first place? The Lord says that if we doubt while we ask, we will not receive anything from Him, because we are unstable. *"He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind"* (James 1:6).

The remedy for doubt is faith, and faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). The Lord gave us the Bible as a testimony of His works in the past, so we will have a reason to trust Him in the present. *"I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago"* (Psalm 77:11). For us to have faith in God, we must study to know what He has said and revealed in the Word of God. Once we have an understanding of what God has done in past redemptive history, what He has promised us for the present in Christ, and what we can expect from Him in the future, we can act in faith instead of doubt.

The most famous doubter in the Bible was Thomas, who declared that he would not believe that the Lord was resurrected unless he could see and touch Jesus himself (John 20:25-28). When he later saw Jesus and believed, he received the gentle rebuke, *"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* Hebrews 11:1 says, *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."* We can have confidence even in the things we cannot see because God has proven Himself faithful, true, and able.

In this issue of *Theology for Life*, you will hear from many of the most prominent theologians of our day on the subject of doubt to help you learn to face it head-on and grow in the grace of God. Wherever you are on your journey, there is help in this issue for you—from help for the skeptic, to the Christian struggling with doubt. It is our prayer that, as you read this issue, you will be helped, equipped, and grow in the grace of God through facing your doubt with faith in God's Word.

In Christ Alone,

Dave Jenkins

Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine*



## Doubt, Skepticism, and Faith

By John Frame



**Doubt is a major problem for Christian believers, but we are very reluctant to admit it.** We are reluctant, of course, to admit many spiritual problems, like anger, anxiety, and envy. But doubt may be the hardest to admit, because doubt seems to be the opposite of faith itself. The Heidelberg Catechism Q 21, says that faith is “an assured confidence”. How can there be any doubt in an “assured confidence” if salvation itself is “by faith” (Ephesians 2:8)? If doubt is a



lack of faith, how can a doubter be saved at all?

The Bible itself presents doubt largely negatively. It is a spiritual impediment, an obstacle to doing God's work (Matthew 14:31; Acts 10:20, 11:12). In Matthew 14:31 and Romans 14:23, it is the opposite of faith and therefore a sin. Of course, this sin, like other sins, may remain with us through our earthly life. But we should not be complacent about it. Just as the ideal for the Christian life is perfect holiness, the ideal for the Christian mind is absolute certainty about God's revelation.

We should not conclude that doubt is *always* sinful. Matthew 14:31 and Romans 14:23 (and others passages) speak of doubt in the face of clear special revelation. To doubt what God has clearly spoken to us is wrong. But in other situations, it is not wrong to doubt. In many cases, in fact, it is wrong for us to claim knowledge, much less certainty. Indeed, often the best course is to admit our ignorance (Deuteronomy 29:29; Romans 11:33-36). Paul is not wrong to express uncertainty about the number of people he baptized (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:16). Indeed, James tells us, we are always ignorant of the future to some extent and we ought not to pretend we know more about it than we do (James 4:13-16). Job's friends were wrong to think that they knew the reasons for his torment, and Job himself had to be humbled as God reminded him of his ignorance (Job 38-42).

"A believer will struggle against [doubt], but may not gain total victory over it until he or she enters into glory."

So although Scripture presents doubt negatively, as a sin, as a spiritual impediment, it is not a sin that invalidates a Christian's profession of faith. It is inconsistent with faith, as all sin is. But like other sins, it may remain with us for many years. A believer will struggle against it, but may not gain total victory over it until he or she enters into glory.

But how are we to struggle against the doubts that beset us? First, we should be honest before God about our doubts. In Mark 9:24, a man wanted Jesus to heal his son, but when Jesus told him the importance of believing, the man admitted to Jesus, "I believe; help my unbelief!" Jesus honored the man's honesty and healed his son. Often writers of the Psalms express questions to God, questions that indicate some level of doubt about God's promises. In Psalm 73, for example, Asaph questions the justice of God's dealings with the wicked:

***But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant***

### ***when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.***

Later in the Psalm, Asaph is reassured; but there is also Psalm 88, in which there is no explicit reassurance. It is right for us to express our doubts to God and ask Him to restore our faith. For ultimately, only He can deal with them. The final solution for doubt is God's supernatural work in our heart, enabling us to understand His ways and enabling us to praise Him even when we do not understand.

But additionally, it is possible even in this life to gain some victory over our doubts. I have said that absolute certainty is the appropriate (if ideal) response to God's special revelation. How can that be, given our finitude and fallibility? How is that possible when we consider the skepticism that pervades secular thought? How is it humanly possible to know anything with certainty?

First, it is impossible to exclude absolute certainty in all cases. Any argument purporting to show that there is no such certainty must admit that it is itself uncertain. Further, any such argument must presuppose that argument itself is a means of finding truth. If someone uses an argument to test the certainty of propositions, he is claiming certainty at least for that argument. And he is claiming that by such an argument he can test the legitimacy of claims to certainty. But such a test of certainty, a would-be criterion of certainty, must itself be certain. And an argument that would test absolute certainty must itself be absolutely certain.

So skepticism—the view that we can know nothing with assurance—necessarily fails, for the skeptic is never skeptical about his skepticism. And if he claims assurance about his skepticism, he is no longer a skeptic. In a biblical view of knowledge, God's word is the ultimate criterion of certainty. What God says *must* be true; for, as the letter to the Hebrews says, it is impossible for God to lie (Hebrews 6:18; compare Titus 1:2 and 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:27). His Word is Truth (John 17:17; compare Psalms 33:4, 119:160). So God's Word is the criterion by which we can measure all other sources of knowledge.

When God promised Abraham a multitude of descendants and an inheritance in the land of Canaan, many things might have caused him to doubt. He reached the age of one hundred without having any children, and his wife Sarah was far beyond the normal age of childbearing. And though he sojourned in the land of Canaan, he didn't own title to any land there at all. But Paul says of Abraham that *"no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised"* (Romans 4:20-21). God's Word, for Abraham, took precedence over all other evidence in forming his own belief. So important is this principle that Paul defines justifying faith in terms of it: *"That is why [Abraham's] faith was counted to him for righteousness"* (verse 22).

Thus, Abraham stands in contrast to Eve, who (in Genesis 3:6) allowed the evidence of her eyes to take precedence over the command of God. Abraham is one of the heroes of the faith, who (according to Hebrews 11:13), *“died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar...”* They had God’s promise, and that was enough to motivate them to endure terrible sufferings and deprivations through their earthly lives.

I would conclude that it is the responsibility of the Christian to regard God’s word as absolutely certain, and to make that word the criterion of all other sources of knowledge. Our certainty of the truth of God comes ultimately, not through rational demonstration or empirical verification, useful as these may often be, but from the authority of God’s own Word.

“The Lord calls us to build our life and thought on the certainties of His Word, that we “will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12).”

God’s Word does testify to itself, often, by means of human testimony and historical evidence: the “proofs” of Acts 1:3, the centurion’s witness in Luke 23:47, the many witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians

15:1-11. But we should never forget that these evidences come to us with God’s own authority. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, Paul asks the church to believe the evidence because it is part of the authoritative apostolic preaching: “so we preach and so you believed” (verse 11; compare verses 1-3). Today, we learn about the “proofs” of the Gospel from the Bible, God’s authoritative Word.

But how does that Word give us psychological certainty? Even good arguments often leave us with psychological doubts. Christians sometimes make great intellectual and emotional exertions, trying to force themselves to believe the Bible. But we cannot make ourselves believe. Certainty comes upon us, as I said earlier, by an act of God, through the testimony of His Spirit (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 2:4, 9-16; 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 1:5). The Spirit’s witness often accompanies a human process of reasoning. Scripture never rebukes people who honestly seek to think through the questions of faith. But unless our reason is empowered by the Spirit, it will not give full assurance.

**So certainty comes ultimately through God’s Word and Spirit.** The Lord calls us to build our life and thought on the certainties of His Word, that we “will not walk in darkness, but have the light of life” (John 8:12). The process of building, furthermore, is not only academic, but ethical and spiritual. It is

those who are willing to do God's will that know the truth of Jesus' words (John 7:17), and those that love their neighbors, who are able to know as they ought to know (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 8:1-3).

**Secular philosophy rejects absolute certainty because absolute certainty is essentially supernatural, and because the secularist is unwilling to accept a supernatural foundation for knowledge.** But the Christian regards God's Word, illumined by the Spirit, as His ultimate criterion of truth and falsity, right and wrong, and therefore as the standard of certainty. Insofar as we consistently hold the Bible as our standard of certainty, we may and must regard it as itself absolutely certain. In this life we will do this imperfectly. All sin comes from our failure to trust God's Word as our absolute standard. But we should rejoice that in God's Word we have a firm basis for assurance of His truth. By the grace of Jesus Christ, we have a wonderful treasure, one that saves the soul from sin and the mind from skepticism.

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## Doubt and the Resurrection

By Andreas J. Köstenberger



**Recently, my son and I went on a campus tour of a local university.** In many ways, the university is a wonderful place where young people can explore, experiment, and grow intellectually, but all too often universities can also be the place where young people lose their faith. We live in an age of doubt. The French philosopher René Descartes coined the motto of the Enlightenment when he said, “I doubt—therefore I think; I think, therefore I am.”

“I doubt...therefore I am.” In other words, doubt is at the core of our human existence. Ever since, it’s been fashionable to question traditional beliefs and to embrace a critical, even skeptical, mindset toward everything in life—including God. In

fact, as we'll see, doubt is a lot older than Descartes and the Enlightenment.

One of the most important historical questions related to Christianity is how a tiny offshoot of Judaism went on to change the world. One of the most outspoken detractors of Jesus' deity and the truthfulness of Christianity, UNC religion professor, Bart Ehrman, writes, "But then something else happened. Some of [Jesus' followers] began to say that God had intervened and brought [Jesus] back from the dead. The story caught on, and some (or all—we don't know) of his closest followers came to think that in fact he had been raised" (*Did Jesus Exist*, 233). So, did the early Christians invent the resurrection of Jesus? Much of what Ehrman writes goes actually beyond mere doubt; it's downright skepticism, the kind of skepticism that starts out with a negative assumption and isn't genuinely open to any evidence to prove otherwise.

The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith (*Sola Gratia, Sola Fide*). What that means is that God took the initiative to save us, in and through Jesus Christ, and there is nothing we must or can do to make our own salvation possible. But it also means that the way in which we *appropriate* God's grace so that it becomes effective in our lives is by active trust in Him on a daily basis. We trust in Him alone for our salvation, but we also trust in Him *moment by moment*, as we go through our lives and face various challenges and opportunities. For this reason, it's very important that we learn to believe rather than doubt God in our daily lives.

You may have heard about the "Hall of Faith" in Hebrews 11 that parades Old Testament examples of faith. You may *not* have heard about the ignominious "Hall of Doubt" that is chronicled in the Bible—individuals who doubted rather than trusted God. Most notably, you may have heard of "doubting Thomas", as he has been called over the centuries. His encounter with the risen Christ serves as an important case in point as we ponder the question of faith vs. doubt. Before we look at "doubting Thomas", however, let's take a brief survey of doubt in the Bible.

### **A Brief Biblical History of Doubt**

Throughout biblical history, there have been those who doubted. First was Satan who asked, "*Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?*" when God had simply said Adam and Eve shouldn't eat from *one* of those trees (Genesis 3:1). The devil cast doubt on God's word and made Eve insecure and confused. She subsequently fell into sin, all because she didn't trust God and His goodness, but doubted His Word.

Later Sarah, the wife of Abraham, laughed when God told her she would have a son in her old age. She didn't think it was possible, even though God told her, and she laughed. Then she was embarrassed about having laughed and denied it, but

God insisted that she'd laughed (Genesis 18:12–15).

Lot's wife doubted and looked back when she and her husband fled Sodom and Gomorrah. The terrible judgment was that she turned into a pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26). Rather than trust God and his deliverance, Lot's wife felt a strong pull toward her old life. She was torn between following God and living life in her own way.

When Job was afflicted and struggling to trust God in the midst of his terrible trials, his wife came to him and taunted him and said, *"Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!"* (Job 2:9). Job's response was: *"You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"* (v. 10).

Later on, the Israelites in the wilderness wanted to go back to Egypt and accused Moses of bringing them into the desert to die. They said, *"Is it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"* (Exodus 14:11–12). Actually, this is more than just doubt; this is outright unbelief.

Fast-forwarding to the New Testament—Nathaniel's friend, Philip, told him that they had found the one about whom the Law and the Prophets had written, Jesus of Nazareth. But Nathanael asked, *"Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?"* (John 1:46). He was skeptical. He doubted the truthfulness of Philip's words. Yet when he met Jesus, he said, *"Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel"* (v. 49).

The Pharisees kept asking Jesus for signs when He had already performed numerous signs right before their very eyes. After He had cleared the temple, they said, *"What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?"* (John 2:18). And again, when He had fed the multitudes, they said, *"What sign then will you give us that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"* (John 6:30). Did you catch this: *"that we may see it and believe"* (the wording anticipates Jesus' words to Thomas later on)? They demanded tangible proof, or else they refused to believe. Now what did Jesus do? He simply told them that He was the Bread of Life, and challenged them to believe. As a result, many left and no longer followed Him, because they were offended.

At some point, even John the Baptist developed doubts about Jesus' true identity. He sent some of his disciples to Jesus, and they asked Him, *"Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?"* (Matthew 11:2). John had been thrown into prison, and he started to doubt that Jesus really was the Messiah. Amazing, isn't it? His adverse circumstances made even the forerunner of Jesus doubt that

He was who He claimed to be. He looked at his circumstances, and his feelings, and he began to doubt. Jesus pointed out the fickle nature of many when He said that they couldn't make up their minds what they wanted. They criticized the Baptist for not drinking any wine and then didn't like it when Jesus did (Matthew 11:7–18). Some people you can't please, no matter what you do.

After the resurrection, when Jesus gave His disciples the "Great Commission", the Bible says, "When they saw him, they worshiped him; *but some doubted*" (Matthew 28:17). Even when the risen Jesus stood there right in front of them, some of His disciples doubted! It obviously was *not* a problem of insufficient evidence, because what more evidence can you have than the resurrected Jesus standing right in front of you? The problem was in their hearts; some of them doubted.

"Only a few believed."

