

# Dealing With Doubt

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With an Appendix by Ronald T. Habermas  
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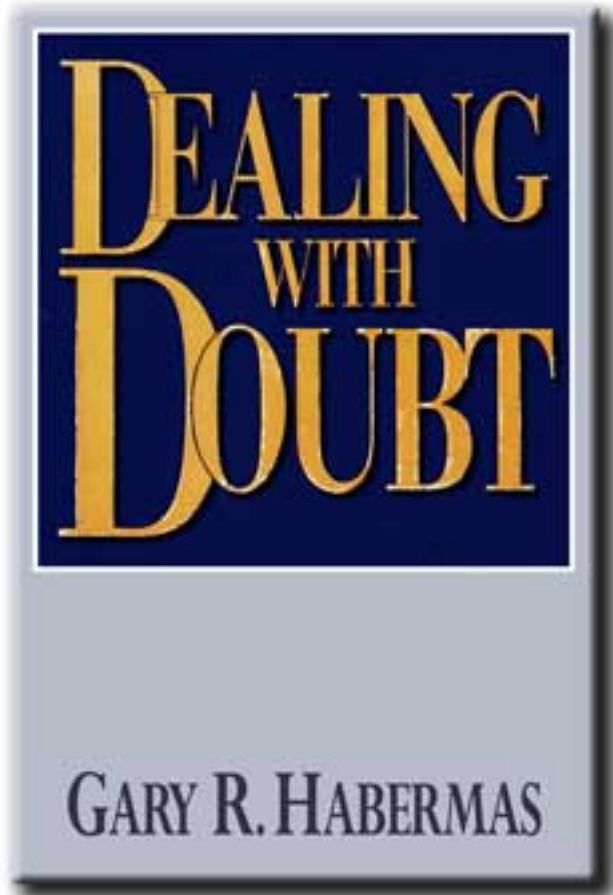
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## Preface

The opportunity to write this manuscript came chiefly as the result of two extended speaking engagements. The bulk of the material was written to complement the Spring Lectureship which I presented at Western (Conservative Baptist) Seminary in Portland, Oregon. Those lectures, entitled "Christian Doubt: Toward Resolving a Painful Problem," comprised most of Sections I and II of this volume.

The remainder of the manuscript (Section III, in particular) was completed during a lectureship in an adjunct study program at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, England. One of the lectures there was similarly devoted to the subject of doubt.

I benefited personally from my interaction with those from both groups during this lecturing and writing. The week at Western Seminary, at the invitation of Professor Gerry Breshears, provided an excellent time of interaction, including meetings with administration, faculty and students. The three weeks at Oxford provided an intensely personal setting for the integration of living and learning. The interaction with the students was especially gratifying. I would like to deeply and sincerely thank all those who made possible both lectureships, and the writing of this manuscript.

Incidentally, if it is possible to judge from the responses of those involved in these and other discussions on this topic, the issue of doubt and its resolution is one with which many Christians struggle. It is my hope that this volume will be especially helpful for those who are either working through such uncertainty themselves or who are assisting others in such a process.

Gary R. Habermas Oxford, England 11 August 1988

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## Chapter I

## **Introduction: Some Crucial Groundwork**

Doubt, manifested in many forms from the assurance of one's salvation to factual questioning, is certainly one of the most frequent and painful problems which plague Christians. These studies propose to deal, successively, with the general topic of doubt as experienced by believers, and then, chiefly, with practical suggestions for the possible resolution of each of three prominent types of doubt. Afterwards, we will examine several pertinent issues which might potentially be of further assistance to persons experiencing such uncertainty.

Although we will discuss some theoretical issues, our chief purpose is, through the usage of practical language and suggestions, to concentrate on the healing of believers who struggle with doubts. This may refer both to those who read the book themselves and to those who use some of the ideas to help others with doubts. To this end, this book is written to Christians and so will not attempt to argue for the truth of Christianity, although endnotes will frequently list some relevant sources which do a commendable job of introducing the reader to the area of apologetics.

