

# STRENGTHENING THE FAITH OF THE DOUBTING BELIEVER

## WEEK 5: WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW FROM SCRIPTURE WHEN DOUBTING II

### 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 when we sin? (biblical texts)**
  - Week 6: How can we cultivate assurance of our salvation in our daily life?

### INTRODUCTION

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- This morning, we are continuing our two-part series by looking through some biblical texts to learn how Jesus and others deal with believers who may have been *weaker in their faith*.
- The goal over these two weeks is to make sure that we understand what the Bible has to say, in the proper context, so that we can have peace and walk in victory.

## JESUS AND THOMAS<sup>1</sup>

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- John 20:24-29 “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace be with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; ***and do not be unbelieving but believing.***’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’”
- Jesus came specifically to Thomas, not to condemn him for his unbelief, but to stretch out His hands to him and allow him to see what he had been doubting.
- Jesus did not want to leave Thomas in his doubt but rather have him believe.
- “Jesus could have left him to stew in his doubts, but the Lord never breaks the bruised reed. Instead he bears the infirmities of the weak. He accommodates Himself to help us through our doubts.”
- When we see the love and compassion of Christ, to make a “special” trip to Thomas, why do we doubt that He would do the same for us.
- Jesus may not visit you personally, but we have His words to us that we can put our faith in, just like Thomas did when he saw the wounds.

## WHEN CHRISTIANS FALL INTO SIN.<sup>2</sup>

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- Every Christian sins. Every child of light stumbles into momentary darkness. Every prince or princess acts like a rebel at times.
- As Christians in this world, we are sinners and saints. Redeemed, yet still needing to repent. Forgiven, yet still needing to forsake. Confessing Christ, yet still needing to confess sin.
- This reality of our lives is not easy. In fact, few moments in life pain or discourage the Christian more than the instant we become conscious of having committed yet another sin against our heavenly Father.
- **Surely, it grieves us. And at times, it can lead to anxiety, guilt, melancholy, embarrassment, and even depression for many Christians.**

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<sup>1</sup> Idea taken from a daily devotional by Joni E. Tada

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-devyoung/when-a-christian-sins/>

- In the midst of such struggle, the Christian does well to remind themselves of the gospel comforts of Scripture. There is peace to be had and love to enjoy. Our Heavenly Father ever extends His grace to us.
- The Christian also does well to take to heart gospel encouragements. We desire to pursue Christ and work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Philippians 2:12).
- As we tread through this Valley of Baca (Psalm 84:6) let us readily embrace both the comforts and encouragements of the gospel. Falling into sin, though never good, provides such an opportunity.

### **Remind Yourself of These Comforts:**

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- **Forgiveness is yours.** Forgiveness is not a possibility; it is already a reality.
  - **1 John 2:12** - I am writing to you, little children, because your sins have been forgiven you for His name's sake.”
- **A clean record is yours.** Your debt is gone. The Lord paid the penalty, the record of debt has been cancelled, and the legal demands have been met.
  - **Colossians 2:13-14** - When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.
- **Peace is yours.** Grant yourself peace; God has. This is not forgiving yourself, but accepting the forgiveness that God has already granted you.
  - **Romans 8:1** - Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.
- **The guilt is not yours to carry.** It has been born by another.
  - **John 19:30** - Therefore when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.
- **The Father is yours.** God continues to be your Everlasting Father. He continues to direct His love towards you.
  - **Galatians 4:6-7** - Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.
- **Freedom is yours.** You are not forsaken. Your sin does not need to be the start of a life lived in habitual sin. This isn't the end. You remain in the palm of His hand.
  - **John 10:28** - and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.

- **Christ's prayers are yours.** The faithful High Priest intercedes for you. Nothing is hidden from Him and He cries out for you.
  - **Hebrews 7:25** - Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
- **Life is yours.** Your life is not over. You are united to Christ and will persevere to the end.
  - **John 6:39-40** - "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."
- **Grace is yours.** Though your sin may be great, Christ's grace is greater still. We have grace upon grace in Christ our Lord.
  - **John 1:16** - For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.
- **You are not disqualified.** God continues to use sinners for great purposes. God is not done working in you and through you.
  - **1 John 2:1** - My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous;