In the Book of Acts, we read that the philosophers in Athens sneered at Paul's message and told him they wanted to hear him again another day (Acts 17:33). Only a few believed. As Paul writes in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, the Greeks craved wisdom, but in their quest for human wisdom, they missed the wisdom of God—Jesus Christ, and Him crucified for sinners like you and me.

In Paul's last letter, we hear of Demas, one of Paul's associates, who deserted him because he "loved this world" (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4:10). We don't know the exact circumstances, but it seems that Demas took his eyes off the crucified Christ and started to make his decisions based on what was comfortable, cozy, and convenient. 1<sup>st</sup> John 2:15 tells us *not* to love the world or the things in the world; Demas "loved this world". Like Eve, he succumbed to the pride of life, the lust of the eyes, and the lust of the flesh. He forgot Jesus' words, "*What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?*" (Matthew 16:26).

In James 1:5-8 we read, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.*"

And the author of Hebrews writes (at the beginning of his "faith" chapter), "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen...And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*" (Hebrews 11:1).

So, we see that doubting God's word and skepticism have a very long pedigree,



as it were, in the Bible and in human life—all the way from Satan to Eve, Sarah, Lot's wife, Job's wife, the Israelites in the wilderness, Nathanael, the Pharisees, even John the Baptist, some of Jesus' disciples, and Demas; and the list is far from complete.

### Doubting Thomas

Having surveyed the history of doubt in the Bible, let's now look at the specific case of Thomas. In John 20:24–29, we'll discover two characteristics of the person who doubts. John 20:24 tells us that Thomas was not with the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them (cf. 20:19–23). We don't know the reason why Thomas was not with the disciples that first night; it may well have been accidental. In any case, Thomas was not commissioned by the risen Lord along with the other ten apostles when Jesus said, "*As the Father sent me, I am sending you. Receive the Holy Spirit*" (John 20:21–22). So, we see that seeing the risen Jesus and believing in Him is foundational to mission, to being commissioned by Him and sent out to witness to Him in the unbelieving world around us.

In God's providence, Thomas thus becomes the focus of Jesus' second resurrection appearance to His disciples. Now, Thomas is no stranger to the readers of the Gospel. He makes an appearance earlier in the Gospel when Jesus is about to go to raise Lazarus from the dead in chapter 11. In verse 16, Thomas says to the rest of the disciples, "*Let us also go, that we may die with him.*" Not everyone agrees on how to interpret this statement. Some say this was an act of raw *courage*, and Thomas was prepared to die a martyr's death. Others believe Thomas displayed *sarcasm* and a kind of gallows' humor. If so, Thomas told his fellow disciples that, very likely in his opinion, if they went with Jesus to raise Lazarus, they would be killed in the process (some even say when Thomas said "die with him" he was referring to Lazarus, not Jesus).

Personally, I lean toward the *second* option: that Thomas's remark was *cynical*. This seems to fit better with the doubt he expresses in our passage and adds up to a character profile of Thomas as a follower of Jesus who found it hard to believe and who was prone to sarcasm, doubt, and unbelief. Peter denied Jesus; Judas betrayed Him; Thomas doubted. So, then, as we'll see further in the following verse, the first characteristic of a doubting person is this: a person who doubts demands tangible evidence rather than being willing to trust God and his Word even without tangible proof.

### The Demand for Proof

In verse 25 of John 20, Thomas famously responds, "*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his*

*side, I will not believe.*” Seeing is believing, the saying goes, so the other disciples believed because they had seen the resurrected Jesus. But Thomas had not been with them. As a result, he was unwilling to take their word for it and demanded special, personal, tangible proof that the crucified Jesus was still alive (or, actually, alive again). How should we evaluate Thomas’s attitude?

Thomas was a realist, a rational thinker, and he wanted to base his faith on actual hard evidence, not the testimony of others. He refused to take a leap of faith. He wanted to go by reason, not revelation; by seeing, not believing; by sight, not faith. Now, as you and I both realize, whether or not Jesus actually rose from the dead is of absolutely critical importance for the Christian faith. In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15, Paul says that if Jesus *didn’t* rise from the dead, our faith is in vain, and we’re in worse

shape than unbelievers.

So, on one level, Thomas’s demand is understandable, because it recognizes the critical importance of whether Jesus actually rose from the dead. But at the same time, Thomas’ demand is fatally flawed, because *none* of us is in a position to demand that God or Jesus must reveal Himself to us in a certain *way* or at a particular *time*. God is completely sovereign and can choose to reveal Himself to people at will. But Thomas drew a line in the sand. He was very emphatic that unless he put his finger on the nail marks and in Jesus’ side where the spear had pierced Him, he would never believe (there is a double negative in the original Greek, best translated as “I will *never, ever* believe” or “there’s *no way* I’m ever going to believe”).

Incidentally, the same thing is true with many so-called “critical scholars” today. Many of them distinguish between the “Jesus of history”—Jesus as He really was—and the “Christ of faith”, that is, the Jesus that you and I believe in. They say that the actual Jesus (the “historical Jesus”) was, in fact, very different from Jesus as He is depicted in the Bible. Because of their critical spirit—in fact, their skepticism—they drive a wedge between who Jesus really was and the Jesus you and I believe in today—the Jesus revealed in the Bible—and they say that Jesus never rose from the dead. It seems to me that this is not that different from the situation in which Thomas found himself in our passage. He took a skeptical stance toward the resurrected Jesus and demanded tangible proof, or else he was unwilling to believe that Jesus had really risen from the dead. So how did Jesus respond?

What happens next in the narrative shows the graciousness and kindness of Jesus. It was now a week later. Apparently, the disciples were still afraid of the Jewish authorities, because the doors were still locked, like at the previous occasion

(John 20:19). Of course, that was no problem for Jesus; it seems He simply went through closed doors with His resurrected body and suddenly appeared in the midst of the disciples. Jesus shows His supernatural knowledge and turns straight to Thomas. He invites him to put his finger onto His hands and into His side and exhorts him to “stop doubting and believe” (John 20:27).

Remarkably, Jesus condescended and revealed Himself to Thomas, *even though* Thomas’ demand was *unreasonable*, since it was made in doubt, not faith. In John’s Gospel, the Thomas “episode” becomes a very important object lesson, not *only* for the original disciples, but *also* for the *readers* of the Gospel. They, too, should stop doubting and believe, even though they have not *literally* seen the risen Jesus. They should trust the apostles’ *testimony*, as written down in the Gospels. The same is true for you and me today: rather than demand evidence, we should trust God in our daily lives, trust in His goodness, grace, power, and sovereignty; trust and not doubt that He exists and that He will certainly do what is ultimately best for us and what is in keeping with His perfect plan.

Thomas, apparently without taking Jesus up on His offer, casts aside all unbelief and exclaims, “*My Lord and my God!*” (20:29). The Greek terms are *kyrios* and *theos*, both Old Testament names for God. So, Thomas affirms that Jesus is one with *Yahweh*, the Creator and God, who had entered into covenant with His people—Israel. Thomas’ confession also echoes the way in which the Roman Emperor was addressed in the first century. We have coins designating Emperor Augustus as “the divine son” (*divi filius*), and many emperors were declared gods by the Roman Senate after their death. In some cases, they even demanded to be worshiped as lord and god during their lifetime. Some were also called “savior” or “deliverer” as the supreme military leaders of Rome.

So, for any original reader of John’s Gospel, the conclusion was obvious: Thomas worshiped *Jesus*, not the *Roman Emperor*, as Lord and God. Notice also the Book of Revelation, which was written not long after John’s Gospel, where we see clearly that the Christians at the end of the first century were martyred because they didn’t go along with the emperor cult and refused to worship the Roman Emperor as god.

We heard earlier that Thomas sarcastically told his fellow disciples to go with Jesus so that they would all die with Him. Well, tradition has it that Thomas later went to India as a missionary and subsequently died a martyr’s death, like all the other apostles with the sole exception of the apostle John.

### **Trusting God’s Promises**

In John 20:29, Jesus tells Thomas, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” Here, we see the

second characteristic of a doubting person. The person who doubts relies primarily on their five senses rather than looking to God and His promises. This person goes by what he or she sees, hears, can touch, feel, or smell. In other words, such people make their own experience the determining factor of what to believe.

Like Sarah, who judged that old people don't have babies; or Job's wife, who concluded that there was no way God would let anyone suffer what her husband had to go through. Or like Yuri Gagarin, the first astronaut in space, a committed atheist, who said he'd been in space and hadn't seen God there, so that proved God didn't exist. Or you and I, when we can't see how God could possibly provide a job for us, or convert a rebellious teenager, or reconcile us to a parent who has rejected us. (Mind you, I'm not denying that there are tough circumstances, such as terminal illnesses, or fatal accidents. Take the (humanly inexplicable) case of a family of four—a father and mother and their two sons—who were killed not long ago in a head-on collision near Louisville, KY. He was a youth pastor and student at Southern Seminary.)

At this, Jesus communicates the lesson He wants Thomas (and us) to learn: faith *apart from* seeing is better than faith *based on* seeing. I mentioned the common saying "seeing is believing" earlier. Here Jesus is saying, "No, there's an even better way." You could paraphrase it as follows: "Believing is *better than* seeing." After all, if you have all the tangible evidence, then you no longer need faith. But God wants us to trust Him and to have faith even when we *don't* see how He can work out a given situation, simply because He is God.

### **Final Thoughts...**

Are you a "doubting Thomas" today, or do you take God at His word? We may not have all the evidence we would *like*, but we have all the evidence we *need*. In Jesus Christ, God has made a way for us to come to Him and to be reconciled to Him. As John 3:16 says, "*God so loved the world that whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.*"

God has made a way—will you and I walk in it? Will we follow His direction? If so, we will be students of His Word. We will abide by His moral directives. We will strive for holiness, and purity, and seek to preserve a clear conscience. We will seek to love others, even those who are different from us. We will be willing to go where He sends us and do what He asks us to do. We will say, "Lord, not my will, but Yours be done." And with Thomas, we will fall down before Jesus in worship and confess, "My Lord and my God!" No more questions asked, no more evidence needed—it will be enough for us to know that God is God, and we will yield our lives to Him in worship and unquestioning, unconditional obedience. And in this way, we will receive Jesus' blessing, "*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*"



## ***Doubt and the Promises of God***

### **An Interview with Elyse Fitzpatrick**

**By Dave Jenkins**

Elyse Fitzpatrick holds a certificate in biblical counseling from CCEF (San Diego) and an M.A. in Biblical Counseling from Trinity Theological Seminary. She has authored 23 books on daily living and the Christian life. Along with her husband, Phil, Elyse is a member of Valley Center Community Church, a reformed congregation in the community of Valley Center. VCCC is a member of FIRE, the Fellowship of Independent Reformed Evangelicals.



**T4L:** Elyse, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology*

for *Life Magazine*. Please tell us a bit about yourself, including the current ministries you are involved in!

**Elyse:** Having not been raised in a Christian home, I didn't come to faith until right before my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. But soon afterward, I found myself in Bible College and then married with children. In 1985 I began training in biblical counseling with CCEF (San Diego), and went on to get an M.A. in biblical counseling from Trinity Theological Seminary (Newburgh, IN).

I began writing books (primarily on the intersection between daily living and God's Word) in 1997, and have since written about 2 dozen books—some on practical theology, and others on God's grace for sinners. I presently speak at conferences 10-15 times a year and are continuing to write books.

**T4L:** Wow! It sounds like you're staying busy! Can you please tell us a bit about your book *Doubt: Trusting God's Promises*, the reason you wrote it, and how it's being received?

**Elyse:** I was thankful for the opportunity to add to the series of devotional books on daily living from P&R and Deepak Reju. *Doubt: Trusting God's Promises* is a book that acknowledges that all of us struggle with doubt—during some seasons more than others—and that the struggle with doubt is not only common, but also something that the Lord understands and will welcome us through. He doesn't shame doubters; in fact, He calls them to Himself and gives them faith to believe and trust.

**T4L:** Very true. So, how do the Bible's claims about itself help doubts begin to trust the reliability of the inerrant and authoritative Word of God?

**Elyse:** The Bible claims that it is God's Word, which really wouldn't mean much if it were not for fulfilled prophecy and the resurrection of Jesus Christ—a historical fact that was attested to hundreds of people, who could have denied it, but also gave their lives for it. In Scripture, we've been given as much proof as we need to be able to “walk by faith” even though we're not walking “by sight”.

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“It's good for people to know that we all struggle with doubt, especially during times of testing and trial.”

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**T4L:** Yes, and this is something that we—as Christians—need to understand. What role should the local church play in helping Christians deal with doubt?

**Elyse:** They should recognize and speak to the ubiquity of doubt in the local congregation, and offer resources to people that will help them. It would be good for the

leadership to admit that they themselves have times of doubt and that it doesn't mean that they should be ashamed or are unloved.

**T4L:** Excellent point. So often the average lay person seems to believe that his/her pastor never has any doubt...ever...but obviously that is not the case. You're right, we *do* need transparency in this. Many Christians struggle facing trials or times of suffering and are filled with anxiety and doubt. How can they face these times of life and grow in the grace of God?

**Elyse:** It's good for people to know that we all struggle with doubt, especially during times of testing and trial. If people can remember that they are not called to complete certainty, but rather to a reasonable belief, they can walk through dark days and trust that the Lord is with them. It's especially good for people to have others in their lives to whom they are confessing their doubts and who will, in turn encourage them to keep walking.

**T4L:** Agreed! Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Elyse.

## Science or the Bible?

By Ken Ham and Terry Mortenson



**Ever heard one of these claims?** Perhaps you've even said one yourself. Over the years, we've heard them all—but they're all false, or at least they imply a falsehood.

## Common claims by Non-Christians:

- *Science proves the Bible is wrong.*
- *Evolution is science, but the Bible is religion.*
- *Evolutionists believe in science, but creationists reject science.*

## Common claims by Christians:

- *I believe the Bible over science.*
- *Creation is religion, but evolution is religion, too.*
- *Creationists believe in the Bible and reject science.*

The Bible's account of beginnings cannot be tested in a laboratory, so secular scientists—and even some Christians—believe it is not science and must be classified as religion. Secular scientists claim that *their view* of beginnings (evolution) can be tested in a laboratory, so their view is scientific. For instance, they point to mutated fruit flies or speciation observed in the field (such as new species of mosquitoes or fish).

But this is where many people are confused—what is meant by “science” or “scientific”. It is helpful to distinguish between operational science and origin science, and compare how each one seeks to discover truth. Before we get caught up in a debate about whether the Bible or evolution is scientific, we have learned to ask, “Could you please define what you mean by science?” The answer usually reveals where the real problem lies.