### A. Definition and Nature of the Problem

Doubt of various sorts is portrayed somewhat regularly in the New Testament, both in narrative and doctrinal texts. No fewer than seven Greek terms speak of some aspect of the issue with *diakrino* being used most frequently, often indicating uncertainty or hesitation between believing and not doing so.<sup>1</sup> For our present purposes, I will define doubt more specifically as a lack of certainty concerning the teachings of Christianity or one's personal relation to them.

Doubts concerning the ideas or persons most important to us might be called an almost universal fact of life. One could well question how many Christians have not doubted, at least at certain times in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Based on numerous analyses of human behavior, scholars have noted that doubt of various types is a constant companion throughout life and is common to human experience. Speaking specifically of religious uncertainty, one researcher remarks: "We come into the world with question marks in our heads . . . . The question marks in our heads are never fully erased."<sup>3</sup> And lest someone think that non-religious persons are different, C. S. Lewis' personal comment is very instructive here:

**Now that I am a Christian I do have moods in which the whole thing looks very improbable; but when I was an atheist I had moods in which Christianity looked terribly probable.<sup>4</sup>**

Uncertainty is common to human existence, but dealing with it is complicated both by the fact that there are different species of doubt and because each of the types frequently involve more than just that one area. Thus, there is a tendency for doubt to "spill over" into other elements of human experience. Theoretically, the fact that persons are whole rather than fragmented argues that various doubts involve the entire person to some extent. Practically, one usually notes that such is often the case; doubts overlap and more than one type is frequently present. Yet, proper identification of the primary form is still a major step in the healing process.

Consequently, dealing with doubt is an interdisciplinary undertaking. While factual doubt may require the expertise of the apologist or philosopher, emotional and mood-related doubt will have more to do with the psychologist, psychiatrist or counselor. Questions pertaining to the will are perhaps best addressed by theologians. And the more that I deal with the subject, the more I recognize that sociological, anthropological and educational insights are examples of other areas which are also crucial at various points. So there are certainly elements of doubt which require a multidimensional effort.

Accordingly, two important disclaimers need to be offered at this point so the reader can be sure not to misjudge the present product. First, while I am more confident in dealing with areas having to do with apologetics, philosophy or philosophical theology, I am far from being an expert in psychiatry, psychology or counseling. Here I must rely on my own study and interaction with professionals in the other disciplines. And addressing an audience which involves persons who are trained in these areas, I can only admit my lack of expertise and open myself to the observations of others.

However, at the same time, if the subject is to be approached by a single individual at all, it will almost assuredly be a person who cannot deal in an expert way with all of these subjects and specializations. So I will go on record by saying that, while my own training is in the areas just identified above, I will at least endeavor to address the others for the sake of attempting to minister to hurting people. It is this need to be practical that motivates me to write on a subject which could possibly be the single most common problem among Christians. So if I err in my conclusions, I humbly ask your forgiveness and invite your comments.

Second and somewhat related, I am not qualified to offer any psychiatric or psychological counseling and my comments should not be construed as attempting to do this. My purpose is to deal with the phenomenon of doubt and while this frequently involves such conditions as depression, anxiety or medical factors, it must be

understood that I am only qualified to offer advice concerning such healing of various forms of Christian uncertainty, not the psychological or medical conditions such as those just described. I would recommend that the latter be dealt with by a Christian professional in that area. But at any rate, the treating of these last issues is not within my expertise.

It is this last issue of healing that is the primary concern in this treatment. Theory will certainly be presented and is crucial at several important junctures. But it is my chief desire that Christians will be better informed and able to both deal with their own times of doubt and those of other believers.

## B. Common Misconceptions Concerning Christian Doubt

Doubt is very frequently viewed by Christians in a negative light. One common attitude is that relatively few believers have this problem (and those who do usually keep quiet about it). It is often charged that true believers never doubt at all or that being uncertain of one's beliefs is always bad and cannot produce any positive results. These and other misconceptions appear to be fairly widespread.

### 1. Christian Doubt is Uncommon

If one works very long with doubting Christians, one may get the strong impression that many believers who have experienced uncertainty seem to think that they are a distinct minority. Similarly, one is frequently impressed that believers often do not wish to admit the presence of such doubt, a view which probably contributes much to the continuance of the mistaken notion that they are alone in this problem.

