

# STRENGTHENING THE FAITH OF THE DOUBTING BELIEVER

## WEEK 2: WHAT ARE THE ROOTS OF MY DOUBT?

### INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES

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- 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

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- In this section, we are going to go over where our doubts come from or why do we struggle with doubts in the first place.
- If we can know and understand their origin and continued power, then we are better equipped to know how to battle against the doubts which come upon us.
- Also, we are going to look at how our enemy, Satan, uses doubt in our life to render us ineffective in our walk with the Lord.

## WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE YOU?

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- We all have a desire to understand what's going on inside of us.

### **A Word of Caution**

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- While we should not spend too much time looking at ourselves, it is healthy to examine ourselves and our lives to make sure that we are walking in God's grace and in step with the Holy Spirit.
- Robert Murray McCheyne said it best, "For every look at yourself, take ten looks at Christ."
  - The quote is short, sticky, and it helps to both keep our focus on Christ and protect us from the trap of over-introspection with our own sins.<sup>1</sup>
- **Why is this important?** While we need to know what is going on in our hearts (minds, emotions, etc.), we cannot spend too much time there.
  - If we dwell on our own sin, shortcomings, regrets, etc. it will not lead us to freedom but to further wallowing and despair.
- McCheyne goes on to say, "...Let your soul be filled with a heart-ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ and all that is in Him. Let the Holy Spirit fill every chamber of your heart; and so there will be no room for folly, or the world, or Satan, or the flesh."<sup>2</sup>

### **What does this have to do with our doubts?**

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- When we take our eyes off Christ and put them *anywhere else*, we are going to be looking at something less than what we need.
- It is at that time we are opening ourselves up to go down a road that is less than what we need. Though at the time, it may seem that we are going in the right direction.
- Many have pointed out that the word doubt has ties to the word double. In other words, one who doubts wavers between two conflicting beliefs or feelings or thoughts. On the one hand, I believe God is all-powerful. On the other hand, I've prayed for him to heal something but I still feel lousy. Or I hold to a conviction that God is love, but I also know friends who struggle with depression, anxiety, and fear but no amount of Bible study about God's love seems to lift the emotional pain. I'm of two minds about all this.<sup>3</sup>
- **Here is where we put this together in our own minds.**
- When we have "two minds" about something, we are now entering into doubt.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-purifying-power-of-delight-in-christ>

<sup>2</sup> Both quotes of McCheyne taken from the above article and are found in *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. R.M. McCheyne*.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.crossway.org/articles/an-open-letter-to-christians-who-doubt/>

- Webster defines doubt as *to call into question the truth of something*.<sup>4</sup>
  - Think of it in Christian terms, we know what the Bible says but then we experience something that contradicts what we read in the Bible.
- When we have feelings or thoughts that we are not born again or we have not confessed of sin properly or that we are not fully loved by God, we have a choice to look to Christ or something / someone else for our assurance of these things.
- If we look inside ourselves for too long, we will only walk in disappointment. We are not called, as Christians, to live with our focus on ourselves.
- If we look to outward assurances, they may be helpful for a time, but they too can end in failure. There is no stability in finding comfort in things which have no eternal value.
- That's why we need to look to Christ. (we'll cover what the Bible has to say about this in the future)

## WHAT ARE SOME CAUSES TO OUR DOUBT OR LACK OF FAITH?<sup>5</sup>

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- This list is to show some of the common places that people put their assurance.
- When we examine our hearts and where our minds go when we start to doubt, it is helpful to work through the lies and combat them with the truth.

### **Our hope for assurance is found in the wrong place.**

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- **Automatic assurance:** if you just profess that you believe, then you should *automatically* have assurance that you are saved.
- **External assurance:** if someone thinks that you are saved, then you are saved. It is looking to other people for their opinion about your assurance.
- **Hyper-Calvinistic assurance:** you are saved because it is only a work of God and you have experienced something which has led you to believing. You can see evidence of grace, so you must be born again.
- **Minimalistic assurance:** when one acknowledges that they sin, but then still living a lifestyle that does not seek to please God. When one rests on God's forgiveness but then lives how they desire without any regard for what God

