

# Dark, Debilitating Doubts

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Some days our hearts can be heavy, and we can be filled with doubts. If it happened to the best of them, it can happen to me.

The Lord Jesus said there **had not been a prophet greater than John the Baptist**. Thousands flocked to the wilderness and to the Jordan to hear John preach, as he boldly declared the message of God. It was John the Baptist who confidently announced: *"Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world."* He even had the distinction of baptizing Jesus.

John was not only a prophet – he was also the subject of prophecy. (see Matt11:9-10) The last of the prophets, Malachi 3:1, promised a messenger would come to prepare the way for the Messiah. And John arrived, promising someone greater than himself and announcing the arrival of Christ. Yes, other prophets – Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, etc. spoke of a coming Messiah – but John personally pointed HIM out. This distinction is why Jesus called him the greatest who ever lived - up to that point.

Staggering claim: Julius Caesar, Alexander the Great, Homer, Socrates, Moses, Daniel? John the Baptizer never even did one miracle. (John 10:41)

But John's circumstances changed abruptly. Herod Antipas arrested John for challenging him about his sin with his brother Philip's wife Herodias. Now he is in prison. Dark, maybe stifling heat and depressing.

The Messiah, yes, He would go about doing good, but wouldn't He also exercise swift judgment on all that's evil and the injustices of society? Blessing and judgment? (Isaiah 61:2)

John started to doubt. As the days turned into weeks and time dragged on, he called a couple of his men to him and said, **"Go ask Jesus this question: Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?"** Luke 7:19  
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You can almost see his hands gesturing his doubts. You can see the face of a dark-thinking, disillusioned young prophet in his thirties as he wonders if he was off-track. How different were his circumstances in a lonely prison cell from the days of fame when people flocked to hear him!

John's mentor Elijah – he too expected one thing and discovered something else. Elijah expected a revival after the dramatic Mount Carmel confrontation but instead, he faced the wrath and threats of that wicked Queen Jezebel. (1Kings 19) Depressed and doubting, Elijah wanted to die.

Think about this today: Did the Lord Jesus dismiss John's doubts? Did He ignore them, or did He scold him for having such thoughts? No! He immediately sent him words of reassurance. He told the men to go back to the cell and tell John: *"The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. I'm the One! Keep focused on Me. Don't lose heart."*

Sometimes believers have very dark thoughts and wonder if it is all for real or not. Others wring their hands in despair, wondering if they 'believed' the right way or not. We can have doubts. We can get really down at times and have some awfully dark thoughts.

**Thomas** did - John 20:25; **John the Baptist** did - Luke 7:20 (Matthew 11:2-5); Peter **did**. - Matthew 14:29-30 (O, you of little faith, why did you doubt?)

Also, this is something to consider - God does not belittle us if our faith is less than perfect. There are 3 examples of **imperfect faith** in the Gospels.

**Mark 1:40 IF man with leprosy.** "IF you will, you can make me clean"

**Mark 5:28 IF woman touching** the hem of His garment

**Mark 9:22 IF Father with the son with the seizures** "IF you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

..... All three encounters with Christ are prefaced with the word IF - suggesting they weren't *fully* trusting in His unique abilities - but the Lord responded to them despite their imperfect faith.

## REASONS

**Why you may have doubts.**

**1) DUBIOUS OR WRONG DOCTRINE** – There are believers who are taught they could jeopardize their salvation by their failures and sin.

They have been told that it's presumptuous to think you can be spiritually secure. Absolute assurance would bring carelessness into one's life; so, one must always be fearful of losing it. Salvation is a joint effort they are told. "Yes, Jesus' sin-atoning death was absolutely necessary to deal with sin – but I must do my part." They think salvation depends on *God and me*.

Assurance of salvation is the Biblical norm. The Apostle John said (1John5:13) "*I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you have eternal life.*"

Our Christian faith is one that rests 100% on the death, burial and indisputable and triumphant resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is a secure faith. God's satisfaction with Christ.

There's uncertainty about who the author of this hymn was back in the 1700's, but there was no uncertainty in the author's mind as to the foundation he was resting upon.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
who unto the Savior for refuge have fled?

In every condition, in sickness, in health,  
in poverty's vale, or abounding in wealth,  
at home and abroad, on the land, on the sea,  
as days may demand, shall thy strength ever be.

Fear not, I am with thee; O be not dismayed,  
for I am thy God and will still give thee aid.  
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,  
upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,  
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;  
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,  
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
 My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.  
 The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
 thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose  
 I will not, I will not desert to his foes;  
 that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,  
 I'll never, no never, no never forsake!