It was mentioned above that there is some reason to believe that doubt of various kinds is an almost universal fact of human existence. Os Guinness asserts, "It is not primarily a Christian problem, but a human problem . . . . The root of doubt is not in our faith but in our humanness."<sup>5</sup>

So how common is Christian doubt? The "humanness" of the phenomenon would suggest that it still is a very regular problem. Several popular treatments make this point clearly. Mark Littleton answers the question by saying that, "Doubt hangs its hat on all Christians. None can honestly say they've escaped it."<sup>6</sup> John Guest holds that all Christians were once agnostic in that they moved from unbelief to belief. Some Christians remain in a semi-agnostic condition even after salvation.<sup>7</sup> Stephen Board thinks that there may at least be some truth to the saying that unless a person has never doubted, he has never truly believed. In this sense, the Christian's intellectual struggle can produce one's deepest convictions.<sup>8</sup>

More technical writers also agree, such as Karl Barth's statements that all Christians struggle with doubt. Speaking of a character trait which causes such uncertainty, he states that "no Christian (and likewise no theologian) can altogether rid himself of this flaw."<sup>9</sup> Later, he points out that "No theologian . . . should have any doubts that for some reason or other he is also a doubter."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Barth also muses at how easy it is to question God's existence on occasion, even when one knows better.<sup>11</sup> Clark Pinnock adds: "I know what it is to doubt and question. And I suspect that every Christian who takes the time to think seriously about his faith does so, too."<sup>12</sup> Later he warns the new believer to expect to experience the same problem.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of popular statistics, Bill Bright writes that of the tens of thousands of persons who have attended Campus Crusade's various training institutes, up to 25% regularly indicate their doubts concerning their own relationship to God.<sup>14</sup> Even if this was the only subject which Christians wondered about, it would still be a significant estimate. But when other matters of uncertainty are also counted, such as questions pertaining to unanswered prayer, or why Christians suffer, or theoretical questions about the faith, or mood-related issues, I think it is plain that few (if any) Christians completely escape the far-reaching claws of doubt. Although by no means constituting scientific surveys, when I question my large introduction to philosophy classes I regularly find that about 70-90% of all of these hundreds of students are even willing to publicly admit that they have experienced doubt in some form.

At any rate, it should be apparent that the attitude that doubt is uncommon among Christians misses the mark. Especially when the many faces of doubt are remembered, it would appear to be futile to deny the problem. In fact, there seem to be good reasons to hold that doubt may be one of the most widespread problems among Christians today. This provides all the more reason to attempt to solve the dilemma.

### 2. True Believers Never Experience Doubt

Some assert that real believers never doubt, since doubt is said to be the opposite of faith. It should help us at this point to remember our opening definition, for while it is true that uncertainty affects faith, they are not opposites. The counterpart of belief is unbelief, while we have seen that doubt might be described as hesitation between two positions. So initially it must be pointed out that, at least by definition, there is nothing which keeps true believers from struggling with uncertainty or nothing which causes doubt to contradict faith. It is true that doubt may progress to where it may challenge one's very faith, but the failure to believe is unbelief or disbelief, not doubt. Guinness notes that the attempt to make doubt into unbelief is a

contradiction in terms because it appears to make one's questioning choose sides (in this case unbelief) when doubt in its very essence remains between two positions. 15

Barth is in agreement at this juncture, asserting that "doubt does not mean denial or negation. Doubt only means swaying and staggering between Yes and No. It is only an uncertainty . . . ."16 Littleton concurs:

**But doubt is not the opposite of faith . . . . doubt suggests that there is a lack of faith somewhere, but a person can doubt and still have a perfectly sound trust in God. Doubt is rather a state of uncertainty, a spiritual fork in our road.17**

But for many Christians who might raise this second objection, there is a more important consideration than the issue of definitions. The question of what Scripture teaches is crucial here and it also supports the view that true believers can experience doubt. In both the Old and New Testaments, believers clearly express wide ranges of questioning, especially on such topics as pain and evil, God's personal dealing with His people and the issue of evidence for one's belief. On each of these subjects, doubt is clearly expressed by prominent believers.