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/doubt>

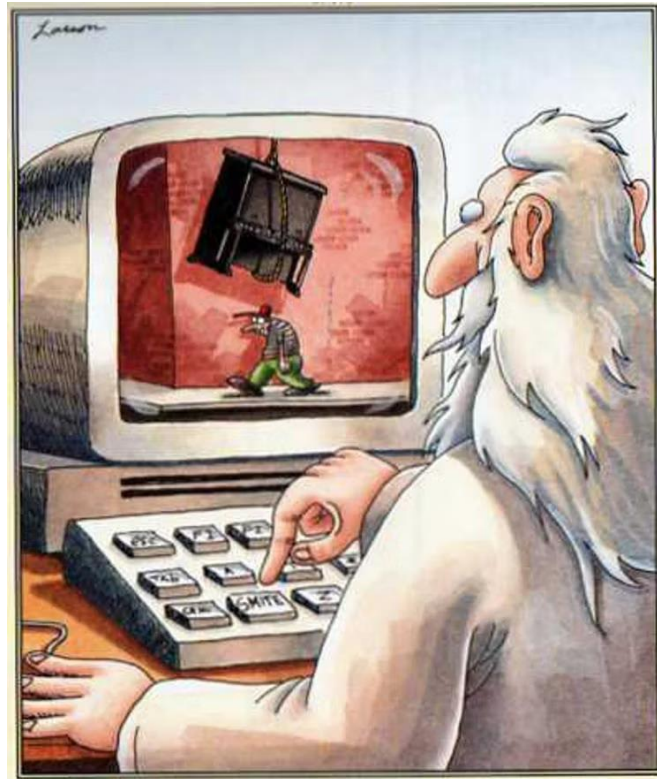
<sup>5</sup> This list was taken from Joel Beeke's *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith*. It has been adapted and modified for this paper.

- **Emotional assurance:** a feeling that has no objective basis in Scripture. Someone who feels that they are in a good relationship with God but cannot really articulate why they feel that way.
- **Legalistic assurance:** you are saved because you do certain good deeds in your own strength. This is a man-made list of dos and don'ts. This promotes a man-centered holiness and puts the focus on my works rather than on what God has done for me.
- **Temperamental assurance:** this is just someone who knows what they know and are very self-confident about it. Their confidence is not based on anything objectively but based upon the fact that they are very self-confident in their daily life so why would their spiritual life be any different.
- **Presumptuous assurance:** this is one who relies on the mercy of God so that they can live how they desire to live. This is one who is cavalier when it comes to sin and indifferent to the holiness of God.
- **Church membership assurance:** this would be one who understands the church, understands how it functions and puts their confidence in their church membership. This view does not see the need for the individual to be regenerated because as a church member, they are already saved.
- **Christian family assurance:** closely related to those who are church members, these people believe that because they come from a Christian home / family, they too are saved. They have said the right things and believe the right teachings, but they have never been regenerated.
- **Promises only assurance:** this view can be tricky and seems to be a good view, on the surface. These people trust in the promise of Christ and that He alone saves them. But, they do not believe in self-examination to look for marks of grace in your life. All you have to do is trust in Him.
- **Unexamined assurance:** these people claim to have a saving faith and in Christ and even a personal relationship with Him. But, when someone comes to examine their faith and sanctification, they are quick to put up their guard and become very defensive.

### **We have a poor or incomplete understanding of basic Christian doctrine.**

- We tend to view God as a punisher rather than a loving Father.
  - **Hebrews 12:5-6** "...and you have forgotten the exhortation which is addressed to you as sons, "MY SON, DO NOT REGARD LIGHTLY THE DISCIPLINE OF THE LORD, NOR FAINT WHEN YOU ARE REPROVED BY HIM; FOR THOSE WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE DISCIPLINES, AND HE SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES."
  - ...this was the message they were to understand from their hardships: God loves you! He has fatherly affection for you. He cares deeply for you. He is taking great pains so that you will share his

holiness (Hebrews 12:10) because he wants you to be as happy as possible and enjoy the peaceful fruit of righteousness (Hebrews 12:11).<sup>6</sup>



- We do not understand the finished work of Christ on the cross.
  - Christ took the full penalty of our sin on His back...past, present and future. We are no longer “punished” for our sin.
  - It is crucial that we remember that everything God feels toward us as Christians is gracious. Even when God disapproves of sinful behaviors and habits and thoughts and disciplines us, it is a precious form of his favor. It’s what a loving father does. He is not giving us what we deserve because he canceled “the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands . . . nailing it to the cross” (**Colossians 2:14**). Instead, he is training us in righteousness. Because he loves us so very much.<sup>7</sup>
- We do not know the role of the Holy Spirit in our life.
  - He reveals to our minds the whole counsel of God as it relates to worship, doctrine, and Christian living. He is the ultimate guide, going before, leading the way, removing obstructions, opening the

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-it-feels-like-god-is-punishing-you>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

understanding, and making all things plain and clear. He leads in the way we should go in all spiritual things. Without such a guide, we would be apt to fall into error.<sup>8</sup>