## Defining Science

People are generally unaware that dictionaries give a root meaning, or etymology, of *science* similar to this one from Webster's: “from Latin *scientia*, from *scient-*, *sci-ens* ‘having knowledge,’ from present participle of *scire* ‘to know.’”

And most dictionaries give the following meaning of the word: “*the state of knowing: knowledge as distinguished from ignorance or misunderstanding.*” Although there are other uses of the word, the root meaning of *science* is basically “knowledge”. In fact, in the past, philosophy and theology were considered sciences, and theology was even called the “queen of the sciences”.

But over the past 200 years, during the so-called Scientific Revolution, the word *science* has come to mean a method of knowing, a way of discovering truth. Moreover, many people assume that modern science is the only way to discover truth. Operational science uses observable, repeatable experiments to try to discover truth. Origin science relies on relics from the past and historical records to try to discover truth. To help people clear up the confusion, we have found it helpful to distinguish between two types of modern science, and compare how each one seeks to discover truth:



- *Operation science* uses the so-called “scientific method” to attempt to discover truth, performing observable, repeatable experiments in a controlled environment to find patterns of recurring behavior in the present physical universe. For example, we can test gravity, study the spread of disease, or observe speciation in the lab or in the wild. Both creationists and evolutionists use this kind of science, which has given rise to computers, space shuttles, and cures for diseases.
- *Origin science* attempts to discover truth by examining reliable eyewitness testimony (if available); and circumstantial evidence, such as pottery, fossils, and canyons. Because the past cannot be observed directly, assumptions greatly affect how these scientists interpret what they see.

So, for example, how was the Grand Canyon formed? Was it formed gradually over long periods of time by a little bit of water, or was it formed rapidly by a lot of water? The first interpretation is based on secular assumptions of slow change over millions of years, while the second interpretation is based on biblical assumptions about rapid change during Noah’s Flood.

### **Can a Creationist Be a Real Scientist?**

Both creationist scientists and evolutionist scientists have religious (or faith) components to their scientific models about origins. Yet both types of scientists are equally capable of doing both operation science and origin science.

Operation science, whether done by an evolutionist or a creationist, has benefited mankind in many ways, particularly through technology. Creationists have contributed greatly in this area of science, including nineteenth-century physicists Michael Faraday and James Clerk Maxwell, and more recently Dr. Raymond Damadian, invented the MRI imaging used by medical doctors. In origin science, creationists are discovering many things that honor the Creator’s wisdom and confirm biblical history.

### **The Nature of the Debate**

At this point, most people realize that the debate is not about operation science, which is based in the present. The debate is about origin science and conflicting assumptions, or beliefs, about the past. Molecules-to-man evolution is a belief about the past. It assumes, without observing it, that natural processes and lots of time are sufficient to explain the origin and diversification of life.

Of course, evolutionary scientists can test their interpretations using operation science. For instance, evolutionists point to natural selection and speciation—which are observable today. Creation scientists make these same observations, but they recognize that the change has limits and has never been observed to *change one kind into another*.

Until quite recently, many geologists have used studies of current river erosion and sedimentation to explain how sedimentary rock layers were formed or eroded slowly over millions of years. In the past few decades, however, even secular geologists have begun to recognize that catastrophic processes are a better explanation for many of the earth's rock layers. Also during this time, creation geologists have been identifying evidence that points to the catastrophic formation of most of the rock record during the unique global Flood of Noah's day.

These present-day observations help us to consider the possible causes of past events, such as the formation of the Grand Canyon. But operation science cannot tell us with certainty what actually happened in the past. After we explain these two types of science, people usually begin to recognize the potential problems with the statement "evolution is science, but the Bible is religion." Molecules-to-man evolution is not proven by operation science; instead, it is a belief about the past based on anti-biblical assumptions.

The Bible, in contrast, is the eyewitness testimony of the Creator, who tells us what happened to produce the earth, the different kinds of life, the fossils, the rock layers, and indeed the whole universe. The Bible gives us the true, "big picture" starting assumptions for origin science.

## **Different Histories**

Thus, creationists and evolutionists develop totally different reconstructions of history. But they accept and use the same methods of research in both origin and operation science. The different conclusions about origins arise from different starting assumptions, not the research methods themselves. So, the battle between the Bible and molecules-to-man evolution is not one of religion versus science. Rather, it is a conflict between *worldviews*—a creationist's starting assumptions (a biblical worldview) and an evolutionist's starting assumptions (an anti-biblical worldview).

The next time someone uses the word *science* in relation to the creation/evolution controversy, ask him first to define what he means. Only then can you begin to have a fruitful discussion about origins.

## Proven Facts

Let us be clear. Accurate knowledge (truth) about physical reality can be discovered by the methods of both operation science and origin science. But truth claims in both areas may be false. Many “proven facts” (statements of supposed truth) about how things operate (in physics, chemistry, medicine, etc.), as well as about how things originated (in biology, geology, astronomy, etc.) have been or will be shown to be false. So, as best we can, we must be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11 and examine every truth claim against Scripture and look for faulty logic or false assumptions.

## Which Worldview is Correct?

There are many ways to test the accuracy of the biblical worldview against naturalistic atheism (the worldview that controls most origins research). When our research is based upon biblical truths about the past, we find that our interpretations of the biological and geological facts make sense of what we see in the real world, whereas evolutionary interpretations don’t really fit what we see.

“But the preprogrammed mechanism for variation within the kind could never change one kind into a different kind...” Let’s look at an example. The Bible says that God created distinct groups of animals “after their kind” (see *Genesis 1*). Starting with this truth of the Bible as one of our assumptions, we would expect to observe animals divided into distinct groups, or kinds. Creationists postulate that our creative God placed phenomenal variability in the genes of each kind, so there could be considerable variety within each kind. But the preprogrammed mechanism for variation within the kind could never change one kind into a different kind, as evolutionists claim and their belief system requires.

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## How Can Doubt Give Way to Assurance of Salvation?

By Gregg Allison



**Mary came into my office to discuss a personal dilemma she was facing.** She had recently applied to a Missions agency to be considered for an international ministry assignment. In an initial interview with the agency, she had struggled to articulate an adequate

answer to a simple question: “Do you have assurance of your salvation?”

A woman of about thirty years, Mary had become a Christian sometime in her teenage years—at least she thought. Many times and often she had gone forward at church when it came time to be saved. She had prayed to receive Christ at final challenges at summer camps. Mary had walked the aisle at a massive evangelistic crusade and expressed her desire to follow the Lord with her counselor. And she had regularly prayed the sinners’ prayer. Dozens of times Mary had responded with repentance and faith to the gospel of Jesus Christ. All well and good, right? The problem was that Mary was not sure if any of these events and prayers were valid, if she



had really become a Christian. She thought she had. She hoped she had. But she was not sure if she had become a follower of Jesus Christ.

Her friends had attempted to help Mary by asking probing questions: “How did you receive Christ?” “When did you pray the sinner’s prayer?” “Where were you when you became a Christian?” These were well-

intentioned questions raised to help her, but Mary’s problem was that she had difficulty pointing to the how, when, and where of her salvation. Indeed, she had had so many experiences of answering the gospel call that she couldn’t say which, if any, had actually taken effect and saved her. Besides, in none of those times had Mary felt

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“Importantly, assurance is grounded on the perseverance of the saints.”

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the weight of her sin lift off of her shoulders or heard a choir of angels singing—experiences of salvation that her friends had shared with her to give her assurance of salvation. So, Mary was not sure that she was a Christian. Moreover, if she were a Christian, she was not sure that she would remain a Christian her entire life. And the missions agency to which she had applied was rightly concerned about her and insisted that she gain clarity on this all important, foundational matter.

So, Mary came to me. Over the course of the next few months I worked with Mary to help her gain assurance of salvation. The following is a sketch of what I shared with Mary. I begin with a definition: *assurance of salvation is the subjective confidence that is the privilege of all genuine believers that they will remain Christians throughout their life. It is an inner certainty that God has saved them on the basis of the work of the Son on their behalf, and the application of that saving benefit by the work of the Holy Spirit.*

Importantly, assurance is grounded on the perseverance of the saints. Perseverance is the mighty act of God to preserve Christians throughout their life by His power, through their ongoing faith, until their salvation is complete. As Peter underscores in his blessing of the Lord: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-5). The inheritance of eternal life is guaranteed for Christians as God’s power unfailingly protects them from temptation, demonic attack, persecution, and overwhelming sin. Thus, they cannot ultimately abandon the faith and fall from salvation. However, God’s protective power does not operate apart from the Christians’ ongoing faith. God, who is faithful to His promises and all-powerful to ac-

comply with His will, not only saves His people, but also guards them as they walk with Him by faith—day by day—ultimately giving them their promised eternal life. On the basis of this divine preserving work, Christians are privileged to enjoy the assurance of their salvation.

Specifically, what has God done, and what is He doing for us that gives us this ongoing confidence that we will belong to Christ forever? Like I shared with Mary, if we are to gain assurance of salvation in the best way possible, we must ground our faith on the work of the triune God and the promises of His Word.



Beginning with the gracious mighty acts of God the Father, Christians have been chosen by Him in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:3). By His gracious *election*, the Father marked them out eternally for His purpose of salvation. God has united them with Christ; through this *union with Christ*, the Father grants them every benefit of salvation (Romans 6:1-11; Galatians 2:20; 3:28;

Eph. 2:4-7; Col. 3: 1-5). God has justified them, that is, declared them not guilty, but righteous instead. Such *justification* has nothing to do with *merit* or *earning* God's favor by good works; rather, it is on the basis of the perfect obedience, death, and resurrection of Christ, and faith in Him (Romans 3-8; Galatians 2:15-3:29). Through *adoption*, God is their Father. He has taken them as sinful people—enemies who were separated from Him—and joined them as beloved children into His family forever (John 1:12; Galatians 4:4-7; Ephesians 2:13-22).

Assurance of salvation is next grounded on the pledges and prayers of God the Son. Christ *pledges* to unfailingly hold on to His followers, never lose them, and give them eternal life. As Jesus assures us, *"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day"* (John 6:37-40; cf. 10:27-30). In addition to His pledges, the Son engages in *unceasing prayers* for His followers' ongoing salvation. Contrasting the old covenant priesthood with the new covenant High Priest—Jesus Christ—Hebrews underscores: *"The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them"* (Hebrews 7:23-25; cf. John 17:24).

Grounding the assurance of salvation continues with the testimony of God the Holy Spirit. Even before people become Christians, His *conviction* of sin, righteousness, and judgment is disturbing them (John 16:8-11). The Spirit is the one responsible for *regeneration*, the work of removing the old nature characterized by darkness and death and implanting in its place a new nature characterized by light and life (John 3:3-8; Titus 3:5). His work of *sealing* marks out Christians as belonging to God forever (Ephesians 1:13-14; 4:30); indeed, His work is presented as a down payment, the *firstfruits*, the *guarantee* of salvation (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 1:22; Ephesians 1:14; Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 5:5). Moreover, the Holy Spirit renders testimony in the inner core of Christians, that they are indeed children of God (Romans 8:16). And throughout their life, the Spirit is engaged in the *transfor-*

"Moreover, the Holy Spirit renders testimony in the inner core of Christians..."

mation of believers into the image of Christ (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 3:18) so that they progressively exhibit Christ-likeness (Galatians 5:16–25).

On top of the work of the triune God, assurance of salvation is grounded on the promises of the word of God. Scripture *promises* eternal life, and assurance of it, to all those who embrace the Son by faith: “*And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life*” (1<sup>st</sup> John 5:11–13; cf. John 3:36; 5:24).

“Such appeal is not wrong in and of itself, but it has to be put in the right place.”

Assurance, then, becomes a matter of trusting in the promises of the Word of God.

But, it is not enough just to tell people like Mary to trust God. They want to, but often find it difficult. So share the promises of Scripture, with this expectation: “*faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ*” (Romans 10:17). Through regular and sustained sharing of the Word with others, as they meditate over and over again on its promises of salvation, trust will be ignited and they will gain assurance of salvation.

The promises of the Word of God uphold assurance of salvation:

- The gracious mighty acts of God the Father.
- The pledges and prayers of God the Son.
- The testimony of God the Holy Spirit.
- The promises of the Word of God.

Only once we have grounded assurance of salvation on this unshakeable foundation should the present faith and obedience of Christians be appealed to. But like Mary’s friends, we often begin with, and then focus on, these subjective matters: the *how*, *when*, and *where* of our conversion. The good works in which we are engaging. Our life of trusting God and doing His will. But if we invert the diagram and focus on this subjective aspect, assurance of salvation rests on an unstable foundation.

Such appeal is not wrong in and of itself, but it has to be put in the right place. Ultimately, assurance of salvation is grounded on the gracious mighty acts of the triune God and the promises of His Word and not on some subjective sense: faith, evaluation of good works, personal profession, progress in sanctification, and the like. Yet, a subjective sense is not to be minimized but directed toward thanksgiving to God. As believers contemplate the phenomenal transformation that they have undergone (they now know God, trust Christ, follow the Spirit, worship the

Lord, repudiate sin, desire the word, love others), they should be drawn to the source of this change (God's marvelous work) and conclude rightly, "I must be saved, for God's loving and gracious work alone can explain this wonder!"

And now for the rest of the story: through months of studying and meditating on the gracious mighty acts of the triune God and the promises of His Word, Mary gained the assurance of her salvation! I hope that what I have shared will help you similarly, if you lack such assurance, and provide a way for you to disciple others who suffer from a lack of assurance of salvation.

