

# STRENGTHENING THE FAITH OF THE DOUBTING BELIEVER

## WEEK 3: WHAT ARE THE RAMIFICATIONS OF DOUBT IN MY LIFE?

### 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 our study this morning, we are going to look at what can happen in our life if we continue down the road of doubt.
- These ramifications are not merely consequences, but also serve as signposts for us so that we can know the state of our own hearts.

## SATAN'S ROLE IN OUR DOUBTING

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- Last week we were looking at some of the sources of our doubt. When we trust our salvation to manmade ideas (either our own or others) or any other external source, we run the risk of falling into doubt.
- I want to cover the section which we did not get to, not only because of its importance as a source of our doubt.
- One of the major issues with Western Christianity is either the dismissal or hyper-focus upon Satan.
- 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>1</sup>
- In other words, because of the way Satan has been portrayed over the years, we think that our issues are easily solvable by our own way of doing things.
- Most Christians, I would assume, believe in the existence of Satan but do not understand (or even think?) the role that he plays in our life.
- It is important to know that Satan or demonic beings cannot inhabit a Christian.
- **1 John 4:4** “You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world.”
- Who is the One in us? The Holy Spirit. Who is the one in the world? Satan and his demons. Therefore, the believer has overcome the world of demons, and the case for demon possession of a believer cannot be made scripturally.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://in.thegospelcoalition.org/article/the-neglected-reality-of-spiritual-warfare/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/Christian-demon-possessed.html>

## **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>3</sup>
- While Satan has a few different names in the Bible, one of them we need to especially 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.**
- Lies can cause us to doubt. When we know something to be true by faith, but then we see or think 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.
- There are other forms of lies as well. *If I don't do something, it's all going to fail. If I don't parent right or am not the best wife/husband, everything is going to fall apart.*
- These lies take the focus from where we get our power, Christ, and put them on our own weaknesses and shortcomings. Our worries become our “normal” and we are plagued with anxiety about a future that we neither know nor can possibly control.
- **Do you see how he is lying to you in order to destroy you?**<sup>4</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.”

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

## **Can you know the different “voices” in your head?**

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- Since the character of Satan is to be a liar (deceiver) and an accuser, we need to be able to discern those thoughts that are “from” him and those which are from God.
- **Ephesians 6:16** “...in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to **extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.**”
- If our thoughts contain any of the following, they are not from God.
- **Fears**...are you being told to have fear...fear of people finding out your not perfect...fear that you won’t meet the standards that you have made for yourself...fear that you don’t love God enough or that He has given up on you because you’re not good enough...
  - These are **not** from the Lord. These thoughts only lead you further into despair and take over your thinking. They are not pointing you to the Lord but keeping you away from the very grace that you need to live your life for the glory of God.
- **Faults**...you are not good enough...you can’t be loved by God because you’re imperfect...you have made too many mistakes...it’s your fault that you’re in this mess so you need to get yourself out of it...think if others knew about your shortcomings...there’s just something wrong in you that can’t be fixed...
  - Once again, these thoughts are not from the Lord. They only focus on **you**, offer no hope and only lead to more despair. This keeps our mind’s attention on all of our shortcomings and the ways we have tried and fallen short.
- **Failures**...thinking on past sins as if we are still living in them today...failed at how you talked to someone...failing as a mom/dad/wife/husband...failing at being a Christian...your life is full of struggles so you must be doing something wrong...look at other people, they have it all together...you’re just no good at anything...all you can do is fail...
  - All of these are simply there to tear you down, not build you up. It keeps you locked into your past and fearful of your future so that you cannot enjoy the Lord’s blessings today.

## **How do we fight this battle?<sup>5</sup>**

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- 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.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

- 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.

## THE AFFECTS OF OUR DOUBTING

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- As said before, when we live in the *shadow of doubt* there are going to be some noticeable ramifications which we can spot in our life.
- These are not just results that we are to live with, but rather key indicators that our heart and minds are not where they need to be so that we can shift our focus and live in victory.
- The Lord never intended for Christians to live saturated in doubt and fear.