For example, the story of Job is well known, but I think few realize how this righteous man actually charged God with misconduct on several occasions, and just how pointed some of his criticisms were in actuality.18 Likewise, several psalmists also experienced serious quandaries and even, on occasion, cried out to God not just about certain problems, but actually blamed Him with what they considered to be mistreatment and His breaking of His covenant with Israel.19

While these Old Testament passages certainly evidence some of the facts of doubt enumerated earlier in this chapter, such expressions are not absent from the New Testament, either. In an apparently little known episode, John the Baptist was in prison awaiting what would later be his death (Matt. 11:1-11; Lk. 7:18-30). He sent two of his disciples to Jesus to ask a twofold question. John wished to know if Jesus was the Messiah or if he should be looking for someone else. Such is simply an amazing incident and is very similar to some queries about which we hear in the last half of the Twentieth Century. It is difficult to know exactly what was on John the Baptist's mind, but it is very likely that his doubt was prompted by emotional circumstances surrounding his imprisonment.

Jesus' response is just as remarkable. Instead of rebuking John for his doubt, Jesus told John's disciples to return and relate to him the miracles which Jesus was performing (Matt. 11:4-5; Lk. 7:21-22). Jesus had basically answered John the Baptist's question concerning His messiahship in the affirmative. And after an exhortation not to be offended because of Himself, Jesus called John the greatest man ever born (Matt. 11:6-11; Lk. 7:23-28). So far from chastising John, Jesus both answered his questions with evidence and then complimented him during the time of his doubt! This narrative should convincingly show us that believers sometimes do have times of uncertainty and questioning.

Another New Testament example is the passage which describes the outspoken challenge of "doubting Thomas" (Jn. 20:24-29), who declared that he would not even believe unless he first saw the resurrected Jesus himself. Although Jesus rebuked Thomas for his failure to believe the eyewitnesses who had seen him after His resurrection, the point here is that Thomas had expressed a rather serious doubt (if not unbelief<sup>20</sup>). Jesus, once again, provided some evidence but warned Thomas that such "special" treatment ought not be sought after. For whereas John the Baptist presumably believed after Jesus' miracles were reported to him by those who had witnessed them, Thomas refused to believe the same kind of testimony, requiring a personal appearance of Jesus.

It would appear to this writer that the Old and New Testament examples are sufficient to show that true believers in Scripture have doubted, thereby buttressing the earlier definitional points. But in a strange turnabout, however, our discussion indicates that the objection that true believers never doubt could itself actually cause two major problems. First, this misconception can cause great harm to believers who do experience uncertainty. As Guinness states, "No misunderstanding causes more anxiety and brings such bondage to sensitive people in doubt."<sup>21</sup> I recall a case where a young man came to see me in emotional turmoil because some friends had told him that his doubts of assurance obviously proved that he was not a Christian. Some simple techniques for dealing with emotional doubt (which are presented below) were sufficient for him to deal with this situation. As is my usual practice, I checked with him several times afterwards, the last occasion more than a year later and he testified that he had not experienced any real doubt again. But this was potentially a long and painful situation for him if the untruths had not been corrected.<sup>22</sup>

Second, this objection actually overlooks an important concern about doubt. That is, all doubt ought to be taken seriously and dealt with accordingly. Just because uncertainty plagues most believers at some time is no reason to take it lightly. And just because doubt is not the same as unbelief does not mean that it cannot affect one's faith adversely, especially if it is allowed to grow and spread. By God's grace, such questioning needs to be identified and dealt with accordingly.