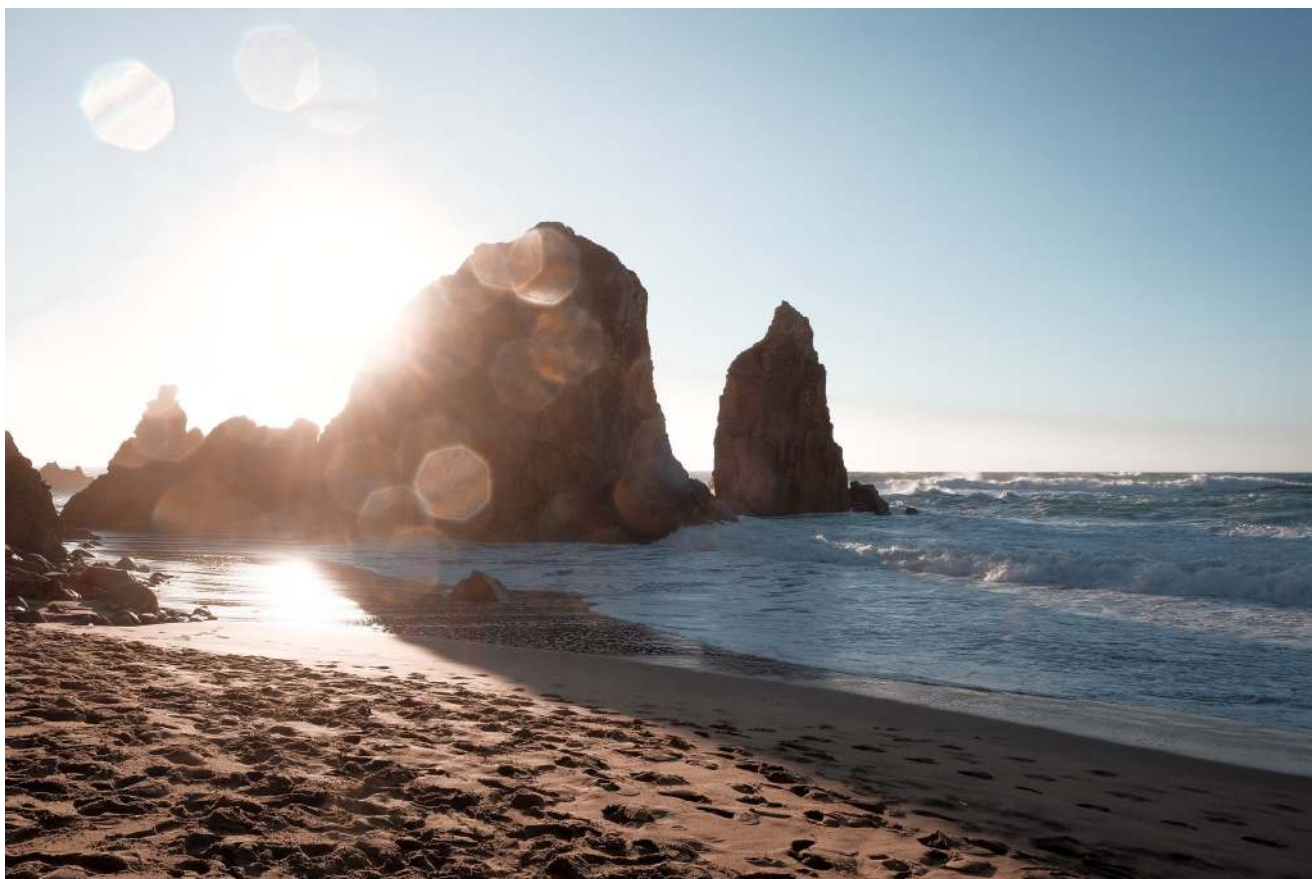
As Jesus promises, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life"* (John 5:24).

Some of this material is adapted from Gregg R. Allison, *50 Core Truths of the Christian Faith: A Guide to Understanding and Teaching Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 273-80.



## Confronting Doubt with the Promises of God

By Christina Fox



**There are growing pains in our home.** I have a preteen and a teen and each day I witness my children stretch and grow and mature into young men. The growing process isn't easy, as youth hover somewhere between childhood and adulthood. It's often an awkward season. Teens seem to grow inches overnight, struggle to find emotional equilibrium, and assert their independence. Indeed, such

growth is a bumpy process and sometimes even painful.

In the Christian life, we have growing pains as well. As we grow and mature in our faith, we are stretched emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. We may take steps forward in our growth, only to then take a few steps backward. We may feel awkward in our faith at times, uncertain even. At some point, we'll feel the pain of sanctification as we are stripped of sin.

A common growing pain for many believers is doubt. There may be times in our Christian life when we face a hardship and wonder why God would allow such a thing in our life. We may doubt His love for us. We may question what we believe about Scripture and wonder deep down, is it really true? There may be times when we wonder if God hears us or if He's even there.

"Those who came to Christ for healing didn't have complete faith either."

### **Doubt in the Christian Life**

When we come to faith in Christ, we are justified and counted righteous before God through the blood of Jesus, shed for our sins. Though the power of sin loses its reign over us, the presence of indwelling sin remains. We still battle temptations. We still struggle with indwelling sin. We still have human weakness and frailties. We still face suffering and trials. It shouldn't come as any surprise that we face doubt in our life as well.

Such doubts often bring feelings of shame. I've received many emails from people expressing concern over their doubts. Because they doubt, they wonder if they are saved. They assume their doubts mean they don't have true faith. And oh, what heartache such thoughts bring! Yet doubt is different from unbelief. While unbelief rejects God altogether, doubt reflects our growing faith, which is still immature, weak, and imperfect. Until we die, or Christ returns, and our sanctification is complete, we will have imperfect faith.

This is true of the disciples. Their faith was often weak. They had doubts. They had seen Jesus feed the five thousand and then the next time they were gathered with thousands of hungry people, they wondered how they could feed such a large crowd (Matthew chapters 14 and 15). Jesus often called the disciples "ye of little faith". Even John the Baptist wondered if Christ was who He said He was and needed reassurance (Matthew 11:3).

Those who came to Christ for healing didn't have complete faith either. A man asked Jesus to heal his demon possessed son saying, "But if you can do anything,

take pity on us and help us.” (Mark 9:22). “Jesus responded, “If you can! Everything is possible for one who believes.” Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:23-24).

In John Calvin's commentary on the book of Mark, he commented on how God responds to our weak faith:

*“This agrees with what I have lately noticed, that God deals kindly and gently with his people, —accepts their faith, though imperfect and weak,—and does not lay to their charge the faults and imperfections with which it is connected...Though we have not such abundance of faith as might be desired, there is no reason why our weakness should drive away or discourage us from prayer.” [i]*

## Questioning Our Doubts

While doubt may be part of our growth as Christians, and while the Lord is indeed patient with us, it doesn’t mean we don’t do anything with our doubts. It doesn’t mean we are passive in response. It doesn’t mean we don’t continue to exercise our faith. And it doesn’t mean we don’t cry out to God for help.

As doubt questions our faith, we must in turn question our doubts. We must

“When we doubt, we must confront and counter our thoughts.”

doubt our doubts. This is what the psalmist did in Psalm 42 and 43. His enemies pursued him. His soul was in turmoil. “My tears have been my food day and night, while they say to me all the day long, “Where is your God?” (Psalm 42:3). He cried out to God asking, “Why have you forgotten me?” (Psalm 42:9) and “Why have you rejected me?” (Psalm 43:2). While he knew God was his salvation and refuge, he felt as though God had left him. He felt far from him.

The psalmist challenged and confronted his thoughts and feelings. He doubted his doubts. He spoke back to himself, “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Psalm 42:11).

John Calvin noted that it is our duty to strive against our doubts: “As our faith is never perfect, it follows that we are partly unbelievers; but God forgives us, and exercises such forbearance towards us, as to reckon us believers on account of a small portion of faith. It is our duty, in the meantime, carefully to shake off the remains of infidelity which adhere to us, to strive against them, and to pray to God to correct them, and, as often as we are engaged in this conflict, to fly to Him for

aid.” [ii]

## Four Promises to Confront Our Doubts

When we doubt, we must confront and counter our thoughts. We must turn to God and His word, dwelling on His rich promises for us in Christ.

1. **He is faithful to forgive your sin.** When you cry out to God in repentance, He will forgive you. *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1<sup>st</sup> John 1:9).
2. **Your salvation is secure.** When you feel shame over your doubts and wonder if your salvation is secure, read John 10: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand”* (John 10:27-29).
3. **Nothing can keep you from God’s love.** When you doubt God’s love for you, look to the promise in Romans 8: *“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? [...] For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (vv. 35, 38-39).
4. **He will finish what He started in you.** When it seems as though your faith will never mature and your sin will never be conquered, turn to the promise in Philippians 1:6: *“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”*

On this side of eternity, our faith will be weak and imperfect. We will have doubts from time to time as we mature in our faith. But such doubts should not keep us from God. We need to turn to him, correct our doubts with the truth of His word, and rest in His promises for us in Christ.

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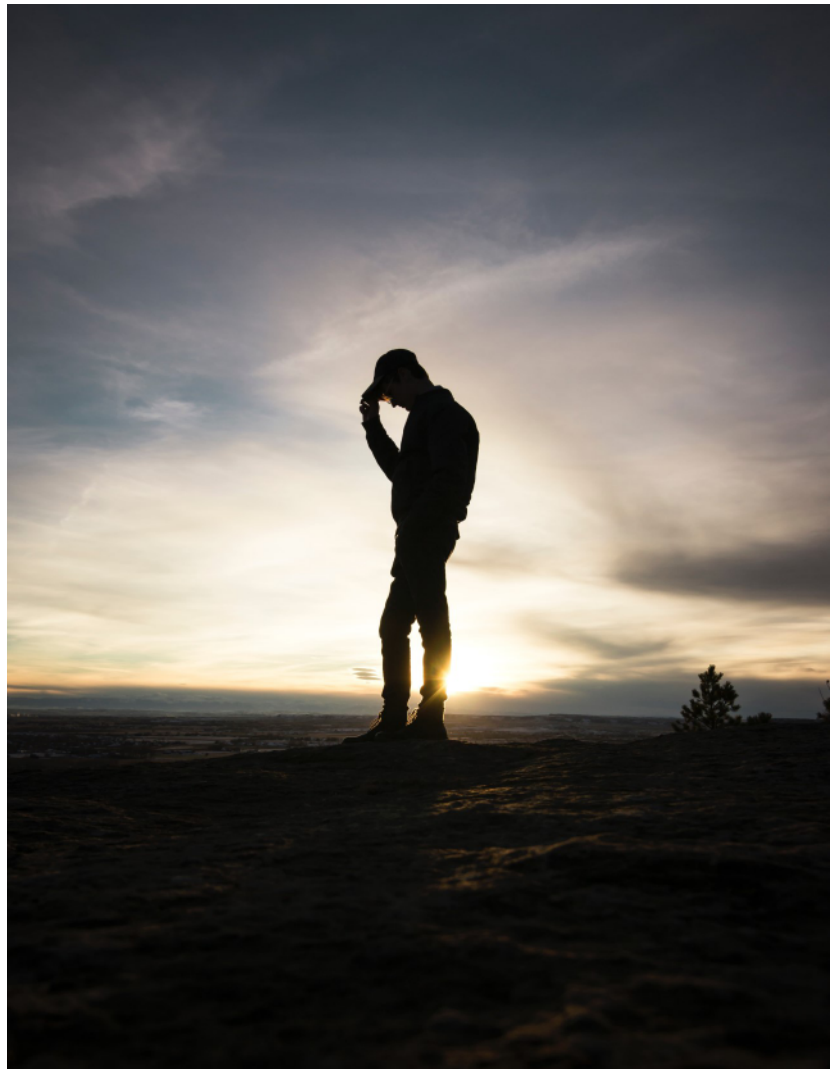
## Dear Timothy: Set Your Eyes on Faithfulness

By Jeff Robinson

### Dear Timothy,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. My dear brother in Christ, the world will try to press you into its God-denying mold when it comes to gauging your success in ministry. The world, and perhaps a good many well-meaning, but carnal-minded, people in your congregation, will tell you that for your ministry to be considered a success, you will have to exhibit regular conversions to Christ, have a lakeshore lined with candidates for baptism, and possess attendance numbers that increase astronomically overnight within your congregation. They will seek to sell you on the notion that those are the marks of ministerial success, and you may be allured by such cheap reasoning. Don't buy it!

While we certainly desire healthy church attendance and want to see untold numbers experience the effectual grace of Christ, you must remember that conversion and church growth are God's business.





(Recall what happened after Pentecost when God added more than 3,000 to His church in one day? Wasn't that glorious?) Those may be measures of what God is doing in your ministry, but not necessarily. Recall the false prophets I have warned you about, the ones who have roiled the church in Ephesus, and remember also those "super" apostles with whom I contended at the church in Corinth? They were gaining quite a following, and who among us would assume that the fruit of their false teaching was healthy?

Timothy, God is not calling you to be omnipotent, for you are merely a weak clay pot—common, expendable crockery. God is not calling you to be omniscient, for all men are ignorant to such a degree that James had to remind us that Him who makes plans without considering God's sovereignty is sinfully presumptuous. God is not calling you to be omnipresent, for you minister in vain if you seek to be everywhere all at once out of a sinful fear of man. God is not calling you to please men, for men are fickle. The church members who are today praising you are just as likely to be calling for your removal when your ministry threatens to upset the peace within the kingdoms, over which they occupy the throne. He is not calling you to earn their praise. You must please Him alone. God is not calling you to fear men. You must fear *Him*. If you will fear God and nothing else, and hate sin and nothing else, God may turn the world upside down through your ministry.

**No, God is calling you simply to be faithful.** He is calling you to be faithful in feeding and leading His flock. Remember, it is *His* flock. It is *His*

“He has called you to faithfulness in studying to show yourself approved, a workman who is able to rightly interpret His Word.”

kingdom, not yours. You have been called to build it, by His grace, faithfully. What does such faithfulness entail? It's not going to look like that which the world calls "success", and you must settle this notion in your heart and mind now. God has called you to faithfulness in preaching His Word, being ready at all times to proclaim His truth. Forsaking all else, God has called you to set the oracles of God, before the people of God, to the glory of God, every Lord's

Day. Do not worry about results. Results are God's business.

He has called you to faithfulness in studying to show yourself approved, a workman who is able to rightly interpret His Word. That will always be priority one: many hours in study and prayer will establish you in this crucial endeavor. He has called you to be faithful in guarding the gospel He has deposited into your care, which means you must know sound doctrine and teach sound doctrine. He has called you to be faithful in refuting false doctrine as well. Therefore, my dear son,

you must work hard to be a pastor/theologian. That is an irreducible part of faithfulness in ministry. Studying God's Word and learning theology are hard work, but such labors will pay dividends into eternity, for this is the way God in His infinite wisdom has ordained it.

So God is calling you to be faithful in guarding your doctrine, but He is also calling you to be faithful in keeping a close watch over your life and conduct, what Solomon in the book of Proverbs calls "guarding your heart with all vigilance". Though you are young, you must be faithful in living out the theology of grace that has been given to you through God's Word. Will your people find your theology compelling if the theology you claim to hold dear has had little discernible effect on your life? How can you commend grace to others if you are not willing to live a godly, gracious lifestyle? A man of grace must be a gracious man, a wise and godly sage once told me.