- We have a poor understanding of progressive sanctification.
  - This is not the process of becoming perfect but being pruned more into the image of Christ.
  - **John 15:2-3** “Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. **You are already clean** because of the word which I have spoken to you.”
- We do not know how to handle our thoughts and feelings in a biblical way.
  - While God gave us thoughts and feelings, they have been infected by sin because of the fall.
  - They are good and serve a purpose, but they must be submitted to Scripture.
  - **2 Corinthians 10:5** “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ...”
  - Reasoning, thoughts, judgments, etc. which are raised against what we know to be true of God, needs to be brought under submission to the truth of God’s Word.
- We read the Bible out of context and misapply warnings and encouragements.
  - When we focus on ourselves, we tend to put ourselves in the worst places in the Bible.
  - Every judgment which came upon disobedient Israel was actually meant for us.
  - We only view ourselves through who we were and can only focus on how far short we fall of reaching God’s holiness.
- We do not understand what it means to have our new identity in Christ.
  - We can either think too highly of this, that we should be like Christ now, or we can not put enough thought into this, that we truly have new hearts and minds.
  - **Colossians 2:10** “...and in Him you have been made complete...”
  - When we realize that we do not need man’s approval or anything else to find favor in God’s eyes, we truly have been set free.
- We do not understand what the perseverance of the saints really is in our Christian life.
  - Perseverance of the saints is not really the *saint’s power in persevering*. It is important to understand that we are not the **subject** of salvation but we are the **object** of it.<sup>9</sup>
  - This is why Paul can say in **Philippians 1:6** “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.”

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Spirit-today.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-perseverance-of-the-saints>

- "...imagine Paul saying, '*Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord . . . except for our own weakness*' (see Rom. 8:38–39). The promise of perseverance, if not eternal, would provide a cruel and false hope of an impossible reality. The truth of the matter would be that we are sovereign rather than God."<sup>10</sup>

## SATAN'S ROLE IN OUR DOUBTING

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- It is key to understand that Satan and God are not equal in the battle. Satan is a created being who is subjected to God.
- Satan and all his ways are against God and all His followers.
  - **1 Peter 5:8** "Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. *Your adversary*, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."
  - Satan is *our* opponent or our enemy since we now identify with Christ. He attempts to make you as ineffective as possible in our walk with the Lord.
- Spiritual warfare should not be underestimated and needs to be front and center in the believer's life.
- We dismiss Satan as a caricature, wearing a red cape and carrying a pitchfork. We not only find it amusing but absurd, with stubborn unbelief in the reality of spiritual warfare. Our instinctive solutions to problems are natural and logical.<sup>11</sup>

### What are his tactics against us?

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- Our own predisposition to Satan and his power plays a big part in the strategy of the devil. **He is quite content to keep us dreading him in fear or laughing at him in unbelief.**<sup>12</sup>
- While Satan has a few different names in the Bible, one of them we need to know so that we can have success in our Christian life.
- Jesus, in talking with the Pharisees said in **John 8:44** "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and *does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him*. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, *for he is a liar and the father of lies*."
- This is the number one way that Christians come under attack, through lies and deceit.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Internal quote taken Paul D. Wolfe, *Perseverance: The Hope-Full Gospel that Encourages Abiding Faith*. "

<sup>11</sup> <https://in.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-neglected-reality-of-spiritual-warfare/>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

- Lies can cause us to doubt. When we know something to be true by faith, but then we see something that questions that belief, we can start to doubt.
- For instance, when we know that God can heal and that He has compassion and mercy, but then we watch death and destruction take place.
- The thoughts can come into our minds *is God really good...does He really care about what's going on?*
- Then the lies can come into our minds, *if God was good, He would have done something.*
- While I don't believe that we have encounters with Satan on a regular basis (he is not omnipresent nor can he read your thoughts), there can be other demonic activity around us, or we can think these things from our own volition because we are still human.
- Do you see how he is lying to you in order to destroy you?<sup>13</sup>
  - Do you hear his tempting and accusing voice? Can you feel his lies in your mind, whispering, "God does not care about you. God does not love you. Obeying God limits pleasure. It is not a big deal to give in to this temptation. Everyone does it. This person deserves your anger. Look how much you are struggling in your life. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

### **How do we fight this battle?<sup>14</sup>**

- God's command to us is not to attack Satan but to resist Satan (**James 4:7**). We succumb to his attacks when we forget the truth of God's lavish and rich love for us in Christ and instead believe Satan's tempting and accusing lies. But we have the power to resist him when we adorn the armour.
- To "armour up" and to be battle ready is to believe the gospel. It is to be found in Christ, strengthened by his grace, rooted in his word, humble in prayer and confident in hope. It is turning down the lies of Satan and turning up the truth of the gospel.
- When you live in light of this glorious victory and hope in Christ, letting the gospel warm your heart and allowing the Spirit to shine God's truth on your soul, you are not just battle ready but on the path to victory.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.