**Four things that don't fall under the heading of *wrong doctrine* but definitely fall under DUBIOUS Teaching:**

- a. **(Feelings)** If you are a Christian who has a background in a faith community where exhilarating feelings and triumphal experiences are showcased as the pinnacle of true spirituality – you may experience doubts frequently. Because, like the tides, feelings ebb and flow. Because, like a shook-up can of Pepsi or Coke, the effervescence soon subsides
- b. **(Preoccupation with Rooting out False Professions)** If a Christian has been exposed to constant teaching or preaching about false professions, one may experience doubts. An excessive, unbalanced, preoccupation with false professions in someone's preaching – could create anxiety and unsettle a believer.
- c. **(Unrighteous Living)** An unbalanced and harsh approach towards Christian failure and succumbing to temptation and repeating sins could cause a person to doubt.
- d. **(Memory of the Moment)** An unbalanced emphasis on the moment of salvation may cause a Christian to focus on their memory and their recollection of the *event*, as opposed to their appreciation of Christ and evidence of the Spirit of God and the fruit of the Spirit. When a believer begins to suffer from dementia, isn't it awesome their eternal security rests on Christ and not on their ability to vividly recall the details of exactly 'when' and 'how' they trusted Christ. The clarity may dissipate but the foundation is secure – Christ!

**2) SPIRITUAL DEVOTION** - Prayer, Bible study, and worship may have been neglected. We cannot survive or walk closely with the Lord if we are not reading and praying. It is a relationship! We can grow very distant in that relationship if we are not communing with the Lord – talking with Him daily in our prayers and reading His Word.

1John Chapter 2:3: *“By this we know that we know HIM, if we keep His commandments. One of the signs of salvation is that there is a **loving desire** to obey the Lord and do what is right. If there's no kind of a desire to please God and there never has been, then something is missing. Relationships are real.*

Having said that, none of us constantly have within us the burning desire to please the Lord that we should have. Sometimes when our heart is on fire or stirred - we really want to please Him. Then, there are other times when we aren't feeling as close to the Lord as we should - so the big desire to please the Lord is not as evident.

Do not compare yourself to other Christians and think: “Why am I not always enthused and on fire for the Lord? Why can't I be brave like they are and witness for Christ and share the Gospel with everyone?” Get your eyes off other Christians and focus them on Christ and what Christ has done for you.

There are days when we feel as cold as ice – even weeks. But if a person digs-down deep enough in a real Christian's heart - somewhere amidst everything else going on in their heart – there's a tugging at the heart-strings to please the Lord...even if it is not a strong tug!

An unbeliever does not even have the slightest tugging to do something for Christ *because* He died for them. They have no devotional desire towards Christ – not even a weak one!

If you are ever struggling with doubts, take one hour to write a 250-word paragraph about what Christ means to you – what you think of Christ. An unbeliever has no personal connection with Christ – it's vacant. A dead spot.

**3) WILFUL DISOBEDIENCE** – If I have been making choices that grieve my Lord and violate His Word and the holy direction He has for me in my life, I could seriously doubt my salvation.

Heb.10:22 “Let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” To live in sin is to live in doubt.

Of course, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. Every single child of God who ever lived, has failed – has sinned. 1John 1:8-9

Sin is disobedience. When we give in to the wicked desires of our rotten flesh – in reality, we are committing an act of willful disobedience. But the struggle can be intense and tiring – right?

Believe it or not – one of the signs of salvation is when a person has a new struggle, a new tug of war going on within. One side of them is saying: “*I don't want to do it!*” But another voice within is saying: “*Come on – do it just one more time. You'll like it.*”

All Christians have a desire to please the Lord, but they also experience failure with sin. They have a battle and a struggle raging inside.

Some temptations are stronger than others. Sadly, we succumb to it. Sadly, we fail. Until I confess that sin to the Lord, I will feel distant from the Lord – like the days when I used to disobey my parents and grieve them. Until I said I was sorry, I felt awkward sitting at the kitchen table with them.

Then, there's the frustration of repeating the same sin and we are embarrassed to confess it again to the Lord. But confess it - we must. Even the greatest characters in the Bible sadly repeated their sins. e.g. Abraham, Moses, Peter to name a few. Sin should never be normalized in our lives, but we need to know that we are not the first child of God who has struggled with the same sin throughout our lives. I know Christians who have struggled with controlling their outbursts of anger (flash-rage) all their lives! But now they are with the Lord and their struggles with their sinful flesh have come to a complete end.

Sometimes the struggle can be so strong - that a person wonders if they can really be saved or not. But the fact that a person is even feeling the struggle is a healthy sign. If there were no struggle – there would be no new life.