### 3. Christian Doubt is Always Bad

Another frequent claim is that doubting is always a negative sign and that it cannot ever bring about positive results. But this is the exact opposite of the conclusion reached by Christian researchers who have both fought against doubt themselves and have observed the healing process in others. Charles Hummel asserts that, "A stronger faith can emerge through a siege of doubt; both holiness and faith are forged in the fires of temptation."<sup>23</sup> Virtually every observer agrees that not only faith, but Christian growth and greater certainty, conviction, and service can result (and often does) from successfully dealing with one's uncertainty.<sup>24</sup>

In our answer to the last objection, it was pointed out that several believers in both the Old and New Testaments experienced doubt. In some instances the complaints against God appear out of the ordinary and amazingly strong. Is there any evidence from these cases, in addition to the scholarly testimonies above, which indicates that doubt can actually yield good results? In the case of Job, his encounter with the Lord brought about the resolution of his doubts, repentance and trust in God, leading to his multiple blessings (Job 42). Even though there are numerous Psalms which express doubts, sometimes it is the very questioning and despair which is turned around to a positive attitude of praise (Ps. 42:5-6, 11; 43:5).

In the case of John the Baptist, it is presumed that he was triumphant over his doubt, for in spite of it (and even during it!) Jesus pronounced his great compliment about John (Matt. 11:11; Lk. 7:28). Thomas' more radical doubt, in spite of Jesus' rebuke, led to Thomas' glorious recognition of Jesus' deity (Jn. 20:28).

So even though doubt is a serious matter whenever it occurs, it can clearly lead to good results including the triumph of faith and worship of God. In the case of Thomas, if church tradition is to be believed at this point, it was doubt which led to this disciple's later commitment of his life to ministry in the Middle East, where he was martyred. At any rate, it appears to be evident that doubt can lead to positive growth in the believer's life.

### C. Conclusion

Christian doubt, defined as a lack of certainty concerning the teachings of Christianity or one's relation to them, is a very common and painful problem affecting many believers. The subject is complicated by the misconceptions and caricatures concerning doubt, which tend to militate against the finding of solutions. The interdisciplinary nature of the issue also makes it a difficult matter, for Christian doubt is very frequently not just a factual issue, as is widely believed. As a result, doubt needs to be identified as to its "species" and dealt with accordingly.

The chief purpose of this volume is both to help believers work through and conquer their own doubt and to provide them with means to help others who are dealing with it. The curing of this dilemma for many Christians would not only assist them in experiencing peace on a crucial topic, but would hopefully also free them to turn their energies to service for Christ.

### **Endnotes--Chapter I**

1However, *diakrino* is also translated in other ways such as "contending" or "judging." Other related words include *meteorizomai*, *dialogismos*, *distazo*, *aporemomai*, *diaporeo* and *psuchenairo*. They can all have similar meanings such as doubt, uncertainty, despair or unbelief. But there is some variation among the terms. *Meteorizomai* indicates an anxious state (but is used only once in the New Testament (Lk. 12:29), while *dialogismos* is used of the evil thoughts which emanate from the sin nature of man.

2If a personal illustration (for that is all that it is) is at all helpful, in my regular discussions on the subject over the years, I can only recall one person ever telling me that he had never doubted. Then just recently, as I reminded this individual of his statement made a few years ago, he hastened to point out that he had only been speaking of one very specific form but that, including all elements of uncertainty, he had experienced it frequently in his Christian life.

3Leon McKenzie, "The Purpose and Scope of Adult Religious Education" in *Handbook of Adult Religious Education*, edited by Nancy T. Foltz (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986) p. 11.

4C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1952), p. 123.

5O. Guinness, *In Two Minds: The Dilemma of Doubt and How to Resolve It* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), p. 39.

6Mark R. Littleton, "Doubt Can Be a Good Thing," *His* (March, 1979), p. 1.