You must be faithful in asking God to form those character traits in you that I passed down to you in another letter, traits that God gave me as qualifications for His under-shepherds. You must be a faithful family man—loving your wife as Christ loved the church, and training your future children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. You must petition our Lord for daily grace in being sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, and gentle. You must plug the ears and shield the eyes of your heart to the deadly lure of money, and you must be able to teach and debate the truth with others in a gracious and winsome matter. Living out these attributes by God's grace, and praying that God will bear the full range of the fruit of His Spirit in you, are all a part of what it means to be a faithful herald of God's Word.

**And you must persevere in faithfulness, even when war has broken out all around you in the ministry.** Remember, you are a soldier of Christ. Until our Lord returns, you will be at war, not at peace. Thus, you must fight the good fight of faith, on behalf of yourself and your people. You must persevere in loving the members of your congregation, even those irascible, incorrigible souls who withhold love from you and defame your good name to others. Remember what I told the church at Corinth: *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things*. You must love them with the kind of selfless love that compelled our Savior to the Cross.

Timothy, no matter what the world tells you, no matter what well-meaning church people tell you, if you do all these things consistently, you will then be a worker approved by God, who need not be ashamed, no matter the size of your church or the scope of your ministry. You will adorn the gospel—your message—with the sweet aroma of Christ. I close with the same words of encouragement that I told to the Co-

rinthians, for it is a helpful summary of the Christian man's call to faithfulness: *be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like a man, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.*

**There is much more I could say, but I pray this small encouragement will steel your frame toward the pursuit of faithfulness.** May God make you content in His Son, and faithful to the end in proclaiming His Word and shepherding His flock for His glory. May our invincible, sovereign Lord make His face to shine upon you and your labors. Grace be with you.

**Faithfully your father in the faith,  
Paul**

## ***Doubt and the Authority of Scripture***

### **An Interview with Dr. Josh Moody**

**By Dave Jenkins**



**Josh Moody (Ph.D., University of Cambridge) is the senior pastor of College Church in Wheaton. He is a pastor, author, conference speaker, and college campus speaker (places such as Yale University, University of Illinois). He is the president and founder of God Centered Life Ministries.**

**T4L:** Dr. Josh Moody, thank you very much for agreeing to do this interview with *Theology for Life Magazine*. Please tell us a bit about yourself, including the current ministries you are involved

in!

**Dr. Moody:** Thank you very much for interviewing me. I do hope that this conversation encourages you and the readers.

I serve as the senior pastor of College Church in Wheaton, IL, and also as the

president of God Centered Life Ministries (GCL). College Church is a historic Bible-teaching church that was founded in 1860 by Jonathan Blanchard, the same man who founded the nearby Wheaton College, but it is not affiliated institutionally with the College.

It is a church of about 2,000 or so adults in regular attendance, along with dynamic ministries to children, youth and college students. GCL began as a website that I launched in coordination with the book, *The God Centered Life*, and it has since become a standalone 501c3 ministry. Its vision is all generations living for God. GCL has a daily podcast program of my

preaching. It is also on daily broadcast on Moody Radio, plus some other radio stations across the country. We have a heart to get God's word as far and wide as possible, trusting God to use his word to save and build his church.

"I think of the Bible as food."

**T4L:** Can you please tell us a bit about your book, *How the Bible Can Change Your Life: Answers to the Ten Most Common Questions About the Bible*, why you wrote it, and how you hope it is received?

**Dr. Moody:** I wrote the book because I want people to understand that the Bible is important for both personal and church use. I've noticed that Christians tend to read the Bible less. And I've also noticed that churches tend to make less use of the Bible.

There are many reasons for that—historical, cultural, and theological—but I want to reverse that trend. I want to show that the Bible is essential for our lives and health as Christians and the Church. I want to show how you can use the Bible and still be effective in reaching out to non-Christians—that, in fact, you will be *more* effective in reaching out to non-Christians if you use the Bible!

**T4L:** Why is it so important that Christians ask good questions of the biblical text with a foundation of sound biblical convictions?

**Dr. Moody:** I think of the Bible as food. I don't know whether I always have good questions, the right approach, or convictions about food, but I know it is better that I eat than that I don't eat at all!

I am happy when people read and study the Bible. It is better to have sound convictions first, but if you don't, then those convictions will develop as you are open to what God is saying. You want to leave to one side your framework—your assump-



tions and presumptions—and come ready to have your mind and heart brought back into line with God and His will.

**T4L:** Excellent point. Many people today chafe when the word “authority” is mentioned. How can Christians begin to place themselves under the Word, not just on Sundays, but connect Sunday to Saturday (and every day in-between) to the Word of God?

**Dr. Moody:** The word “authority” derives from the word “author”, and it is connected to the word “authentic”. If we want to be authentic Christians, we must be those who abide by the Author of our faith, and that means submitting to the authority of His Word.

**T4L:** I agree—authentic Christianity is essential to our witness, and thus imperative. In your book, you discuss the relevancy of the Scriptures and chronological snobbery, as used by C.S. Lewis. That’s an important point! Why is it so important that we understand that the Bible is not merely a historical document but the living Word of God?

**Dr. Moody:** I’ve always liked Martin Luther’s comment that he thought of the Bible as having hands and feet. *“It has feet, it runs after me; it has hands, it lays hold of me.”* You wrestle with the Bible, and it wrestles with you. There is something living about the Bible. Of course, at one level, reading it is just like reading any other book. It is a work of history. There is a historical context to it. There are human authors and different genres or styles of writing. But at another level, we believe that every word is *breathed out* by God. This is no ordinary book. The best way to discover that is to read it.

Perhaps the most ironic part of this book that I’ve written about The Book is that the answer to the assumed question of the title (*How the Bible Can Change your Life*) is really “read the Bible”! The best way for the Bible to change your life is for you to read—with faith—the Bible! But I hope my book about The Book will help you to read the Bible, and so have your life changed for God’s glory.

**T4L:** What are some strategies to help Christians to begin to see their need to read the Bible? And how would you advise them to begin to read the Scriptures daily?

**Dr. Moody:** I would say simply *start*, if you have not already. Start small, if necessary. Aim to be regular rather than impressive. Better frequent, regular, and often, than infrequent or very occasional (if lengthy) Bible reading.

Reading the Bible for an hour and a half one day and then not reading it for a week is not as good as reading the Bible five minutes each day. Think of it as eating:

little and often is better than a feast once a week. There are various tools and methods that I discuss in the book about how to read the Bible too.

**T4L:** How can we help people begin to see that the Christian faith is not opposed to intellectual rigor, and help Christians begin to think in biblical categories and from a biblical worldview?

**Dr. Moody:** The first part of the question—helping non-Christians see that the Christian faith is not opposed to intellectual rigor—must be given a very large answer. It is, in many ways, *the* question of our secular age. The reason why people don't go to church is not usually because they do not like the coffee. It is because they do not think it is *true*. The answer to that is to build into our ministries, at every level, intellectual rigor that is also relevant to the real issues of our day.

To the second part of the question—helping Christians think from a biblical worldview—the answer is to teach and preach the Bible in churches. Not just from the pulpit, but in youth groups, and small groups as well.

**T4L:** Yes, exactly. Preaching the Bible from the pulpit is important; but as you pointed out, it's just as important to preach it in every level of the church! How can church leaders and pastors begin to use the Scriptures effectively in the church?

**Dr. Moody:** There are various courses that church leaders and pastors can attend to help them grow and develop as Bible teachers and preachers. Training Leaders International is one such resource. Another is The Charles Simeon Trust. Additionally, so is Leadership Resources International. If you are a young pastor or someone wanting to be a pastor, I would say listen to someone who teaches the Bible effectively, and seek to learn from him and others like him. You want to develop a sense, a taste, and instinct, for what biblical preaching is by exposure to good models in your own life.

**T4L:** Wonderful advice! Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to do this interview, Dr. Moody.

**Dr. Moody:** You are welcome! Many blessings.

## How to Counsel Those with Anxiety and Doubt

By Lara D'Entremont



**When Christ saved me from legalism and led me a saving knowledge of Him, tendrils of legalism remained wrapped on me.**

Every sin I caught myself in was further ammunition I used against any assurance of salvation I had. As I stood worshipping alongside my friends at my Christian university, I put on a smile, but inwardly wondered if I was righteous enough to sing any kind of praise to God. I wondered if any of the promises we heard, any of the words we sang, even applied to me. At times, I tried to make deals with God. *If I do better, will I feel your love then? If I try harder, will I feel secure? Will you take note of me if I somehow force away these sins?* I felt choked by doubt because I couldn't will away these sins.

I am not writing this article as a professional, experienced counselor striving to teach other counselors—I am nothing of the sorts. I am writing this as a believer who has battled her way through the thorns of doubt, and who has discerned

both the good and poor counsel given from others. I also come with humility, recognizing the times I have given the same gut-wrenching, doubt-inducing counsel that was once given to me. If there is anything to be taken away from this, I hope it is this: let's counsel those who doubt with the gospel—not their works.

### **Doubt-Inducing Counsel**

There are two primary forms of doubt-inducing counsel: (1) the Conversion Story and (2) the Fruit-Bearing Checklist.

#### ***The Conversion Story***

The young girl sits in front of you, tears streaming down her face. She hides her face in hands, and her muffled answer is, “I don't think I'm saved.”

You tell her to lift her face from her hands and look at you. She does, and you look her in the eyes and say, “I know that's not true. Do you want to know how I know? Because I was there that day you went forward to the altar, and I heard you pray that sinner's prayer. That day, you were saved, and I know it. You need to mark that date in the front of your Bible, and whenever the devil starts tempting you to doubt your salvation, you need to point him to that date and tell him you were saved.”

Her tears stop, and she takes a tissue to dry her cheeks. “Are you sure?”

You quickly reply, “Did you mean it that day? Did you make Jesus Lord of your life?”

“I think so,” she snuffles.

“Then you are saved.”

Does this sound familiar? Maybe you were on the counselor side, or maybe you were on the counselee side. At the moment, this sounds so comforting. That's it—simple as that, you're saved, no questions asked. We have a date and witness to prove it.

But this is far from comforting counsel. This counsel sets our friends and counselees up for further doubt as it places our hope and assurance in our own flaky, meager works. Assurance (in this model) is now based on whether or not I said a “good enough” prayer or my heart was in the “right place”, or if I truly “made” Christ my Lord that day. If we are relying on our own feeble works or our memory of a particular day, our assurance will always be unstable.

The simple words of Ephesians 2:8-9 put it well: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast” (ESV). Even our faith is a gift of God. If our assurance is based on a story where we mustered up enough faith, we have placed our hope in a false gospel. “You see, it is not the strength of your faith that ultimately

matters for your salvation; it is the strength of the object you place your faith in.”<sup>1</sup>

### ***The Fruit-Bearing Checklist***

All believers will bear fruit. James wrote:

*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead (James 2:19-26 ESV).*

But our fault comes when we seek to place a believer’s assurance solely in their works. Like the previous scenario, we are turning the gospel into works-based salvation. The reality is, though, we as believers will continue to sin and fall short of God’s law. That’s why we need a Savior, and that’s why we need Him to persevere us in Christ so that we can persevere by the grace of God.

“Another problem that often comes with poor counsel of any sort is simplistic answers.”

Like Paul, we often lament, “*So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*”

But with Paul we likewise rejoice, “*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh, I serve the law of sin*” (Romans 7:21-25 ESV). Christ has freed us from our slavery to sin, but we do still feel it’s temptation in our flesh.

### ***The Problem of Simplistic Counsel***

Another problem that often comes with poor counsel of any sort is simplistic answers. We create a “one-size-fits-all” program for the struggles and sins people face and then seek to apply them to each person we counsel. Yet every person is unique and comes with a lens that shapes them based on their experiences. We need to listen to these stories and strive to know these people. A true counselor loves



the person they are counseling, and because of that love, they don't want to hand out generic advice. Instead, they come alongside to know the story behind the sin or problem.

Before trying to "fix" someone's doubt, we need to listen and understand their doubt. Asking the following questions of ourselves can be a helpful spiritual diagnostic:

- *Why are you doubting your salvation?*
- *Why do you fear that you are going to hell?*
- *When did your confidence shift? Why?*
- *Is there a sin that you think is unforgiveable? Why do you think that?*
- *Do you believe you are not good enough? Why do you believe that?*

The coiling weeds of doubt are often grounded with thick roots. A parent that showed affection only when they performed well in school and extracurriculars. A husband who cares more about work than spending time with his wife. An unshakeable sin. An upbringing in a legalistic church or system. A shameful sin of the past that can't be forgotten. Feeling damaged and dirty from abuse. Doubt is often only a fruit of a much deeper problem that needs to be dealt with before we can find relief from it.

### **Gospel Counsel for Those Who Doubt**

Those who doubt their salvation must be counseled by the gospel. We must bring them back to the old, old story of the cross.

*Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.*

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?*

*And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth (Isaiah 53:4-9 ESV).*

We lead our anxious doubting friends to the foot of the cross and remind them of what Christ has done for them. We tell them of Christ's forgiveness and his gift of

grace so that, *“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved”* (Romans 10:9-10 ESV).

When we repent and believe the gospel, our hearts are radically changed through conversion and continue to be radically changed by the Holy Spirit in sanctification so that fruits such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control are produced. While these fruits give evidence for such a change in our lives, they cannot be the assurance of it. Our assurance must rest solely in the finished and sufficient work of Christ on the cross, that it was enough for every sin we have ever committed and will commit. We can have assurance knowing God’s grace saved us and sustains us to the end because of the finished and sufficient work of Christ alone.

*“For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified”* (Romans 8:29-30 ESV).

As those who are justified by grace alone, we can trust that we will also be glorified by grace alone. This is the hope we must instill in our brothers and sisters who doubt. As we counsel our siblings in Christ, especially those who come filled with anxious doubts, let’s not heap further burdens on their shoulders. Instead, let’s come alongside and remind them of the grace we are saved and sustained by.

