

STRENGTHENING THE FAITH OF THE DOUBTING BELIEVER

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

- The goal of this six-week class is to dive into our practical salvation. We want to know what the *real* Christian life looks like on the ground when we face times of doubt.
- We all face times of trial and suffering. We all do things that we know we should not have done. We all don't always *feel* like we are saved every moment of every day.
- What do we do with all of this and how can we keep going in times that we may just want to give up?
- **The Question:** Are you going to cling to your questions and doubt or are you going to cling to God and His promises?
- **Our schedule will look like this:**
 - **Week 1: What is doubt? Is it opposed to faith? What does the Bible say about doubt?**
 - Week 2: What is the root of doubt in the believer's life? How does Satan use doubt?
 - Week 3: What are the ramifications of doubt in the believer's life? How does it affect me?
 - Week 4: What do we need to know in times of doubt? Part 1 (look at biblical texts)
 - Week 5: What do we need to know in times of doubt? Part 2 (look at biblical texts)
 - Week 6: How can we cultivate assurance of our salvation in our daily life?

INTRODUCTION

- "Assurance of faith is the conscious confidence that we are in a right relationship with God through Christ. It is the confidence that we have been justified and accepted by God in Christ, regenerated by his Spirit, and adopted into his family, and that through faith in him we will be kept for the day when our justification and adoption are consummated in the regeneration of all things."¹
- If one believes all these things, all the time, then they would have no worries about their standing before God. This is not always the case, nor is it the normal Christian life.
- Our culture today has a very high emphasis on *feelings*.

¹ Sinclair Ferguson, "The Reformation and Assurance", *The Banner of Truth*, cf. p. 30 fn. 1, no. 643 (Apr. 2017): 20. Quoted in Joel Beeke *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith*, 15.

- There are times in our life that we do not *feel* that we are in a right relationship with God through Christ.
- Or we do not *feel* that we have been justified, regenerated by the Spirit or that we are in His family.
- It is during these times of not feeling what we think we should be feeling that we need to reorient our hearts and minds to something that is more concrete.
 - That is the purpose of why we are going through what we are in these 6 weeks.
 - If we do not reorient ourselves to what we know to be true, we are going to be washed over again and again by our feelings.
- God, His Word, our Church, your fellow believers want *you* to experience assurance.
 - Not in a *feeling's* way, but deep in your soul.
 - We experience salvation by our fellowship with other believers, our prayers, times in the Word, and so on.
- The desire is to cultivate an unwavering belief that you are a child of God and that nothing is able to take you away from Him.
- Every true Christian should enjoy the reality of his or her salvation. Not to have that assurance is to live in doubt, fear, and a unique form of misery and spiritual depression.²

What kind of doubt are we discussing?

- There are two kinds of doubt that affect people in the world today.
- **Firstly**, there are those who doubt that Jesus is the Savior, the Son of God, etc. They doubt that all they have to do is believe to be saved.
- **John 6:42** “They were saying, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven.’”
 - These words were to the Jews who were following Jesus *generally*. They were not necessarily for those who would consider themselves believers but those who were trying to get something from Him.
- The same thing happened with those who were considered His *disciples*.
- **John 6:60** “Therefore, many of His disciples, when they heard this, ‘This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?’”
 - We know this was difficult for them because Jesus says in **verse 64** “But there are some of you who do not believe.”

² John MacArthur Jr., *Saved without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 8.

- This doubt that Jesus speaks of is not a doubting believer but one who doubts that Jesus is the Son of God and was sent from heaven.
- When we talk about doubting our salvation, it is a different kind of doubt. That doubt is the doubt that wants to believe but is having problems believing.
 - **Mark 9:24** “Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”
 - Admitting the imperfection of his faith, mixed as it was with doubt, the desperate father pleaded with Jesus to help him to have the greater faith the Lord demanded of him.³
- Really, we want to differentiate between those doubting all that Jesus said and looking for a way to prove what He has said is wrong and those who want to believe but seem to be plagued by doubt.