- 7John Guest, *In Search of Certainty* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1983) pp. 36-36.
- 8Stephen Board, *Doubt* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), p.3.
- 9Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, translated by Grover Foley (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), p. 128; cf. p.122.
- 10Ibid., p. 131.
- 11Ibid., p. 123.
- 12Clark H. Pinnock, *Reason Enough: A Case for the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), p. 107.
- 13Ibid., P. 117.
- 14Bill Bright, *How to be Sure You are a Christian* (U.S.: Campus Crusade for Christ, Inc., 1972), p.10.
- 15Guinness, pp. 28-29.
- 16Barth, p. 124.
- 17Littleton, p. 1.
- 18See Job 7:11; 10:3-4, 13-14, 20-21; 12:6; 13:21; 14:6; 19:7; 27:2.
- 19For some of the "tougher" variety of complaints, see Ps. 44:9- 26; 60:1; 82:2; 89:38-39.
- 20I think that it is certainly possible that Thomas was not a believer before meeting the risen Jesus, especially in terms of his own statement about his refusal to believe (Jn. 20:25) and Jesus' addressing him in terms of his (new?) belief (Jn. 20:29). But this is a very difficult question. If Thomas was not a Christian, this would affect the use of this example in this section.
- 21Guinness, p. 27.
- 22It should be noted that both here and in other places in this book where personal accounts are utilized, various factors have been purposely changed to protect the identity of the individual(s) involved. Particular details, such as gender, reactions and even some symptoms are frequently altered specifically so that persons may not be identified. As a result, descriptions which appear to correctly describe a particular person are accidental in that no case is left unchanged. However, an effort has been made to keep those characteristics which are integral to the illustration so that a real correspondence between the problem and the answer is preserved.
- 23Charles E. Hummel, *Doubters Welcome* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 16.
- 24Barth, p. 122; Pinnock, p. 108; Guinness, p. 16; Board, p.3; Guest, p. 139; Littleton, pp. 1, 10-11.

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## **Chapter II**

### **Identifying Doubt**

The point has already been made that it is crucial to identify the type of doubt from which a person is suffering in order to attempt to deal with it. The primary reason for this statement is that there are different varieties of uncertainty and, like medicine, different remedies are applicable.

For the purposes of this study, we will divide doubt into three general families. We will begin by discussing factual doubt, which is concerned with the evidential foundation for belief. Here some chief interests might

include the trustworthiness of Scripture, the facts in favor of a miracle or answering objections to God's existence. The second category is emotional doubt, which is most concerned with one's feelings and frequently involves more subjective responses. In this case the chief issues might include the feeling that one is not a believer or how Christianity is viewed when one is going through a mood. Third is volitional doubt, having to do chiefly with one's will and choices. Major questions here may involve weak or immature faith or the seeming inability to apply known truths to one's actions.

There is nothing necessarily "sacred" about these three categories.<sup>1</sup> But they have the advantages of being few in number, they do not appear to duplicate one another, they correspond to different human faculties, and many different types of doubt can be accurately subdivided under them. Thus it will be my purpose in this chapter to propose numerous typical expressions of doubt, each identified under one of these three headings. This will serve both to reveal the purpose of these three groupings and to provide representative doubts to which readers can perhaps relate.

Now it should be noted at the outset that there will be some overlap or duplication in the various sub-examples of doubt. And in several cases it is perhaps possible to question the category in which the example is placed. So the exact configuration of these examples presented here is definitely not the point of the chapter. Rather, our purpose is to provide sample doubts, most of which are quite commonly expressed, and to relate these to the three major categories with which we will be concerned throughout this volume.

In categorizing the separate objections, we are not only interested in the origin of the doubt, but also how it frequently manifests itself. The latter query is perhaps even the determining one. Of course, personal factors are critically important but cannot be factored except in a very general way. An attempt will be made to define and categorize the doubt as it might be expressed.

Several authors have entertained the question of why persons doubt their beliefs and have arrived at numerous reasons.<sup>2</sup> I have added a rather lengthy listing of additional responses from my own experience in speaking with persons who have struggled with doubts. Together, I think that the causes of uncertainty enumerated in this chapter include a fairly wide range of responses (without exhausting the subject). It should be remarked that the separate causes for doubt will usually be stated in a more general way (as opposed to specific issues). So it is not the specific objection ("Why is there pain and evil?" or "Did Jesus rise from the dead?") which is listed in this chapter, but the general categories which might give rise to these issues.

#### A. The Root Cause

Just before attempting to delineate various kinds of typical expressions of doubt, the overriding cause should be discussed briefly. Doubt in its various forms exists, from a biblical perspective, because of sin. As Guinness states the issue, "Doubt is human and universal. But if we are speaking as Christians, we must quickly add that this situation is a problem only because of the Fall."<sup>3</sup> Whether uncertainty of various kinds would have been present had man not fallen is one of those issues concerning which it is rather fruitless to inquire. But one thing appears certain. The issues would have become much more complex afterwards whether they existed earlier or not. Human nature is certainly at the root of the problem and various human factors provide the impetus for additional complications.

