



Doubt

## THE THOMAS FACTOR: TREATING DOUBT

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(John 20:24-29)

**D**oubt is a common experience. Unfortunately, it's been given a bad rap. Doubt is often referred to as the opposite of faith—unbelief or the unpardonable sin. It is also erroneously defined as something one ought not to admit. Questioning God can be sinful, but it is not always so. When properly handled, doubt can be the first step to a positive, strong, and dynamic faith.

### BIBLICAL EXAMPLES OF DOUBT

During his severe suffering, Job began to doubt God. He learned a tremendous lesson, however, when he realized that he knew enough about God to trust Him in the many things he did not understand (Job 42:1-6). Abraham is known as the man of faith, and yet on many occasions he showcased his doubts. In spite of the promise that all people would be blessed through him, Abraham still asked for assurance (Gen. 15:8). Later, when God repeated His promise, Abraham went so far as to laugh at God (Gen. 17:15-17). He even lied twice about his wife, Sarah, in order to save his life—indicating that he was unsure about God keeping His promises to protect him (Gen. 12:10-20; 20:1-8).

The New Testament provides still other instances. John the Baptist wanted to know if Jesus was really the Messiah, or if he should look for someone else (Luke 7:18-30). Thomas questioned the Lord's resurrection (John 20:24-29). Paul related his struggle with unanswered prayer (2 Cor. 12:7-10).

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF DOUBT

There are three primary types of religious doubt: factual, emotional, and volitional. *Factual doubt* is identified by questions concerning one's grounds for belief—whether or not Christianity is based on a

solid foundation. *Emotional doubt* stems from passions and moods. It is intermingled by other struggles in one's life such as anxiety or depression. *Volitional doubt* is concerned with the will. It is mainly related to issues like weak faith, forsaking one's motivation to follow God.

Doubt sometimes follows a person through, including all three types of doubt. For example, people's unanswered factual questions may bother them, affecting their emotions. They grow upset with God for not meeting their needs. Later, these emotions also attack their motivation as they wonder why they should follow the Lord any longer.

### RESPONDING TO DOUBT

It is important to be able to correctly identify the type of doubt. If people are uncertain about the nature of their sickness and take the wrong medicine, they should not be surprised if it does not work. Doubt can be the same way. If people do not correctly diagnose the type of doubt, they should not be surprised if their misguided response fails to bring relief.

*Factual doubt* can often be handled by pointing out the many evidences for Christian truth. When Thomas expressed his doubt, Jesus said, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be

unbelieving, but believing" (John 20:27).

*Volitional doubt* is the most dangerous type. At that point, people may have little desire to follow the Lord, and that sometimes makes them unwilling to listen to reason, to study the facts, or to care about the truth. People who have volitional doubt may need help from those who understand the issues involved and are concerned enough to lovingly confront them. In particular, volitional doubters need to be challenged in terms of their loss of motivation.

The middle one, *emotional doubt*, is the most common type. It is often the most painful, frequently distinguished by tattered feelings and distraught emotions. Emotional doubters usually judge the facts surrounding their beliefs based on how they *feel* about those beliefs. They often think they are asking about the truth of Christianity when in fact they are merely reflecting on their feelings. Rather than giving in to one's emotions, Scripture teaches people to think and practice truth. In Philippians 4:6-9, Paul tells believers to pray, give thanks and praise, change their thinking, and practice these teachings regularly. Similarly, Peter tells Christians to give their concerns to God (1 Pet. 5:7). The psalms promote praise and thanksgiving as the antidotes to unruly emotions, for it is almost impossible to praise or give thanks to God without one's moods changing almost immediately (Ps. 42:5, 6). Changing one's thinking patterns is also a key to victory. Paul commands Christians to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2).

Finally, Christians dealing with emotional doubt must continually practice truth. They must center their hearts on God and His kingdom, laying up treasures in heaven in order to nullify worry (Matt. 6:19-34). Before their emotions get involved, Christians must deliberately change their thought pattern at the very

moment of doubt, substituting God's truth. Christians must constantly practice God's truth until it soothes the doubt. This can be done in many ways: repeating the truth, writing it on cards, meditating on it, thanking and praising God, giving Him our worries in prayer, and recalling His promises to us.

#### **OVERCOMING DOUBT**

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The believer who doubts God because of personal pain needs to internalize the same lesson that Job learned. We also know enough about God to trust Him in those painful areas that we do not understand. Since God raised Jesus from the dead, thereby insuring heaven (1 Pet. 1:3-5), we have an *ultimate* answer to suffering. The victory comes as a process. Much like medicine that must be taken for one to feel better, these biblical principles can provide victory over struggles with doubt.