Naturally we do not want to please God. But Galatians tells us that the flesh battles with the Spirit. The Apostle Paul had a huge struggle raging within him – read it in Romans 7:15-20. Our wicked flesh hates the presence of the indwelling Spirit of God in a Christian's life. So, the fact that you feel the struggle and you want to please the Lord even though you sin - is a sign you HAVE eternal life. If you didn't feel a struggle - then that would be a sign of no new life within.

If you read 1John 2:3 and 1John 3:18-22 you will see that the more we obey Him and do the things that please the Lord, the greater the assurance we will have of our salvation – when we are walking closely with the Lord,

the greater the peace will be – the greater our confidence will be – because we are pleasing Him and enjoying the vertical relationship.

**4) DARK DISILLUSIONMENT** - A person may have inadequate or erroneous understanding about God or about the daily Christian life. Have you ever heard of *Prosperity Gospel* preaching? Some of these television preachers are making mega-bucks, as they tell people that God wants to put one big perpetual smile on your face that will never wear-off, and to fill your pockets with cash and transform you into a super-happy person that's triumphant on every occasion and always feels the smiling approval of God and without exception, is always rejoicing in positive forward and progressive momentum in their lives.

All *peaches and cream* after salvation! That's not what Jesus promised His followers. John 16:33

Christians experience trials and tears and troubles. Sometimes, the circumstances and vicissitudes of life can cause a rock-solid believer to have doubts. Doubts are not always about salvation. Doubts can be about the Character of God. Asaph in Psalm 73 was having major doubts about his walk with the Lord and whether it was paying-off or panning-out.

We can forget the context of Paul's beautiful words about the impossibility of ever being separated from the love of God.

*"What can or who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?....."*

*'I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Don't you love Romans 8! – especially after you read about the struggles and temptations we are plagued with in Romans chapter 7.

**5) CLINICAL DEPRESSION** - Physical or emotional difficulties may be causing the person to doubt his salvation. Professional help is needed for a clinical depression.

Requiring professional help is not a sign of spiritual failure or weakness; nor is it something of which you should be ashamed or embarrassed and secretive about.

This is taken from mayoclinic.org.

Signs and symptoms of clinical depression may include:

- Feelings of sadness, tearfulness, emptiness or hopelessness
- Angry outbursts, irritability or frustration, even over small matters
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most or all normal activities, such as sex, hobbies or sports
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia or sleeping too much
- Tiredness and lack of energy, so even small tasks take extra effort
- Reduced appetite and weight loss or increased cravings for food and weight gain
- Anxiety, agitation or restlessness
- Slowed thinking, speaking or body movements
- Feelings of worthlessness or guilt, fixating on past failures or self-blame
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions and remembering things
- Frequent or recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts, suicide attempts or suicide
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches

Symptoms are usually severe enough to cause noticeable problems in relationships with others or in day-to-day activities, such as work, school or social activities.

There are awesome believers who are living fruitful and productive spiritual lives who, periodically or regularly, battle clinical issues with their mental health. This is not a closet illness.

Based on the above list, if this is your experience, you need to get professional help.

**6) SATANIC DETERMINATION** – Never forget that Satan is an accuser of brothers and sisters in Christ. He has always been going ‘to and fro’ around the world spying on lovers of God. Think of him in the Garden of Eden. Think of his surveillance flights over Job and his reconnaissance maneuvers down through the ages ....

Peter wrote that our ‘adversary the devil, as a roaring lion walks about (or perhaps a more apt and accurate rendering is Satan prowls around) seeking whom he may devour....’ 1Peter Chapter 5

Satan tempts you to sin and, if you give in to the impulses of the flesh and sin – then he harasses you after you have confessed your sin. He whispers, sometimes escalating into a scream – “*You can’t be saved after what you did.*” He hounds and harasses.

There is never an age in our lives or a month in our lives when Satan leaves us alone – even if it is the last month of our lives. Often when we are weary and tired, he will attack us. He looks not only to attack us in our strengths – but also in our vulnerable moments. He is determined. He knows he can not rob us of our salvation, so he works at robbing us of our joy and dimming our brightness for Christ.

**7) PERPETUAL DITHERING** - Some people just have doubting and dithering personalities – always 2<sup>nd</sup> guessing themselves. “Maybe I shouldn’t have taken this job.” “Perhaps I said the wrong thing to the salesperson.” “Maybe I shouldn’t go on the trip.” “I shouldn’t have thought the Lord had come. God must be speaking to me.”

**8) GENUINELY DEAD** -Some have doubts because they never had Christ in the first place. They may have a verse. They may have a moment. They may have an experience. They may have gone forward and knelt at an altar. They may have recited a prayer. Whatever it was, some are plagued with doubts because they are still genuinely dead in their sins.