WHAT DO OTHER FAITHS TEACH ABOUT ASSURANCE OF SALVATION?

- I want to take a few minutes to look at what some of the other major religions teach about their adherent’s assurance of salvation.
- By doing so, I hope to show that the God of the Bible, the Christian God, is unique in His desire to have His followers know where they stand before Him and in eternity.
- We believe that the true and living God does not want His followers to doubt or not know where they stand before Him.
- The question of salvation is of eternal importance and should never be left up for debate.
- Because of the influence of other religions in our own life, it is possible and probable that we are inclined to think wrongly of our own faith when we put it up against other faiths.

Islam⁴

- Like the Bible, the Quran teaches that people are descendants of Adam and Eve and are imperfect sinners. However, the Quran also teaches that their god, Allah, inspired sin in humankind (Quran 4:88; 7:16–18; 9:51; 14:4; 16:93; 35:8; 57:22; 74:31; 91:7–9). Muslims believe that humans are sinners because Allah has willed it. They have no understanding similar to the Bible’s teaching that humans, not God, caused sin through rebellion against God.
- The Quran’s teachings regarding salvation are inconsistent. On the one hand, the Quran teaches that salvation is based on purification by good deeds (Quran 7:6–9). A Muslim can become righteous through prayer, almsgiving, fasting, and living according to the Quran. Yet the Quran also teaches that Allah has

³John F. MacArthur Jr., *The MacArthur Study Bible*: NASB. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), Mk 9:24.

⁴<https://answersingenesis.org/world-religions/islams-view-of-sin-and-salvation/>

predetermined every person's destiny, and one's righteous acts may or may not affect Allah's decision (Quran 57:22). It teaches that everyone, both the righteous and the unrighteous, will be led into hell by Allah, before the righteous will enter heaven (Quran 19:67–72). Therefore no Muslim can know his or her eternal destiny in this life. Even Muhammad himself was unsure of his salvation (Quran 31:34; 46:9).

- Today, whenever Muslims mention the name of Muhammad, they always add the phrase, "Peace be upon him," because Muhammad's eternal destiny is uncertain, and the Muslim must ask Allah to be merciful to him.

Mormons⁵

- In contrast to the Christian doctrine of grace, the Mormon concept of salvation requires personal, behavioral perfection. In order to be saved, one must attain perfection in this lifetime through complete, unflinching repentance and obedience to the laws of Moses, the teachings of Jesus and the words and direction of the Mormon prophets. Mormon prophets teach perfection is possible in this lifetime, and necessary for eternal life (exaltation).
- "Grace consists of God's gift to His children wherein He gave His Only Begotten Son that whosoever would believe in Him and comply with His laws and ordinances would have everlasting life." (Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson, pp. 353-354).

Jehovah's Witnesses⁶

- Jehovah's Witnesses believe that salvation requires faith in Christ, association with God's organization (i.e., their religion), and obedience to its rules.⁷
- The Watchtower article "What Must We Do To Be Saved?" states the following: "The apostle Paul and his associate Silas urged a sincere inquirer, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will get saved, you and your household' –Acts 16:30-31." Notice the striking difference between the New World Translation of the verse and most other versions. There is a vast difference between having the opportunity to "get saved" and being saved now in the present tense. Similarly, consider the following statement,
 - A MAN once asked Jesus, "Lord, are those who are being saved few?" How did Jesus reply? Did he say: "Just accept me as your Lord and Savior, and you will be saved"? No! Jesus said, "Exert yourselves vigorously to get in through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will seek to get in but will not be able" –Luke 13:23-24.

⁵ <https://coldcasechristianity.com/writings/is-mormon-salvation-possible/>

⁶ <https://arcapologetics.org/what-must-the-jehovahs-witness-do-to-be-saved/>

⁷ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/the-11-beliefs-you-should-know-about-jehovahs-witnesses-when-they-knock-at-the-door/>

- So, for the JW, faith becomes the starting point to a life of effort to earn Jehovah’s favor.