### Lack of Joy

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- Most likely, the most discernable heart attitude of one walking in doubt is a lack of joy.
- In our culture today, it can be difficult to distinguish between joy and happiness.
  - It’s okay for a Christian to be happy, the feeling that everything (at least for that moment) is good.
  - That’s not what a Christian’s *joy* is in their life.
- **...how we can be joyful as a matter of discipline or of the will.** How is it possible to remain joyful all the time? Paul gives us the key: **“Rejoice in the Lord always”**. **The key to the Christian's joy is its source, which is the Lord.** Even if the Christian cannot rejoice in his circumstances, if he finds himself passing through pain, sorrow, or grief, **he still can rejoice in Christ.** We rejoice in the Lord, and since He never leaves us or forsakes us, we can rejoice always.<sup>6</sup>
- When we are in a state of doubt, we are no longer putting our gaze upon Christ but on something else.
  - That is usually on us and how bad we *think* we are doing.
- Our joy is the fruit of our gazing upon the Lord.
- How do you rejoice in the Lord if you don’t know anything about the Lord? How do you rejoice in the Lord if you are not seeing things about the Lord that cause joy to rise up in your heart? That is the work of the Holy Spirit. He doesn’t just flip a switch, and you rejoice with no mental content whatsoever. The Holy Spirit is given, according to **John 16:14**, to glorify Jesus Christ, which means the Holy Spirit opens the eyes

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of my heart to see the beauty of Christ. When I see Christ in all that he is doing, and all that he is, then my heart is drawn out in joy towards him. The Holy Spirit bears this fruit by causing us to see the beauty of Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup>

### **Lack of grace filled obedience.**

- The Bible is replete with commands for both the righteous and the unrighteous.
- These commands put on display God's heart towards us and they are there to lead us into fellowship with Him, one another and to guide us in this life.
- Obeying commands is good. We do not want a life which is characterized by lawlessness and unrighteousness. Our hope should be to live in obedience to what the Lord has commanded.
- **John 15:5** "I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, **for apart from Me you can do nothing.**"
- If we are striving for obedience with the hopes that it is going to make us feel better, we are going in the wrong direction.
- Since Christ said we can do nothing apart from Him, we are striving in our own strength and only destined to become more and more defeated.
- A lack of grace filled obedience means that we no longer put our trust in Christ but in ourselves for what we are doing.
- When we are surprised that we still sin or that we fail, it possibly shows us that we were thinking too highly of ourselves and not putting our focus on the grace of Jesus.
- Added to the above wrong assumptions about the Christian life is the belief that the flesh improves and becomes "godly" over time, becoming less temptable in the process and becoming less dependent on Christ. Christians who believe this are prime targets for failure, because they tend to play with fire and let down their guard against temptation. **This is the truth:** We never outgrow our need to depend 100% upon Jesus Christ. Spiritual maturity is not reached by needing less of Jesus but by depending more on his truth and his power to live a life that brings glory to God and pleases him.<sup>8</sup>

### **Lack of communion with God.**

- "Assurance is valuable because it enriches our communion with God. How can a person have close communion with God when he is uncertain as to where he stands with God? how difficult would it be for a

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-do-you-define-joy>

<sup>8</sup> <https://bible.org/seriespage/9-grace-motivated-obedience>

parent to have a close relationship with a child who is unsure of the love of his father? The child never relaxes and accepts expressions of love. In such an atmosphere, a close relationship is impossible.<sup>9</sup>

- For those who are in Christ, this relationship is expressed in different ways throughout Scripture to show the kind of relationship that God has with us.
- I think that it is important to remember this is God describing it to us. This is how He wants us to view our relationship with Him.
- **Galatians 4:6** “Because *you are sons*, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’”
- **Hebrews 12:7** “It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you *as with sons*; for what son is there whom *his father* does not discipline?”
- **John 15:15** “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; *but I have called you friends*, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”
- **Ephesians 5:23-25** “For the husband is the head of the wife, as *Christ also is the head of the church*, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, *just as Christ also loved the church* and gave Himself up for her...”
  - Do you know who the church is? It is the body of believers for all time, past, present and future. It is not a building in one location, but representative of all Christians.
- The Lord uses the most intimate relationship in life to describe the relationship that He wants with His people. Assurance is necessary to realize that kind of relationship.<sup>10</sup>
- Some stop reading their Bibles because it has become a source of pain rather than joy.
- Praying becomes just more condemnation and drives a wedge between you and God.
- Church is no longer seen as the gathering place for communion with God and His people but rather just a reminder of how far you’ve fallen away.
- We can become so inner-focused that we stop talking to friends and family about our spirituality.
- This is what can happen if doubt goes unchecked. This is why the body of Christ is invaluable in the life of the believer.