Again, the fact that human beings are whole, rather than being fragmented into their component "parts" is a reminder that uncertainty generally affects the entire person. As a result, causes of doubt are seldom individual but are interrelated with each other. Attempting to unravel the moral, social, medical and psychological factors for purposes of identification can indeed be troublesome.

At any rate, the multiple affects of sin and human fallenness provide ample opportunities for doubt to originate and grow. This is graphically portrayed in C. S. Lewis' celebrated volume on demonic temptations, *The Screwtape Letters*. Here Lewis attempted to show, in fictional terms, how the forces of evil schemed to ruin person's lives and turn them away from God.

In one passage, Lewis describes how doubts can be caused in the area of answered prayer. Here Uncle Wormwood advises his apprentice demon Wormwood on an excellent technique for tempting Christians:

**But you can worry him with the haunting suspicion that the practice is absurd and can have no objective result. Don't forget to use the "Heads I win, tails you lose" argument. If the thing he prays for doesn't happen, that is one more proof that petitionary prayers don't work; if it does happen, he will, of course, be able to see some of the physical causes which led up to it, and "therefore it would have happened anyway," and thus a granted prayer becomes just as good a proof as a denied one that prayers are ineffective.<sup>4</sup>**

This scenario is typical of many types of uncertainty in that the doubter perceives a situation where negative results are likely to occur no matter what happens. Also instructive here is the importance of demonic

influence. Lewis warns believers that two opposite errors frequently occur when this subject comes up: either demons are disbelieved or they are stressed too much, as if all evil proceeds from their activity. Lewis retorts that demons "are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight."<sup>5</sup>

On this subject, the more balanced biblical position is to recognize the influence of demonic forces as a major factor (Eph. 6:10-18) and to deal with them accordingly. In his popular pastoral treatment, Erwin Lutzer recommends several steps in such a process:

(1) confess one's sins and pursue fellowship with God. In fact, Lutzer states that "The most important defense against demonic attack is righteousness, along with an effective use of the Word of God."

(2) Believers must exercise their delegated authority (from Jesus Christ Himself) to battle the temptations of Satan, for he must leave the Christian when confronted in the power of Christ (Jn. 4:7; Col. 2:15). Lutzer points out that often Satan must be dealt with directly by the citation of scriptural truths.

(3) Christians must be patient and endure the conflict, realizing that results do not always come immediately. The testimony of many believers is that, ironically, it is in such times of trouble that God can really work in our lives.<sup>6</sup>

So the original temptation, the corresponding human sin nature and the continuing openness to Satan's promptings combine to form the root cause of mankind's basic problems, including doubt. And if sin is the source, then, conversely, God and His teachings are the answer. It is not the purpose of this chapter to begin a discussion of cures for doubt,<sup>7</sup> but suffice it to say that the testimony of the New Testament is that the healing of an individual's problems is performed by God and not by the person.<sup>8</sup> This will be a crucially important truth to remember when the subject of a person's part is set forth in subsequent chapters.

## B. Examples of Doubt

As pointed out above, it will be the chief purpose of this chapter to list numerous examples of uncertainty, divided under the three grouping briefly identified earlier (factual, emotional and volitional). Yet, the purpose is not so much to attempt to categorize each of these types per se, but rather to provide numerous different instances in an attempt to help in the process of identifying doubts as a preliminary step in the healing process. Once again, it is not specific questions which are entertained here, but the general categories which give rise to them.