#### **FURTHER MEDITATION:**

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Other passages to study about the issue of doubt include:

- > Psalms 43:5; 55:4-8, 16-18, 22
- > Lamentations 3:19-24
- > Matthew 12:38-40
- > Luke 7:18-30; 24:36-43
- > 2 Corinthians 4:8, 16-18
- > Philippians 4:6-9

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To Learn More: Turn to the key passage note on doubt at Matthew 11:1-6 on page 1246. See also the personality profile of Thomas on page 1407.

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to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

<sup>16</sup>Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him,<sup>a</sup> "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).

<sup>17</sup>Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"

<sup>18</sup>Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord,<sup>a</sup> and that He had spoken these things to her.

#### THE APOSTLES COMMISSIONED

<sup>19</sup>Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled,<sup>a</sup> for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."

<sup>20</sup>When He had said this, He showed them His hands and His side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

<sup>21</sup>So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." <sup>22</sup>And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. <sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

#### SEEING AND BELIEVING

<sup>24</sup>Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.

<sup>25</sup>The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord."

So he said to them, "Unless I see in His

**20:16** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text adds *in Hebrew*. **20:18** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads *disciples, "I have seen the Lord," . . .*

**20:19** <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *assembled*.

### PERSONALITY PROFILE



#### Doubt

## THOMAS: FROM DOUBT TO FAITH

(JOHN 20:24-29)

"Doubting Thomas" was really no different from the rest of the disciples—and no different from much of the modern world. He may have been skeptical by nature, but, in reality, none of the other disciples truly understood that Jesus would come back to life until they saw Him with their own eyes.

Thomas wasn't present when Jesus first appeared to the other disciples, and he refused to believe the astonishing news that Jesus had risen from the dead. Thomas insisted that unless he touched the wounds of Jesus, he would not believe. Thomas wanted proof. When he got that proof, however, he had no trouble believing.

John the Baptist also faced a moment of doubt. Sitting in prison, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was really the Messiah (Matt. 11:1-6). Jesus did not condemn John for His doubt, but merely gave him the proof he needed, just as He did with Thomas. Both men understood the truth and believed.

Doubt is not wrong if it leads us on a search for the truth, and if we are willing to accept the truth once we find it. Jesus said to Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." That includes believers across the centuries who have never seen God and never walked physically with Christ. They have trusted in Christ based on the truth of God's Word and the reality of the Holy Spirit in their lives.

Those who doubt the Christian faith can put it to the test. Those who are believers but find themselves faced with situations that cause them to doubt can do the same. Christ will provide the answer we need. Keep on believing, even through the doubt, for we are blessed when we have not seen and yet still believe.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about doubt on pages 1408, 1409. See also the key passage note at Matthew 11:1-6 on page 1246.

nd said to Him, "Are You the Com-  
do we look for another?"

Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and  
tell John the things which you hear and see:  
<sup>5</sup>The blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers  
are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are  
raised up and *the* poor have the gospel  
preached to them. <sup>6</sup>And blessed is he who is  
not offended because of Me."

<sup>7</sup>As they departed, Jesus began to say to the  
multitudes concerning John: "What did you  
go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shak-  
en by the wind? <sup>8</sup>But what did you go out to  
see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed,  
those who wear soft *clothing* are in kings'  
houses. <sup>9</sup>But what did you go out to see? A  
prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a  
prophet. <sup>10</sup>For this is *he* of whom it is written:

*'Behold, I send My messenger before  
Your face,  
Who will prepare Your way before  
You.'*<sup>a</sup>

<sup>11</sup>"Assuredly, I say to you, among those born  
of women there has not risen one greater than  
John the Baptist; but he who is least in the  
kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>And  
from the days of John the Baptist until now  
the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and  
the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the proph-  
ets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup>And if

you are willing to receive *it*, he is Elijah who  
to come. <sup>15</sup>He who has ears to hear, let him  
hear!

<sup>16</sup>"But to what shall I liken this generation?  
It is like children sitting in the marketplace  
and calling to their companions, <sup>17</sup>and saying:

*'We played the flute for you,  
And you did not dance;  
We mourned to you,  
And you did not lament.'*

<sup>18</sup>For John came neither eating nor drinking,  
and they say, 'He has a demon.' <sup>19</sup>The Son  
Man came eating and drinking, and they say:  
'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend  
of tax collectors and sinners!' But wisdom is jus-  
tified by her children."<sup>a</sup>

#### WOE TO THE IMPENITENT CITIES

<sup>20</sup>Then He began to rebuke the cities  
which most of His mighty works had been  
done, because they did not repent: <sup>21</sup>"Woe  
to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For  
the mighty works which were done in you have  
been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have  
repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.  
<sup>22</sup>But I say to you, it will be more tolerable  
for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than

11:10 <sup>a</sup>Malachi 3:1 11:19 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text reads  
works.