### **Let’s counsel them with these words from Hebrews (10:19-23, ESV):**

*“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”*

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## Face Your Doubt, Then Fight It

By David Powlison



**One of the hard things about struggling with doubt is this accompanying second-hand problem—where you are not only feeling doubts, but you're feeling *guilty* for feeling doubts.** The Bible never says that doubt is a good thing—because faith trusts. But, on the other hand, the Bible never says we're to succumb to a death spiral where we're worrying about the fact that we're worrying, and doubting about the fact that we're doubting. We should be able to face our doubts—be able to name them. Sometimes people will say, "Well, all faith has doubt in it." I think we should instead say, "All true faith is trusting." Doubt is a very common, human, natural struggle. Arm yourself to acknowledge it, face it, name it, and then do combat with it—

fighting the doubts hand-to-hand with particular Truth.

## **Rehearse the Promises of God**

When facing doubt, you need very specific Truth. You could have a 3"x5" card—on one side is your doubt, and on the other side is something true. Which will it be? Which will capture and own your heart? You must wrestle your way through that.

My own conversion had an element of wrestling with doubt. I was a skeptic, doubter, and an opponent of Christian faith, but I was won by a promise of God—that He would take out of me the heart of stone and put in a heart of flesh that was soft, and He would wash me in water. And that promise stood against twenty-five years of doubt—of disagreement, even. And the Lord won the argument. Be fully prepared to fight, but fight *honestly* with your struggle.

## Counseling Doubters

By Joey Tomlinson



**You do not have to be a counselor to be well acquainted with doubt.** At some point doubt plagues all of us and we engage with doubters as we journey with others in the ups and downs of life. As a counselor I deal with this issue of doubt all the time and in this

short article I want to address the three most common doubters I counsel on a regular basis and give a few strategies on how to engage them with the gospel.

### **1. Doubt Because of Unconfessed and Unrepented Sin.**

These are those doubters who have developed blind spots and maybe even a hardness of heart regarding their sin. They are miserable and they may not know why. They know something is wrong—that's why they scheduled an appointment with you—but they need to have the Scripture applied to their life by a careful prac-

tioner. I think of David's prayer in Psalm 32:3-5:

*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

Often times I will walk doubters of this type through this particular passage of Scripture. This Scripture helps give them language on how they feel while providing the needed remedy of relief. Listen to the misery of David: unconfessed sin made him feel as if his bones were wasting away, God's hand was *heavy* upon him, his *strength* was depleted as if he stayed out too long on a very hot day. One thing is sure—doubters are an exhausted people. They will identify with the language in this passage of Scripture.

As you take them through this, don't rush through David's illustrations. Linger there for a while, help them to adapt David's testimony as their own. The beauty of this is the hope contained in this passage. David got out under from this feeling by uncovering his sin before the Lord. It may be helpful to discuss particular sins and demonstrate biblically why this brother or sister is living in habitual sin. If they want to come out from under the misery of doubt, confession of sin is the path, not because confession is what saves, but because of who the doubter confesses to—the LORD.

To confess is to humble one's self before God and say, "I agree with you about the condition of my soul and I know that only you have the authority to forgive sins and make everything that is wrong, right." So, counselor, are you taking your doubting counselees by the hand and showing them the path of confession and repentance?

## **2. Doubt Because of the Accuser.**

Satan is the 'accuser of the brethren' (Revelation 12:10). I have counseled people that never seem to have assurance of their faith because the accuser reminds them of their past sins. He whispers to them, "You're disqualified. If people really knew what you did, who you used to be... God doesn't forgive that volatile of a sin. You need to earn your way back into favor." The list of lies go on and on. This type of doubt is usually accompanied by depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, lack of energy/focus, etc. These are those doubters in your church who have confessed their past sins to the Lord, have repented of their past sins, and are pestered constantly by the evil one as if Jesus' salvific work wasn't sufficient for their particular sins.



I think of two passages of Scripture. The first is: *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Romans 8:1). Paul writes this passage in the context of wrestling with his own indwelling sin in Romans 7. Paul needed to be reminded of the gospel and he lived in the same generation as Christ. How much more do we need to be reminded of the gospel being 2000 years removed from the time of Jesus’ first advent? If Paul needed to be reminded that those in Christ are not condemned, then so do we—so do our fellow doubters. So, counselor, remind these doubters that God has no more wrath left for them. All their past, present, and future sins were paid for completely.

The second passage is 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 1:15: *“They saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”* Two very encouraging things come from this particular passage. The first is that Christ came to save *sinners*. He doesn’t want those who *aren’t* ashamed of their past. He doesn’t want those who *are well*. Jesus wants *sinners*, and He supernaturally turns sinners into saints by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, called himself the worst sinner ever. So, even on my worst day I can only be the second worst sinner that’s ever lived! As counselors, we should remind our counselees that Jesus saved the worst sinner ever. So how much more can He save all lesser sinners?

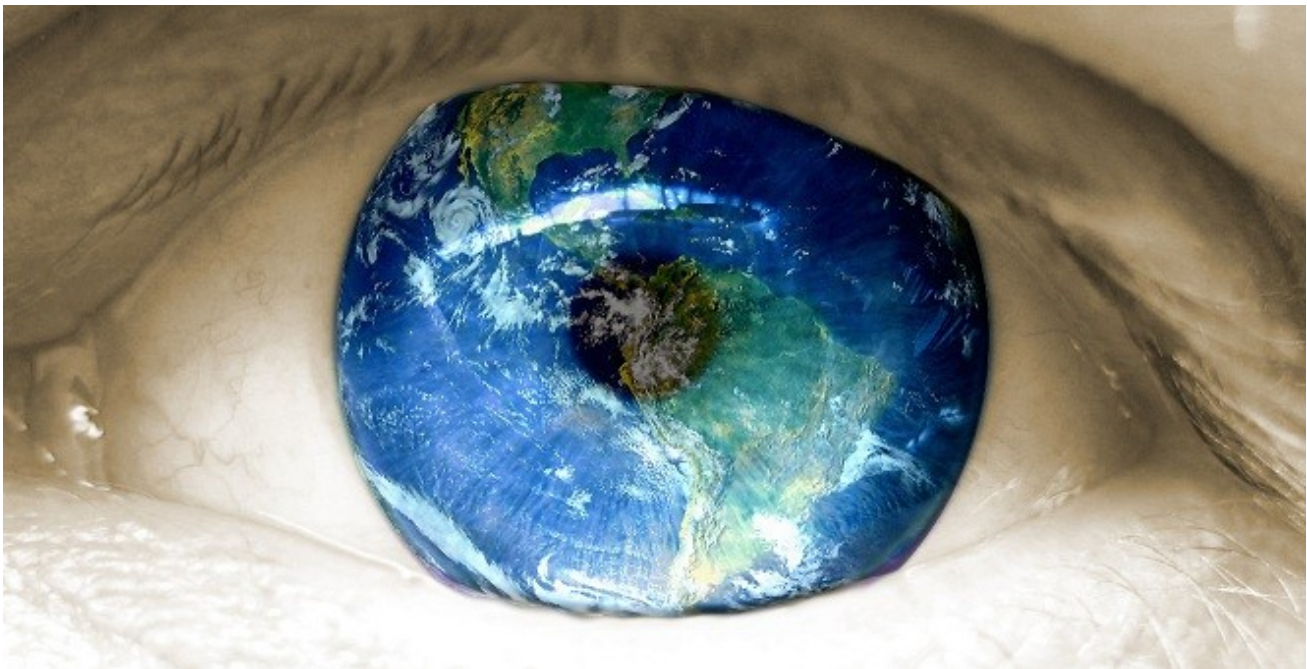
### **3. Doubt Because One is Unregenerate.**

Finally, as counselors we must be loving and truthful enough to inform someone, they aren’t a believer. We don’t determine who is or who isn’t a believer, but the Bible does, and God has given us the Bible and we can utilize it for God’s glory and our counselee’s spiritual good. Here we can utilize this presenting heat of doubt to push the counselee toward repentance and faith in Jesus. The Holy Spirit will use doubt to draw women and men to Himself.

So, we must be listen well as counselors and depend on the Holy Spirit as we show unregenerate counselees Jesus by opening His Word and explaining the gospel. Counselors, God has entrusted us with the important task of stewarding His Word well—counsel accordingly.

## Anti-Intellectualism, Doubt, and the Christian Mind

By Dave Jenkins



**Often, it's thought in our secular culture that Christians are anti-intellectual.** They believe this because often Christians give the impression that they have “blind faith” with nothing to intellectually back it up. I say give *the impression* not to suggest that Christians are anti-intellectual, but that we often give the impression to non-Christians that we don't care about questions, nor about exploring what we believe and why it matters. To be clear, it's *not* that we *actually aren't interested* in what we believe and why it matters. There are plenty of resources and ministries out there that can help Christians understand what they believe and why it matters. Even so, one of the biggest charges by non-Christians is that Christians are anti-intellectual. In this article, I hope to trace some of the rea-

sons for why Christians are viewed this way, talk about how to deal with doubt, and how to pursue a truly Christian mind and worldview for our lives.

## **Christians and the Intellectual Life**

Christians throughout the history of the church—from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century to the present—have all pursued theological studies. They have sought to understand the Bible and then to explain what the Bible teaches to others. This undertaking is known as *theology*. R.C. Sproul famously said everyone is a theologian, the issue is whether you are a *good* theologian or a *bad* theologian. That's true; but equally valid is the pursuit of the Christian mind and worldview.

At the very outset in the second century, men like Justin Martyr were trying to make sense of what the Bible teaches and to explain it to others. Additionally, they were defending the faith from attacks. Primarily, the response to opponents of Christianity clarified Christian doctrine in the first four hundred years and continues today as we seek to be precise, loving, and gracious theologians.

To the Christian, one's mind is not an opponent of the Christian life. It is instead an issue of loving the Lord our God with all of our heart, mind, and strength (Matthew 22:37-40). Jesus says that part of loving Him wholly is to love Him with our mind. When we love Jesus with all of our mind, we will seek to grow in His grace. We will seek to contend for the faith, yes, but we will also seek to grow in the knowledge and skill of handling the Word of God.

## **Doubt and the Christian**

One of the significant issues in Christianity today is the issue of loving God with our minds. We have an astronomical problem according to the statistics with biblical illiteracy. So, part of the charge of Christians asking questions, and even learning how to ask thoughtful questions of the biblical text, is they don't know the Bible. When people think the Bible teaches that God helps those who help themselves, or that Billy Graham wrote the *Sermon on the Mount*, we have a problem. But the problem is not only with just saying biblical illiteracy is an issue. We need to provide solutions that aim to remedy it. We need to apply the right medicine to the problems of the day, not just provide critique. It's a both/and—if we know the problem and don't provide a solution to the problem we are just critiquing the problem. But if we critique the problem and make suggestions to improve the problem, we are exercising biblical wisdom. Biblical wisdom both addresses the problem of sin and provides a remedy to understanding in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

When we come to the issue of doubt in the Christian life, what I've often found is that many Christians think they are nothing. Typically this means they beat themselves up and pulverize themselves into a million pieces. But what does the Bible

say? In Romans 8:1, after spending seven chapters talking about the nature of sin, justification, atonement, and more, Paul turns and says, “Therefore” (indicating that he is about to say something that builds on top of what he has said), “There is now therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” If we flip ahead about 30 verses to Romans 8:31-39, we can repeatedly see the security of the Christian is *not* because of themselves, it is solely because of *Christ alone*.

Over and over again, Paul grounds the security and confidence of the Christian in Christ alone. You see, Christians are saved by Christ from the wrath of God to a life rooted in Him alone, for both the present and the future; not because they deserve it, but because of the finished and sufficient work, Christ has accomplished.

“Pursuing a Christ-like mind begins with how we view the Bible.”

When Paul uses the language of “in Christ” he is referring to the idea of union with Christ. In John 15, Jesus talks about this when He says that He is the Vine and we are the branches (part of the vine). We are *in Christ*. We are no longer enemies of Christ, but friends of God. And since we are friends of God, we are now in Him. We have had our hearts of stone replaced with a new heart, with new desires and affections for Himself. It isn’t because we are so great, it’s because of what Christ accomplished that we are now in Him. So, the idea that we are not good enough, that we are so sinful and deserve only the worst is partly true. We deserve hell and damnation to be sure. We deserve to have the full weight of our sins thrown in our face by a holy God. At the same time beating ourselves and self-condemnation reveal a heart that has yet to come to terms with the glories of the gospel of grace. A heart that doubts the grace of God to forgive sinners is one that may not yet be resting and trusting in Christ alone.

## **How to Pursue a Truly Christ-like Mind and Worldview for Our Lives**

Pursuing a Christ-like mind begins with how we view the Bible. If our view of the Bible is wrong, we have no hope of fighting against anti-intellectualism, since—for the Christian—the Bible is the beginning place for truth, knowledge, and learning about the person and work of the Lord Jesus. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, sufficient, clear, and authoritative Word of God. The Bible is not a book of fairytales and myths but a book that reveals the glory of Jesus Christ as the God-Man.

In the sixty-six books of the Word of God, we learn about the character and nature of God, along with the plan of God that unfolds throughout in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The whole Bible has an entire message for the whole person

that addresses their whole need before a holy God, who is mighty to save and who is soon returning.

To have a truly Christian mind, we must be in the Word of God. As mentioned previously, to be a Christian is to love the Lord with all we are, including our mind. The Christian is not *against questions*; they read and study the Bible to grow in their knowledge and skill of handling the Word of God so they can answer questions. Even so, when asked a question they don't know the answer to, the best answer is not only, "I don't know", but also "I will find out"! That shows the non-Christian that you are interested in having a conversation, and are willing to continue to talk, but don't know the answer right now because you are growing in your understanding of what you believe and why it matters.

In college I had a friend who was teetering on the line between Eastern mysticism and biblical Christianity. He was heavy into philosophy (among other things), so he was naturally curious and asked me lots of questions about the Bible and theology. After a few years of talking about these matters, it became apparent he was merely curious for curiosity's sake. He wasn't serious about exploring biblical Christianity to believe in Christ alone. He was only seeking to add Christian values to his ideas about Eastern philosophy.

Christians reject the idea of syncretism, which is exactly what my friend was doing—melding together a Christian worldview with non-biblical ideas. We reject this worldview, not because we reject people like my friend, but because their philosophy does not align with what the Bible teaches about itself as the foundation for truth. To the Christian, the foolishness of the world is just that: foolishness.

We are to be ready to have an answer for the reason for our faith, but also to honor Christ the Lord as holy in our hearts and our responses (1Peter 3:15). The more we are leading a holy life that honors God by grounding our lives in the Word of God, we will both be able to answer the questions people have intellectually, as well as demonstrate with our lives the truth we profess.