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<sup>9</sup> Joel Beeke, *Knowing and Growing in Assurance of Faith*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

## WHAT AFFECT *SHOULD* DOUBT HAVE ON US?

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- Much of doubt's power lies in this ability to dismay and disorient — to make us feel beyond the pale of normal Christian experience. How heartening it was to slowly grasp the truth: doubt, though unique in some ways, is a normal trial of faith, faced by saints throughout the ages. One of the devil's first temptations (Genesis 3:1), doubt remains a favorite still.<sup>11</sup>
- We should see doubt, not as something that is outside what normally comes upon a believer, but a trial that the Lord uses like any other trial...to strengthen our faith.
- **1 Peter 1:6-7** “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, *so that* the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ...obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”
- Why do we view doubts as any different than other trials which come upon us?
- “...doubt as simply another manifestation of the old self's ongoing influence (Ephesians 4:22). Our old self is by nature unbelieving, trusting our own words over God's. No wonder, then, that we who still possess “this body of death” sometimes still deal with doubt and unbelief (Romans 7:24).”<sup>12</sup>
- All this to say, it is the normal process in a Christian's life to experience trials...*and doubt is a trial.*
- While we all don't go through the same trials, meaning that we all won't experience doubt, we all will go through trials and sometimes that is going to be doubt.
  - The Lord is going to use whatever trial or circumstance He deems best to grow us into the image of Christ and bring glory to Himself.
  - **2 Corinthians 3:18** “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”
  - **Romans 8:29** “For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren...”
- When the darkness of doubt comes upon us, we need to take action. It may not be a physical action, but certainly a spiritual one. Realize that it is the Lord who is transforming you *from glory to glory*.
- Take this time to dig deeper into your faith and find out more about who God is and what He accomplished for us through Christ. People tend to grow into what they spend time thinking about.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/doubt-a-personal-history>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Jay E. Adams, “I Corinthians and II Corinthians”, *The Christian Counselor's Commentary* (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 128.



- Continue to live according to the faith that you do have. Use this time to intentionally deepen your faith.
- We are not called to live according to how we feel but to live by faith.
- Strive to be thankful that the Lord has placed this trial in your life.
- **It is only in these times of testing that the genuineness of our faith can shine forth.**
- **Romans 5:3-5** “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, *knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance*; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”
- The tribulation that we go through (distress, anguish, burden, etc.) is there for a purpose. It brings about perseverance in our life.
- In other words, as you are being tested with doubts, you are also being strengthened as you are pursuing God more and more. Times of testing are there for us to know the status of our faith.

### To come to the realization that we are not perfect.

- If we expect to know everything and understand everything 100% then we are going to set ourselves up for a fall. The Christian life starts, continues and ends with faith.
- We must be comfortable knowing that there are going to be biblical concepts that are outside of our own finite understanding.
- We have the opportunity to know that God is pleased with our efforts in Christ.
- Only the imputed righteousness of Christ will save us, but that does not mean our good works don't please Him, imperfect though they be.<sup>14</sup>
  - Knowledge and wisdom are pleasing to Him (Col.1:10).
  - Meditation on His Word is pleasing to Him (Ps. 104:34).
  - Discernment is pleasing to Him (Eph. 5:10).
  - Generous giving is pleasing to Him (Phil. 4:18).
  - Praying for those in authority over us is pleasing to Him (1 Tim. 2:1–3).
  - Providing for your own household is pleasing to Him (1 Tim. 5:4).
  - Doing His will is pleasing to Him (Heb. 13:21).

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.reviveourhearts.com/blog/god-pleased-our-progress-not-perfection/>