#### KEY PASSAGE



Doubt

## ARE YOU THE ONE?

(11:1-6)

John the Baptist had been one of the first to recognize Jesus' identity as the Messiah (John 1:29). Here, locked in prison and facing death, John sent two of his disciples to make sure that he had not been mistaken about Jesus.

Jesus responded by reminding John that He was fulfilling the messianic signs prophesied by Isaiah (Is. 35:5, 6; 61:1): the blind seeing, the lame walking, lepers being cleansed, the deaf hearing, the dead being raised, and the poor having "good tidings" preached to them. Even though John's circumstances had caused him to doubt, he took those doubts to the right place. Jesus responded, alleviating John's doubts and enabling him to face martyrdom with confidence.

When we begin to doubt, we need to do as John did: Take those doubts to God. He will answer our doubts and reassure us of His truth.

To Learn More: Turn to the article about doubt on pages 1408, 1409. See also the personality profile of Thomas on page 1407.

with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." So Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"<sup>3</sup> And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, "Why is it you have brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?"

<sup>4</sup>So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "What shall I do with this people? They are all most ready to stone me!"<sup>5</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go on before the people, and take with you some of the elders of Israel. Also take in your hand your rod with which you struck the river, and go."<sup>6</sup> Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock in Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink."

And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. <sup>7</sup>So he called the name of the place Massah<sup>8</sup> and Meribah,<sup>9</sup> because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

VICTORY OVER THE AMALEKITES

<sup>8</sup>Now Amalek came and fought with Israel in Rephidim. <sup>9</sup>And Moses said to Joshua, "Choose us some men and go out, fight with Amalek. Tomorrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in my hand."<sup>10</sup> So Joshua did as Moses said to him, and fought with Amalek. And Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. <sup>11</sup>And so it was, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. <sup>12</sup>But Moses' hands became heavy; so they took a stone and put it under his arms, and he sat on it. And Aaron and Hur supported his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. <sup>13</sup>So Joshua defeated Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

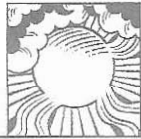
<sup>14</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Write this for a memorial in the book and recount it in the hearing of Joshua, that I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."<sup>15</sup> And Moses built an altar and called its name, The-LORD-Is-My-Banner;<sup>16</sup> for he said, "Because the LORD has sworn: the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

JETHRO'S ADVICE

<sup>17</sup>And Jethro, the priest of Midian, Moses' father-in-law, heard of all that God had done for Moses and for Israel His people—that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. <sup>2</sup>Then Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, took Zipporah, Moses' wife, after he had sent her back, <sup>3</sup>with her two sons, of whom the name of one was Gershom (for he said, "I have been a stranger in a foreign land"),<sup>4</sup> and the name of the other was Eliezer (for he said, "The God of my father was my help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh"); <sup>5</sup>and Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came with his sons and his wife to Moses in the wilderness, where he was encamped at the mountain of God. <sup>6</sup>Now he had said to Moses, "I, your father-in-law Jethro, am coming to you with your wife and her two sons with her."<sup>7</sup> So Moses went out to meet his father-in-law, bowed down, and kissed him. And they asked each other about their well-being, and

<sup>17:7</sup> Literally Tempted Literally Contention <sup>17:15</sup> Hebrew YHWH Nissi <sup>18:3</sup> Compare <sup>18:4</sup> Literally My God Is Help  
Exodus 2:22 <sup>18:4</sup> Literally My God Is Help

SOUL NOTE



**Look Again (17:7)** The Israelites lived by sight and not by faith. Even though God provided daily miracles of food and water in the Sinai wilderness, the people complained and doubted His continued goodness toward them. The world says, "Show me, and I'll believe it," God says, "Believe it, and I will show you." If you are in a wilderness of testing or a valley of doubt, don't question God's love because He is not answering you the way you want. Instead, look around and recognize what God is doing for you. **Topic: Doubt**

**1** The burden<sup>a</sup> which the prophet Habakkuk saw.

#### THE PROPHET'S QUESTION

**2** O LORD, how long shall I cry,  
And You will not hear?  
Even cry out to You, "Violence!"  
And You will not save.

**3** Why do You show me iniquity;  
And cause *me* to see trouble?  
For plundering and violence *are* before  
me;  
There is strife, and contention arises.