To have a Christian life is to watch our doctrine and life as Paul told Timothy. It is to do as Paul said to Timothy: to be an example in purity, speech, and conduct. That is not just for young Christians, but for *all* Christians. We may joke and jest with people, but at the end of the day, if our joking and jesting are only aimed at self-promoting and injuring others, we need to take a hard look at Ephesians 4:29. Our words are to be seasoned with salt, kindness, and be medicine to a hurting word. We have a message in the gospel that is announced with words. So the words we use matter because they reveal the condition of our heart before the Lord (Luke 6:45). What comes out of our mouths is a reflection of what is in our hearts.



## Final Thoughts

The Christian is to have their lives increasingly shaped by the Bible, not by the world. The more we are shaped by the Word of God, the more our worldview will honor God. We will be able as we study the Word of God and sit under biblical preaching; to reject the world's philosophy, but not reject the people of the world. We will be *in* the world but not *of* the world. We will grow in holiness with other Christians in the Church. We will hunger and thirst for righteousness and to daily enjoy Bible reading,

"It is this Word that we are to hold high before the eyes of an unbelieving world, which denies the truth because it would rather have its ears tickled."

along with the other spiritual disciplines, because they feed us, grow us, and nourish our souls.

The genuinely Christ-like mind is the best response to the anti-intellectualism of our day, as well as the best answer to the charge that Christians are against the life of the mind. No Christian is against the life of the mind.

Christians are for rationality and intellect because of a love for God. That is why Christians have started libraries, published books, wrote articles, started hospitals, and much more out of a genuine love for God and people.

**The best response to the charge of anti-intellectualism and the prevailing attitude of doubt in our culture is an authoritative, clear, sufficient, inspired, inerrant Word of God.**

It is this Word that we are to hold high before the eyes of an unbelieving world, which denies the truth because it would rather have its ears tickled. This is why we are to do what Paul says in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 4: preach the Word in season and out of season until the Lord returns, and to look eagerly for that imminent.



## Is This a Dream?

### Engaging today's Cultural Reality with Hope

By Jason Duesing

*If we shadows  
have offended,  
Think but this  
(and all is mended)  
That you have but  
slumbered here,  
While these visions  
did appear.  
—Puck's Epilogue,  
A Midsummer's  
Night Dream*



It was only a dream.

This is how Shakespeare decided to reconcile the chaos he created in the wonderfully entertaining tale of a different kind of star-crossed lovers in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. In his play, devious fairies deceive and manipulate a cast of would-be spouses causing confusion and mayhem—and the tumult is what makes this a comedy. Just when you think it cannot get any worse, it does. With so much upheaval, the

reader wonders how, or if ever, restoration of order will occur.

In the end, order does come, but not through careful exposition or reconciliation, but rather through Shakespeare pressing a literary reset button—it was all just a dream. In our day, as we watch as our culture disintegrates into what David Brooks calls, in Shakespearean fashion,

“[weaponized buffoonery](#)”, we know that this tumult doesn’t come with any reset button. We may hope and wish that it is all just a dream, but it isn’t and that kind of hope is always misplaced. Believers in Christ Jesus, however, need not ever wring our hands and

“Into these days, Christians should speak truth.”

wish to dream away reality. Instead of escaping, we are to engage, and not with louder rhetoric or weaponized trivialities, but rather with hope rooted in truth.

In the midst of the physical destruction of Jerusalem, centuries ago, the author of Lamentations rightly lamented with sorrow the turning upside down the city of the people of God. Yet, at the core of his somber despair, he remembers what is true, and that ray of sunshine in the darkness makes all the difference. Just before Lamentations gives us the hymn-worthy and life-giving words of the greatness of God’s faithfulness and the constancy of daily grace and mercy from Him (Lamentations 3:22-24), the author explains that his hope amid destruction exists because he remembers these things that are true about God: “*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope*” (Lamentations 3:21). God, then, as now, is and was the same (Hebrews 13:8). He does not change (James 1:17).

**Yet, the same is true of humanity and the culture we inhabit.** Without the intersection and intervention of God’s new mercies, both redemptive and restraining, we are desperately sick (Jeremiah 17:9) and prone to wander and to war. The nations will always rage and plot (Psalm 2). Yet, God still laughs—and we should too.

Into these days, Christians should speak truth. These are times for crafting and signing statements. These are days for determining what it means to stand first with brothers and sisters in Christ (Galatians 6:10) and our culture of comforts second. Our consciences should remain uneasy, and not content, as we carry out this confronting work of standing on and for biblical truth. Yet, even Carl F. H. Henry, 70 years ago now, as he called evangelicals to lament the downgrade of society, he thought they should do so with a smile:

*“The message for a decadent modern civilization must ring with the present tense. We must confront the world now with an ethics to make it tremble, and with a dynamic to give it hope.” [U](#)*

We live in dark and uncertain days, where Mr. Shakespeare’s literary reset button does not exist. Yes, the world is wrong-side up and our hearts naturally along with it. But, as we lament these things, we should also call this to mind: God has not changed and His mercies are still new every morning even as we await our Blessed Hope, the Lord Jesus, who gave himself to redeem us (Titus 2:13-14). Believers in Christ uniquely and always have this message to share.

**So as we find ourselves asking, “Is all this a dream?”** We need to smile more as we say “No, it is far worse...and better.” Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:3-5).

**References:**

Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Wheaton: Crossway, [1947], 2003), 53-55.

## How Susie Dealt with Doubts

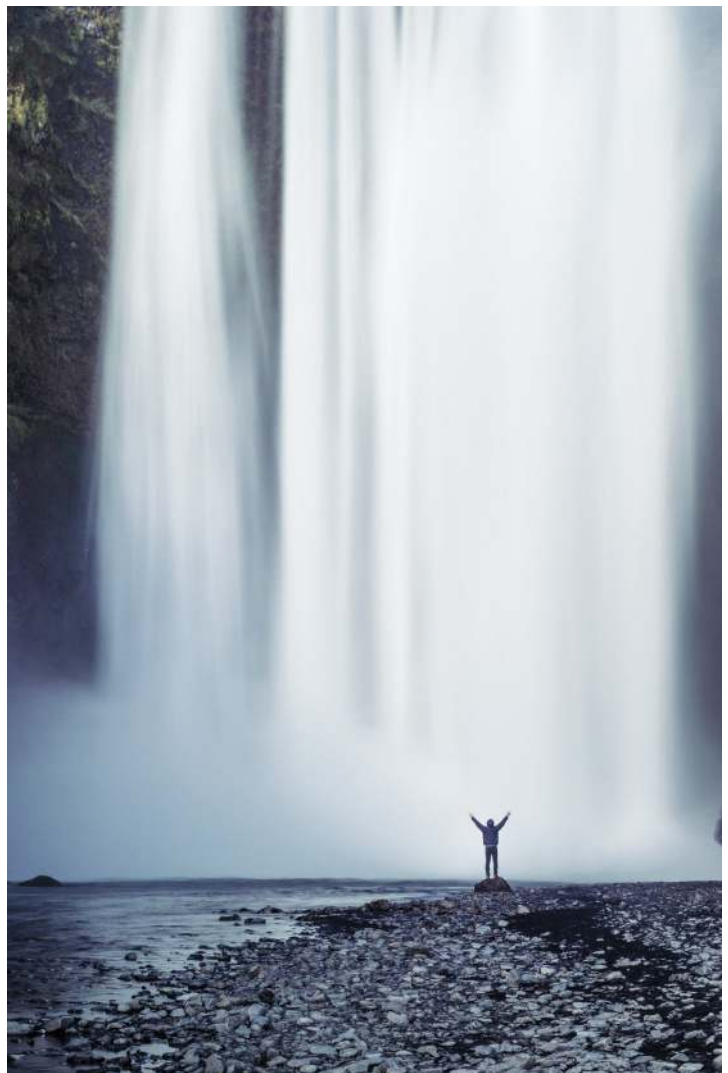
By Ray Rhodes

### ***“Because the LORD loved you.” (Deuteronomy 7:8)***

Doubts and questions often cloud our joy by covering up the rays of clarity. Doubts may come from outside (the world and Satan), but more often they well up inside of us—especially those of us who are prone to timidity and/or depression. Susie felt such doubts and questions, yet she had a “weapon of war against them”.

*“Why does God send you affliction, and sorrow, and suffering, when those who fear not His Name have continual quietness and abounding prosperity?”* When that seemingly impenetrable question is launched against us, we have a ready weapon with which we can fight back and defend ourselves. It is a simple, and yet profound tool of war. Susie writes: *“If thou canst boldly answer, ‘It is because the Lord loves me,’ thou wilt have given him such a sword-thrust as will free thee, for a time, at least, from his cunning devices and fierce onslaughts.”*

God’s love for us helps us to un-



derstand the, otherwise, unanswerables of life. Though we see the general cause for all of our afflictions (sin/the Fall), we often do not know the specific reasons for our troubles other than God is working for His glory and our good through our trials (Romans 8:28).

Are you heavy-hearted? Does your life seem dark right now? Do you feel ensnared by fear of what you imagine to be an impossible situation? Just as Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* had only to remember the key of God's promises, stored away in his pocket, in order to be set free from his dungeon, so we also have a key that removes the lock of doubt and lifts us from the prison of despair. Susie declares:

*"Because the Lord loved you" is a master-key which fits the wards of the hardest questions, and opens the mysteries of the deepest problem. It is a talisman of wondrous efficacy, and every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ may not only rejoice in its possession, but use it constantly to obtain all the desire of his heart in spiritual things.*

What challenges have spun a web of doubt around your heart? Have you received bad news from your doctor? Is it the death of a friend, the loss of financial peace, or a rebellious child that so grieves your soul? Whatever your challenge, *"if thou hast grace and faith enough to say, 'This is because the Lord loves me,' I dare to promise thee that all the bitterness of the affliction will melt away, and the peace of God will fill thee with a sweet content which passeth understanding."*

Susie exhorts us: *"If all that happens to thee can be traced directly or indirectly to the hand of thy loving Lord, how glad shouldst thou bear life's burdens, and how perfect might be the rest in which heart and mind should dwell!"*

**Susie did not write from a bed of ease but as one who had experienced much grief, affliction, and bereavement.**

She saw her challenges as "shadows", which seemed "for a time to blot out all the brightness" of hope. Yet, beyond the shadows, by faith, she was able to see that "the sun has never ceased shining and darkness as well as day has proclaimed the immutability of Thy love."

Susie prayed: *"When the ears of my soul are attuned to catch the soft whisper of Thy voice, I hear Thee saying, 'All this, My child, was because the Lord loved you. Left to thyself, thou wouldst have destroyed thyself; but in Me was thou help found, and the tribulations thou hast endured were but My servants to whom I entrusted the necessary discipline of thy earthly life.'"*

**References:**

Quotes from "A Cluster of Camphire" by Mrs. C. H. Spurgeon.

## The Importance of Complaining to God

By Justin Huffman



### Many Christians simply do not know how to *talk* to God.

And we are particularly uncomfortable talking to God about our discontent, grief, or pain. Yet, the Bible actually models for us how to do this very thing. The Bible encourages us to bring our discontent to God in genuine lamentation. We often think that if we are not coming with words of overflowing gratitude, or

with happy songs of praise, or with full assurance of God's forgiveness for our sins, then we have to wait until we feel those emotions before we can come before God in prayer.

### Brokenness in the Bible

One of the lessons we must learn about prayer is that it is okay, as Tim Keller well expresses, to "be unhappy in God's presence". Although I would disagree with our Christian brothers among the Free Church of Scotland, who feel conscience-bound to sing only psalms in their corporate worship—we make a grave mistake if we do not recognize the value of the Psalms for singing and praying, both individually and corporately.

Lament songs—or "complaints"—often ask questions of God, because there is an apparent difference between God's promises and the current experiences of the



psalmist. These questions are not inappropriate; God is not afraid to answer our questions!

Psalms of lament express deep and real sorrow (Psalm 137), anger (Psalm 140), fear (Psalm 69), unfulfilled desires (Psalm 85), confusion (Psalm 102), desolation (Psalm 22), confession and repentance (Psalm 51), disappointment (Psalm 74), or depression (Psalm 88). These crises can be brought on by shame (Psalm 69), guilt (Psalm 51), physical or medical problems (Psalms 38 and 41), loneliness (Psalm 22), despair (Psalm 88), old age (Psalm 71), oppression (Psalms 22 and 143), or death (Psalm 116).

The fact is we live in a troubled, broken world. We all struggle with sin every day in our own hearts, and we are surrounded by fallen people and circumstances as well. There are times when we simply do not know what God is doing, or which way to turn.

Going to God in prayer and expressing our complaints to him allows us to be real with God, to come to God as we truly are, and how we truly feel. There is not a single adult who is not hurting in some significant way. Songs of lament reflect this human reality.

### **Sorrow is Not Suspect**

We Christians in the West are too suspicious of sorrow and mourning. We may give someone space to grieve for a few weeks after losing a loved one, or a few days to feel discouragement if they are going through a trial—but then we expect them to snap out of it. After all, we think to ourselves, too much mourning is not healthy and true faith trusts in God no matter what, so we are not supposed to be very sad.

While it is true that Christians do not sorrow like those who have no hope (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:13), the Bible interestingly has much good to say about the genuine recognition and expression of sorrow in this broken world.

- *“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart”* (Ecclesiastes 7:2).
- *“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh ... Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep”* (Luke 6:21, 25).

Of course, weeping or mourning are not ends in themselves, but as an accurate appraisal of the situation, it is appropriate. Whether mourning sin in our own lives, or some great tragedy that has befallen others, sorrow is sometimes the only right response.

In our culture, where we are given to escapism and often seeking the quickest way out of any trial, we too quickly truncate the appropriate response of mourning in the face of deep and real pains. Yet it is this very process of facing the real pain with soulful mourning that is part of the healing process, and which is part of agreeing with God in His dissatisfaction with this broken world.

### **Refusing To Ignore the Pain**

Christians come together in worship, or spend time in personal devotion, not to ignore our pain or grief, but to deal with it biblically. And dealing with soul-sorrow biblically does not mean receiving some health-and-wealth promise that if we just *believe strongly enough*, or *pray hard enough*, or *sing loud enough* that all our problems will go away.

No, Christians deal with real problems in prayer by expressing them truthfully to God, along with the corresponding truth that we do not understand them, we do not know how they will be solved, and we recognize that they may not be going away any time soon.