## RELIEF

Let’s remind ourselves that we need a Christian environment and fellowship where we can talk about our dark days and our doubts.

Sometimes we may unintentionally promote triumphalism – where we are to present ourselves to others with the façade of: “*Everything is great. God is good. My heart is overflowing.*” When, in fact, I am an empty shell. Well, not empty – a shell, an external form filled with internal fears and doubts.

Dear child of God - Do what John did if you are experiencing dark thoughts or doubts. **John went to the right source to cure his doubts.** Go back to Christ Himself and re-discover Him. When we go to Him with our fears and doubts, He will reassure us through His Word. When we talk to Him in prayer He will pour in the strength to carry on for the rest of today and then tomorrow. He will supply us with a fresh supply of grace and strength.

Listen to Him whisper in your heart today: “*I’m the One. Keep focused on me. Don’t lose heart. I began the good work in you - I will complete it. Trust me.*”

Read His reassuring words in John 10:27-29: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. **And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish**; neither shall anyone pluck or snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to pluck or snatch them out of My Father's hand.”

## RECOVERY

- **Repentance** – if there's sin – even the sin of unbelief
- **Refocus on the inerrant**, totally reliable Word of God and the absolute sufficiency of the work of Christ.
- **Revisit and learn more** about your security and standing in Christ. Learn to distinguish between our standing forever and our state today. The root of our belief and the fruit of our behaviour.
- **Renew** your tenderness and love for Christ
- **Restructure** your life to **remove or restrict** the culprits that got you into this condition.

We started this essay off with John the Baptist. What did Jesus mean in Matthew 11:11 “He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (John the Baptizer)?

John was the last in a long line of prophets who pointed Jesus out. He did it personally. Now, any and every believer has the privilege of doing exactly what John did and even more clearly – post Calvary. We can point Jesus out and speak of His Work. This is true greatness – a believer's ability to point Christ out with greater clarity and understanding than all His forerunners, the prophets ever could.

You may find it helpful to read about the Chilean Miners on [heaven4sure.com](http://heaven4sure.com). Go to the search function on the website and enter 'Chilean' and it will bring up the story. Or click on this link:

<https://heaven4sure.com/2010/10/26/the-miners-had-a-choice-so-do-you-heaven4sure-com-life-lessons-2/>

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## Post Script

Here are a couple of visual examples:

Is it the work Christ did 2000 years ago that saves you or the degree of your faith in the work of Christ that saves?

Feelings

Faith

FACT

The coloured box *FACT* is the very foundation of it all – and that’s what Christ accomplished on the Cross. The death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ! That’s the *FACT*! Resting upon the trustworthiness of God and His Word. Picture the middle word (Faith) above as **you** - resting on top of the Fact. Faith stretched out on top of Firm, Foundational Fact - as if you were relaxed and resting on mattress. What is holding you off the floor? The mattress. And you are reclining and resting as you should be. Stretched out, relaxed without the slightest worry. Complete rest. Ideally – every Christian’s experience!

Now picture Faith (you) no longer stretched-out and resting comfortably on top of mattress *FACT*. Picture it jumbled and scattered. What is keeping you off the floor now? Sometimes we can *FEEL* scrambled and jumbled – a big muddle. Satan loves it when we are confused; but, even in our confused state – does it alter the *FACT*? Even when we are completely befuddled, it is still the *FACT* the keeps us off the floor or, keeps us in Christ – if you want to complete the analogy.

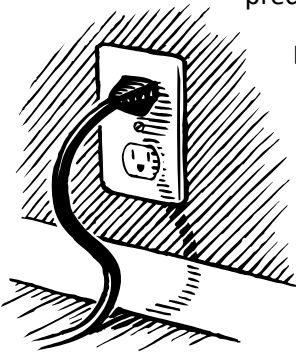
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**FACT**

What is faith? Faith is nothing more than the part that makes the connection.

Using an electrical analogy ---- The power comes from what’s behind the electrical outlet in the wall. It could be an old cord and plug - taped together with electrical-tape or even duct-tape. The prongs on the plug could be bent or twisted and, the plug could be pretty cruddy looking. What makes the old lamp-light come on? It happens precisely when the old shabby plug made contact with the power source.



But this is where the electrical analogy breaks down. A poorly designed plug could fall out of the outlet again. It could work its way loose and fall to the floor and the light would go out. But spiritually, once the first spark of contact is made from the weakest faith plug-in – God takes over completely and makes sure the contact is never lost again – regardless of the shape the old cord and plug is in.