Roman Catholic Church⁸

- One can be confident of one’s present salvation. This is one of the chief reasons why God gave us the sacraments—to provide visible assurances that he is invisibly providing us with his grace. And one can be confident that one has not thrown away that grace by simply examining one’s life and seeing whether one has committed mortal sin.

A Final Word⁹

- Whenever you have a theology that involves human effort for salvation, there can be no true security or assurance because human beings can default. But historical biblical theology declares that salvation is entirely the work of God, which leads to the [connected] doctrines of security and assurance.
- The Apostle John said, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may *know* that you have eternal life” (1 John 5:13, emphasis added). The Prophet Isaiah wrote, “The work of righteousness will be peace, and the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever” (Isa. 32:17). Where God grants righteousness, He also adds the peace of assurance.

DEFINING THE BELIEVER’S FAITH AND DOUBT

- *Faith is much more than the absence of doubt*, but to understand doubt is to have a key to a strong faith, a sound mind, and a quiet heart. Yet more confusions surround doubt than many Christian believers realize.¹⁰
- *Instinctively, we are accustomed to the concept of doubt*. Doubt is uncertainty – or a struggle to believe – in the heart of the believer. Matthew reports that some of the first followers of Jesus Christ had doubts on the Galilean mountain of the great commission (Matthew 28:17). It seems best to understand these doubts not as rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, in disobedient unbelief, but rather as a hesitancy to respond to the risen Messiah with joyful worship.¹¹
- Drawing from C.S. Lewis, there are two equal and opposite errors into which Christians are inclined to fall when thinking about doubt. **On the one hand**, those who are theologically liberal tend to be too soft on doubt, lionizing such notions as ambiguity and uncertainty, and verging on a spiritual permissiveness that becomes a slipway to unbelief. **On the other hand**, those who are theologically conservative tend to be too

⁸ <https://www.catholic.com/tract/assurance-of-salvation>

⁹ John MacArthur Jr., *Saved without a Doubt*, MacArthur Study Series (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 10.

¹⁰ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/i-believe-in-doubt>

¹¹ D.A. Carson quoted in <https://www.monergism.com/ministering-doubting-christians>

hard on doubt, demonizing the dire consequences of unresolved doubt, and verging on a spiritual perfectionism that leaves doubters in such a state of guilt or despair that they dare not acknowledge their doubts to others or even to themselves.¹²

- If you are doubting your assurance of your salvation, it's important to remember **that it is not a sin.**
 - When doubt arises, we must be quick to remember God's ways are not disordered, and He is against the fog of doubt that stumbles our faith.¹³
 - God does not want you to be doubtful...that is what separates the other religions that we looked at from our Christian faith.
 - The Bible is overflowing with assurances about your standing before God and how we can be sure that we are in the faith. (These we will look at further in future classes.)

A Brief Look at Doubt in the Scriptures

- Jesus talking to Peter in **Matthew 14:31** “Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘**You of little faith, why did you doubt?**’”
 - Notice what Jesus says...Peter had *little* faith...not no faith.
 - While we don't know exactly what Peter was doubting, we know that he called out for help from Jesus when he began to sink. So, even in his doubting, he knew where to go for help.
 - Jesus did not chastise Peter for his little faith or for his doubt.
 - **God is not out to crush us when we have doubts!**
- In Jude **verses 20-23**; he gives Christians some good exhortations.
- **Jude 1:20-23** “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.”
- He starts with *but you* to signal that he is now talking to the believers that he was writing to (he calls them *beloved*) ...though we don't know who they were exactly.
 - He was just addressing those who were *devoid of the Spirit*. (**verse 19**)
- What is interesting in **verses 20-21**, is that our actual verb is *keep*.
 - This is important because it is a command (imperative) in the text...as Christians, we are to keep ourselves. Not in just a plain way, but *in the love of God*.
 - **How do we do that?** There are three ways (participles) that Jude uses to tell us how to do it.