### Remind Yourself of these Encouragements going forward:

- **You are not yet what you shall be.** What a glorious thought!
  - **1 John 3:2** - Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.
- **You are to be a holiness seeker.** Holiness is a constant pursuit and endeavor. We have not arrived. The need for growth in knowledge, wisdom, love, and maturity echoes in the canyon of our fall.
  - **Hebrews 12:14** - Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification [holiness] without which no one will see the Lord.
- **You are to be a sin-hater.** Sin is an enemy that leads to death. It is no friend, it is not neutral, and it is not worth it! The consequences of sin always prove to be greater than any enjoyment found in it.
  - **Romans 6:23** - For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- **You are to be a soldier.** We need to have a wartime mentality. Every moment of our lives is lived in the midst of spiritual warfare. Our adversary is constantly prowling around seeking to devour us.
  - **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.

- **You are to be a watchman.** Vigilance is necessary. One moment of not being on-guard can be a moment that shapes the rest of our lives, hurts those around us, and grieves our Lord.
  - **Matthew 26:41** - "Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."
- **You are to run the race.** Falling into sin reminds us that we have one goal: to finish the race before us to the glory of God. That is enough. The challenge is sufficient for a thousand lifetimes.
  - **2 Timothy 4:7** - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;
- **You are to grow in the Lord.** No matter how mature we thought we were in the faith, sin reminds us that we have a long way to go (Colossians 3:1-17).
  - **Colossians 3:1** - Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
- **You continue to need grace.** Like a fish needs water, you need grace. You continue to need grace as much today as you did at your first coming to know Christ. Seek it, embrace it, and live in it.
  - **Galatians 3:3** - Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?
- A repentant and confessing Christian has much to remind themselves of when they fall into sin.
- We need the comfort of the gospel and its strong encouragements.
- We need reminders to quiet our souls with peace regarding the past and reminders to galvanize them for action going forward.
- “You can’t go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.”<sup>3</sup>
- We have a great God. Let us never forget that. A God whose grace is sufficient for the past and whose strength is sufficient for the future.

## **GALATIANS 3:3**

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- **Galatians 3:3** “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”
- This verse answers the question *what else can I do?*
- The recipients of this letter were saved by grace, but after being infiltrated by legalist teachers, they were trying to “finish the work” in their own power.
- Often times when we get into a downward spiral with our thoughts accusing us, it can be hard to simply live by faith. A good question to ask is... **if not by faith, then what?**

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<sup>3</sup> C.S. Lewis

- In other words, if you have done what God has said to do, then what else is there that you can do?
  - The only answer is we must put our own standards on how we come back to God.
  - No longer looking to Christ but to something that we think is better.
- When we start to reject grace in our sanctification, we must rely on our works to bring us up to God.
- It is as if we think that we can improve on the work that Christ has done in us by grace, if we can just get ourselves back to a “good” place.
- “Drifting from the provisions of grace into the efforts of law is ludicrous.”<sup>4</sup>
  - This is a poor understanding of both justification and sanctification.
  - Both are acts of God’s grace, but only one we cooperate with in our life.
  - We cooperate, not as if our own efforts are sanctifying us, but as the Holy Spirit empowers us to know what to do, we do it through His power and the result is that we become more like Christ.
  - We are justified with no help of our own.
    - **Ephesians 2:4-5, 8** “But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ... For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...”
  - We are sanctified when we live our lives in the power the Spirit gives us and in the direction He sends us.
    - **1 Corinthians 15:10** “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.”
- To be sure, most Christians find the Catholic doctrine of penance to be abhorrent. Nonetheless, many are inwardly self-flagellated by their guilt-riddled consciences. They know their right standing with God hinges on Christ’s atoning work, yet still consider it to be a fragile reconciliation—one that’s on a perpetual knife edge. God may have adopted them as His children, but they still live in constant fear of being disowned if they commit a big enough sin. For this reason, many churches are full of Protestants who think and act like Catholics.<sup>5</sup>
- In other words, we still think that our *justification* somehow depends on us.

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, *New Testament Commentary, Galatians*. 67-68.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B170327>

- While we would never say that our sin demands more than Christ, *practically* we punish ourselves by keeping our sin (which we have most likely confessed to God of) in front of us, as a constant reminder of how “bad” we really are.
- This leads to feelings of shame, guilt, and thoughts that we are just not good enough for the task.
- Understanding that our sin, and all its effects, has been paid for, is the key to joy in the Christian life.
- When we do not understand what Paul’s saying here in **Galatians 3:3**, we have no other recourse then to try and get ourselves right before God.