Christians deal with their problems by, among other things, expressing to God their struggles to believe His promises, to trust in His superior wisdom, to rely on His unfailing love. Christians admit to God that we are hurting and that we do not know all the answers to our sufferings.

However, Christians ultimately deal with their problems, not just by expressing them out loud like a patient on a shrink's sofa, but by bringing them to God in prayer. The prayer of lament is, in a way, the beginning of a solution itself. Instead of just feeling doubt, fear, and pain—and trying to bottle it all up or plow our way through it in our own strength—we are taking it to God in prayer. While we are admitting to God our doubts and fears even of Him, we are admitting them to Him—and that is prayer!

**As we see over and over again in Scripture, taking our problems to God does bring about resolution to our problems.**

Not necessarily by ending the pain or removing the loss, but by reminding ourselves in prayer of who God is, of how God works, and of what God has promised. Prayer of honest complaint to God helps us, not just to communicate our problem to God, but to recognize God as *God*, to claim God as our God, and eventually then to exult in God as a result.

## Being an Eeyore in the Midst of Ministry

By James Forbis



**One of my favorite characters in the Disney pantheon is a small stuffed donkey everyone knows by the name of Eeyore.** He's quaint, he's rustic, he is down to earth, but most of all he is the

epitome of the human condition when it comes to doubt. Often times in my life I have resonated with Eeyore. I have at times felt as if all my efforts aren't even worthwhile. I have succumbed to my own self-loathing and tiredness, just as my friend Eeyore has when it comes to building and rebuilding his simple home made of sticks from the Hundred Acre Wood forest floor, or when gazing upon his reflection in the stream. One of the things Eeyore is most well known for is his doubting nature. He doubts whether or not he will find his tail, which he seems to repeatedly lose in every episode of Winne the Pooh, or he doubts whether or not the day is good and if it's even worth going out and about.

***Eeyore, the old grey Donkey, stood by the side of the stream, and looked at himself in the water.***

***"Pathetic," he said. "That's what it is. Pathetic." He turned and walked slowly down the stream for twenty yards, splashed across it, and walked slowly back on the other side. Then he looked at himself in the water again.***

***"As I thought," he said. "No better from this side. But nobody minds. Nobody cares. Pathetic, that's what it is." There was a crackling noise in the bracken behind him, and out came Pooh.***

***"Good morning, Eeyore," said Pooh.***

***"Good morning, Pooh Bear," said Eeyore gloomily, "If it is a good morning," he said. "Which I doubt," said he.***

***"Why, what's the matter?"***

***"Nothing, Pooh Bear, nothing. We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it."***

***"Can't all what?" said Pooh, rubbing his nose.***

***"Gaiety. Song and dance. Here we go round the mulberry bush...I'm not complaining, but there it is."***



### ***said Eeyore. (Winne the Pooh, 1926).***

When I think of doubt I think of the quote above, and I think of Eeyore because all people—especially those in ministry—whether they’ll admit it or not, experience doubt. When the rest of the world seems to be going “round the mulberry bush” and acting as if there’s not a thing wrong in their lives I resonate with what A.A. Milne wrote, “We can’t all, and some of us don’t.”

Most pastors, if they’re like me, worry if whether or not their sermons are truly being heard, whether or not people are growing in their faith, and whether or not people take notice of how grueling ministry can be. Most pastors, if they’re like me, have a time or two muttered the same words my dear friend Eeyore has in some form or fashion because this world is broken and it’s not all “Gaiety. Song and dance.”

At times I find myself looking into the mirror before I leave for the office and think, “Pathetic, that’s what it is”, because I know that my best efforts can never do any true change in the life of a person. It’s all about the Holy Spirit working in the lives of those I come into contact with, but as a sinful man I want to know that my efforts do mean something. I want to see the fruits of my labors. I want to know that it’s not all in vain. I want to know that all the late nights studying for a sermon series

Sometimes I am Jeremiah crying out to God, wondering, “How long oh Lord? How long will this doubt last? Why do you seem so distant and far from me when I need you most?”

or the sacrifices I’ve made to be away from family do matter not only to God, but to the people God has sent me to shepherd. Yes, I have doubts at times. I doubt my own abilities to lead and to preach. I doubt the seriousness of my faith and commitment to the mission of the Kingdom of God. I find myself listening to the whispers of Satan telling me “God doesn’t love me. You’re not that special to Him. He doesn’t hear your prayers for

help.” It’s in those times I’m reminded of the prophet Jeremiah and his open complaints to God about calling him as a prophet and sending him to a people who openly mocked him: “O LORD, you have deceived me, and I was deceived; “you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed. I have become a laughingstock all the day everyone mocks me” (Jeremiah 20:7).

Sometimes I am Jeremiah crying out to God, wondering, “How long oh Lord? How long will this doubt last? Why do you seem so distant and far from me when I need you the most?” Sometimes I doubt my calling because I feel Satan attacking me relentlessly. I feel the critique and hear the whispers of derision. I have been slandered before and it hurts. I have been verbally attacked and it hurts. I have been

“persecuted” by people I called friends and lost good relationships because I’ve stuck to the Word of God as truth. I resonate with Jeremiah in his turmoil and how he’s treated and how he doubts his calling to the ministry.

It’s there, however—in that same passage of Scripture where Jeremiah is complaining to God—that I find myself once more, because God never does leave. He never does forsake those whom He has called out to be preacher-prophets of His Word. He never stops loving and fighting for those whom He has chosen as His own:

*“But the LORD is with me as a dread warrior; therefore, my persecutors will stumble; they will not overcome me. They will be greatly shamed, for they will not succeed. Their eternal dishonor will never be forgotten. O LORD of hosts, who test the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see your vengeance upon them for to you have I committed my cause. Sing to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers”* (Jeremiah 20:11-13).

What these verses remind me of is that God will hold me fast. He will continue to be my “dread warrior”, and He alone will succeed on my behalf. We find this to be the theme of a hymn recently rewritten by Matt Merker: “When I fear my faith will fail, Christ will hold me fast. When the tempter would prevail, He will hold me fast. I could never keep my hold through life’s fearful path. For my love is often cold; He must hold me fast.”

I love that hymn. It has become my hymn, the soundtrack to my life, because I know that my God alone will hold me fast. He who has defeated Satan, Death, and sin will continue to fight my battles for me, and especially the battle with doubt. He has crushed the enemy, and because I know He has done this, I know that He too can and will crush any and all doubts that the Devil may try to worm into my mind. The gloom has an endpoint. Christ is coming back, and on that day there will be no more crying, pain, suffering, doubts, or shame because He is going to make all things new. He is going to wipe away every single tear, fix every single wound, and crush every single doubt every Christian has ever had. He is going to completely and perfectly restore us back to a right relationship with God the Father and with one another.

Pastor, friend, fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, yes doubts in ministry *do* occur. Doubts in every facet of our life and faith do creep in, and at times seem like a deluge with no end. But to quote Eeyore one more time, “The nicest thing about the rain is that it always stops. Eventually.” Amen, Eeyore. The downpour of doubt will end. Christ *is* coming back. Christ will heal all things. Christ will restore all things. Christ will hold you fast.



## Doubting Your Doubts

By Philip Graham Ryken



### Is the Bible really true?

Does God actually hear my prayers? Can I genuinely be forgiven? Will I definitely go to Heaven when I die? Is there truly a God at all? Doubt can be a stimulus to faith, or an ongoing annoyance in the Christian life, or a fatal blow to someone's loose commitment to Jesus. It all depends on what we do with our doubts.

### Acknowledging Our Doubts

One thing we should always do with our doubts is to be honest about the fact that we have them. Doubt is *a struggle to be acknowledged*. Indeed, having doubts is a normal part of Christian experience. We see this repeatedly in the Scriptures. We see it in the story of Job, whose afflictions tempted him to doubt the goodness of the sovereignty of God. We see it in the life of Asaph, who looked around at the atheists he knew, saw what a good time they seemed to be having, and suddenly doubted whether God was worth it (Psalm 73:1–15). We see it in David, whose psalms testify to all the struggles of a doubting soul. We also see it in the desperate father who hoped that Jesus would heal his son from an evil spirit. “I do believe,” he said to Je-

sus, but “help me overcome my unbelief” (Mark 9:24 NIV).

All of these believers were also doubters, sometimes. In a way, we even see this in Jesus himself, in his words from the cross, when he gathered up all of our darkest doubts and expressed them in the interrogative mood: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; cf. Psalm 22:1). Doubt is a struggle to be acknowledged—an ordinary dimension of spiritual experience for God’s faithful people in a fallen world.

## Resisting Our Doubts

But, doubt is also *a temptation to be resisted*. The main person who wants us to disbelieve is the Devil, which is why dealing with doubt can be such a dark struggle. The contested ground between faith and unbelief is a spiritual battlefield, and like any form of warfare, it calls for armed resistance.

Some believers spend too much time doubting their faith, and not enough time doubting their *doubts*. Yes, there are some reasonable questions that thoughtful people have always raised about the Christian faith. But there are also some very good questions that faithful people should raise about their spiritual doubts:

- Have I studied what God has to say on this question, or have I been listening mainly to His detractors?
- Am I well aware of how this doubt has been addressed in the history of Christian theology, or has my thinking been relatively superficial?
- Have I been compromising with sin in ways that make it harder for me to hear God’s voice and diminish my desire for the purity of His truth?
- Is this a doubt that I have offered sincerely to God in prayer, or am I waiting to see if God measures up to my standards before I ask for His help?

All of the doubting believers that I mentioned earlier knew how to fight for the assurance of their faith. When Asaph had his doubts, he went to the temple and worshiped God anyway. Once he was there, he perceived—correctly—that turning away from God would only end in destruction (Psalm 73:16–28). When David had his doubts, he talked them over with God in prayer. And when the half-believing, half-doubting father in the Gospel of Mark wondered if his son would ever be delivered, he went to Jesus and prayed for the gift of triumphant faith.

These are all God-honoring ways to deal with spiritual doubts. Even doubting is something we can do to the glory of God, as long as we do it with God, and not against Him. So as you seek the assurance of God’s love, be sure to doubt your doubts!

## Recommended Reading Doubt in the Christian Life

In this issue of *Theology for Life Magazine*, we've been considering the subject of doubt and how to deal with it with the help of the promises found in God's Word and godly people. We understand that we haven't covered everything on this topic, but it is our prayer that hopefully, readers of this issue of *Theology for Life* will grow in their understanding of it so they can biblically minister more effectively to those facing doubt.

If you've found this issue helpful and would like to study this subject further, please check out the following reading list below. These books are at the top of their genre in both excellence and readability.

### Assurance:

- *How Can I Be Sure I'm a Christian* by Dr. Donald Whitney
- *Assured: Discover Grace, Let Go of Guilt, and Rest in Your Salvation* by Greg Gilbert
- *Assured by God: Living in the Fullness of God's Grace* Edited by Burk Parsons
- *Saved Without A Doubt: Being Sure of Your Salvation* by Dr. John MacArthur
- *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith* by Dr. Joel Beeke
- Doubt
- *Doubt: Trusting God's promises (31-Day Devotionals for Life)* by Elyze Fitzpatrick

### Pastoral Theology:

- *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those who Suffer from Depression* by Zach Eswine

### Person and Work of Christ:

- *The Glory of Christ* by John Owen
- *Chosen by God* by Dr. R.C. Sproul

**In Christ Alone,**

**Dave Jenkins**

**Executive Editor, *Theology for Life Magazine***

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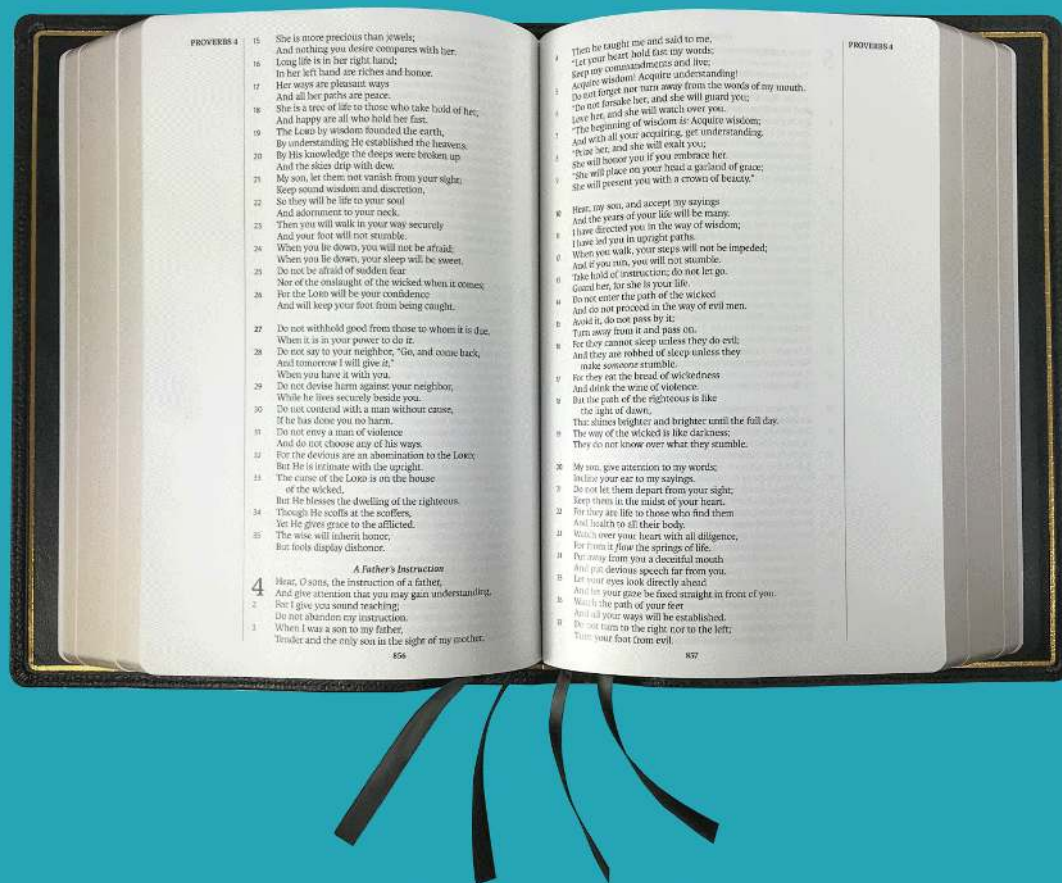
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