**4** Therefore the law is powerless,  
And justice never goes forth.  
For the wicked surround the  
righteous;  
Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

#### THE LORD'S REPLY

**5** "Look among the nations and watch—  
Be utterly astounded!  
For *I will* work a work in your days  
*Which* you would not believe, though it  
were told *you*.

**6** For indeed I am raising up the  
Chaldeans,  
A bitter and hasty nation  
Which marches through the breadth of  
the earth,  
To possess dwelling places *that are* not  
theirs.

**7** They are terrible and dreadful;  
Their judgment and their dignity  
proceed from themselves.

**8** Their horses also are swifter than  
leopards,  
And more fierce than evening wolves.  
Their chargers charge ahead;  
Their cavalry comes from afar;  
They fly as the eagle *that* hastens to eat.

**9** "They all come for violence;  
Their faces are set *like* the east wind.  
They gather captives like sand.

**10** They scoff at kings,  
And princes are scorned by them.  
They deride every stronghold,  
For they heap up earthen *mounds* and  
seize it.

**11** Then *his* mind<sup>a</sup> changes, and he  
transgresses;  
He commits offense,  
*Ascribing* this power to his god."

#### THE PROPHET'S SECOND QUESTION

**12** Are You not from everlasting,  
O LORD my God, my Holy One?  
We shall not die.  
O LORD, You have appointed them for  
judgment;  
O Rock, You have marked them for  
correction.

**13** *You are* of purer eyes than to behold  
evil,  
And cannot look on wickedness.  
Why do You look on those who deal  
treacherously,  
And hold Your tongue when the wicked  
devours  
A *person* more righteous than he?

**14** Why do You make men like fish of the  
sea,  
Like creeping things *that have* no ruler  
over them?

**15** They take up all of them with a hook.  
They catch them in their net,  
And gather them in their dragnet.  
Therefore they rejoice and are glad.

**16** Therefore they sacrifice to their net,

1:1 <sup>a</sup>Or oracle 1:11 <sup>a</sup>Literally spirit or wind

#### SOUL NOTE



**Dealing with Doubt (1:1-4)** Nagging questions and doubts—everyone has them, even believers. We often feel guilty for doubting, however, so we repress our doubts. The prophet Habakkuk didn't silence his questions and doubts.

Instead, he courageously brought them to God. Habakkuk began by asking God why He allowed evil to flourish, a question that has puzzled people for centuries. Habakkuk humbly asked God, and God answered. When we have questions and doubts, we should bring them to God, and He will answer. We must be willing, however, to accept the answers He gives. **Topic: Doubt**



and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

#### MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

<sup>8</sup>I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; <sup>9</sup>in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, <sup>10</sup>but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. <sup>11</sup>Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. <sup>12</sup>And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve. <sup>14</sup>And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. <sup>15</sup>Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.

#### QUALIFICATIONS OF OVERSEERS

**3** This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop,<sup>a</sup> he desires a good work. <sup>2</sup>A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to

teach; <sup>3</sup>not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money,<sup>a</sup> but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; <sup>4</sup>one who rules his own house well, having *his* children in submission with all reverence <sup>5</sup>(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); <sup>6</sup>not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the *same* condemnation as the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

#### QUALIFICATIONS OF DEACONS

<sup>8</sup>Likewise deacons *must be* reverent, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, <sup>9</sup>holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. <sup>10</sup>But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being *found* blameless. <sup>11</sup>Likewise, *their* wives *must be* reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup>Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling *their* children and their own houses well. <sup>13</sup>For those who have served well as deacons obtain for them-

3:1 <sup>a</sup>Literally *overseer* 3:3 <sup>a</sup>NU-Text omits *greedy for money*.

#### SOUL NOTE



**Power Packed (2:8)** Imagine the power of prayers offered “without wrath and doubting”! Anger and doubt can make prayer difficult. Anger can be so divisive that Jesus warned people to make peace before coming to prayer (Matt. 5:23, 24). Doubt can make prayer less powerful, because we cannot pray confidently if we are unsure whether God hears, cares, or will answer. Prayer offered in total dependence and trust toward God is packed with power. We should come to God without doubting His commitment to being there for us when we need Him. **Topic: Doubt**

#### SOUL NOTE



**Being His (3:16)** This verse affirms both the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ. He is human, having been “manifested in the flesh,” and He is divine, having been “received up in glory.” This is the great “mystery of godliness.” We become godly not by trying to be good enough, but by depending on Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect human life, then He rose again to make it possible for us to one day be with Him. We can please God by accepting His Son, Jesus Christ. We live for Him by being His own. **Topic: Knowing Jesus**