¹² <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/i-believe-in-doubt>

¹³ <https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/articles/doubt-a-common-temptation-among-believers/>

- Building yourself up in the most holy faith...
 - Building yourself up in the Word of God.
 - A soldier of Christ must be fully armed with the Bible; otherwise the enemy will cut him down in argument and those he seeks to rescue will become even more convinced of the error to which they have been attracted.¹⁴
- Praying in the Holy Spirit...
 - He makes our ragged prayers acceptable to the Father. So we need not hesitate to pray. For what should the soldier pray? That the Spirit will work in the hearts of those who are being led astray. If He doesn't do that sort of work, you can do nothing. Pray also for yourself that your attitudes will be good and that your memory of the Word and your use of it may be what it should be. **Apart from prayer, it is all in vain.**¹⁵
- Waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life...
 - We are to always be ready for the coming of Christ. This means we are not looking for our ultimate fulfillment here on earth, but with the coming of Christ.
 - Our lives are not our own, we have been bought with a price. Each day we wake up and ask the Lord to use us for His glory in His ways.
- **Verses 20-21** serve a great purpose in the life church and in the life of the doubting believer.
 - There is going to be a large contrast between verse 21 and 22. Those in 21 are the mature ones or maturing believers.
 - They are practicing the spiritual disciplines and secure in the place before God.
- **What are they called to do in the church?**
- He says in **Jude 1:22** “And have mercy on some, who are doubting...”
- This starts with *AND*, meaning it is connected to the previous two verses.
- **Why is this important?**
- It would appear that Jude is saying that one of the roles of the mature or maturing believer is to look out for those in the church who are doubting, who are listening to false teachers and who are going off to follow them.
- What are those Christians in **verses 20-21** supposed to do with the doubting believers?
 - Have mercy on them. Paul says this in the imperative, it is a command from Him. We are to go above and beyond for those who are in the faith but struggling with doubt.

¹⁴ Jay E. Adams, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and Jude, The Christian Counselor's Commentary* (Cordova, TN: The Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 353.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 353.

- To have mercy means *to rescue the afflicted* or *to bring help to the wretched* (this means the miserable or the heartbroken).
 - God is not against those who are struggling in their faith...**He meets them with other believers!**
 - They need mercy. These people need to be worked with gently, quietly, carefully and in a manner that is calculated to set their doubts to rest.¹⁶
 - We have the key to stomping out doubt (this is going to be thoroughly covered in our final class), those in **verse 22** need the help of those in **verses 20-21** to *keep themselves in the love of God*.
 - Is this not what true doubt boils down to in our minds? **Does God really love me?** (this will also be covered in subsequent classes)
- **Verse 23** covers two other types of people, not doubters, they are on the road to following false teachers.
- What can we put our confidence in when it comes to our faith?
- He ends his letter, not talking about how great your faith must be. He does not talk about your obedience and how great you must live your life.
- He ends with the focus being where it should be...on God and His work.
- **Verse 24 “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy...”**
 - The word for *stumbling* means *exempts from falling*. It was used in the context of riding a horse.
 - Jude is saying, God is not going to let you fall off the horse...metaphorically speaking. You are secure in Him so stay on the horse!
- To doubt is human — but to believe is also human. But we cannot escape doubt. Abandoning your Christian faith will not eradicate doubt from your life. Just look at the epidemic of doubt and uncertainty sweeping across the secular world. In the secular world there is very little mercy for those who doubt. The polarized nature of our secular societies means there is only denunciation and cancellation for differing views. But there is mercy for the Christian who doubts: Jude 1:22 says, “Be merciful to those who doubt.”
- **Our God is so great that our doubts do not offend Him.** He does not denounce us or cancel us but pours out mercy on us. He meets us in our doubts and walks with us through them. Let us walk humbly in the tension of our unresolved faith and trust God to meet us in our gaps of understanding. In the words of Dominic Done, “If all we care about is certainty, we lose the beauty of mystery. If all we value is explanation, we lose the joy of exploration. *Deep faith is about progress, not perfection.*”¹⁷

¹⁶ Adams, 354.

¹⁷ <https://calvarychapel.com/posts/doubt-and-faith-of-our-time/>