### 1. Factual Doubts

a) factual foundations: A common form of uncertainty is that which questions the underpinnings of Christianity. Such might frequently occur in the case of new believers who have not thought through many of the main issues yet or even with more mature believers who are not sure of the facts. A common scenario would be the inability to answer critical accusations against Christianity due to one's lack of knowledge on those subjects. In particular, the major issues here might concern the nature of the gospel or other central beliefs.

b) sidetracked by pseudo problems: This variety of doubt occurs when believers allow themselves to be concerned about issues which not only are not central to the truthfulness of Christianity, but sometimes do not make any substantial difference whichever view is correct. Pinnock notes that such usually occurs when strong positions are taken where Scripture may be noncommittal and where it is therefore legitimate for believers to hold differing views.<sup>9</sup> Examples here might include the date of the earth or specific problems in eschatology.<sup>10</sup>

c) questioning intellect: This form of factual doubt is frequently caused by the type of personality which enjoys problem solving. For some persons, to be constantly studying an issue provides the needed motivation to seek creative answers, thereby leading to intellectual growth. In other words, this type of uncertainty actually spurs some individuals to work out dilemmas which interest them, or to get to the root of practical applications with the intent of finding which solutions actually work.

d) system confusion: Board utilizes this description to indicate doubts which arise due to a believer's allowing his world view to be influenced by non-Christian systems or where the believer does not correctly "label" a teaching which would only be true if an entire rival view was also true.<sup>11</sup> Many doctrines are only as accurate as the world-view in which they are held. Doubt may come from taking at face value statements such as those which proclaim that belief in God is for weak persons who need a "crutch" in life, instead of investigating the evidence behind the claim itself.

### 2. Emotional Doubts



a) psychological causes: The most common cause of emotional doubts (and perhaps even all types of uncertainty) stems from psychological states such as anxiety or depression and, in particular, moods which persons frequently undergo. In fact, in a certain select sense, psychological doubt as a whole might be termed mood-related. At any rate, this brand of questioning often masquerades as factual doubt but must be dealt with in a different manner. I have spoken to many individuals who assumed that their problem had to with evidence for faith, only to discover that the true cause was their attitude towards the subject. Earmarks of this sort of quandary will be set forth in Chapter IV.

b) medical causes: Doubt can also come from any number of medical factors, including internal conditions such as manic depressive states or diabetes on the one hand, or externally prompted conditions caused by the consumption of alcohol or other types of drugs. To be sure, it is frequently not an easy matter to decide which of such factors are internally or externally motivated. But while the central cause is medical in nature, doubts which originate in this manner manifest themselves in chiefly emotional patterns. In one particular instance, a young graduate student was constantly in need of counseling and tended to dominate my office hours. Although we were definitely experiencing some success, I noticed some symptoms which I thought should be checked. As a result, I finally referred him to our counseling center for treatment. There he was diagnosed as being manic depressive and was given appropriate medicine. The lesson here concerns the needed input of the medical community on various issues surrounding the treatment of doubts.

c) faulty view of God: To have a wrong concept of God can be very instrumental in the formulation of doubt. And, of course, while it could be argued that no believer would have a perfect view of God, some specific patterns of thought are potentially more harmful than others. For instance, to believe that God does not answer prayers, especially during times of stress or that He is morally responsible for pain will frequently lead to constant personal crises. So if, as Guinness states, assurance depends on our view of God and His faithfulness,<sup>12</sup> then this is certainly an area which needs constant cultivation and development in the believer's life.

d) childhood problems: Experiences which one undergoes in his younger years can have a profound affect on later doubt. For example, child abuse in various forms can make it very difficult for one to accept God's love. Two cases of this nature stand out very vividly in my mind. Both involved very intelligent young women who had been abused as children, one sexually and the other physically; the latter still had at least one visible scar to witness the fact. Both were willing (and even eager) to discuss the problems involved but they had many sessions of discussion before beginning to get control of the situation. Both women struggled with how God could ever love them; it was very difficult to convince them otherwise. Eventually the former, a student, found great relief through the love of her husband, family and close friends. The latter experienced healing through principles shared later.

e) old wounds: Somewhat related to the previous type of doubt derived from childhood problems, this variety is caused by painful situations throughout life. Breaking up with a lover, the death of a loved one or the betrayal of a friend are examples of wounds which could cause a person to wonder if he can fully trust God. In many respects the results of such questioning are similar to that in the former category.

f) judging by feelings: A very common problem, especially with Christians who lack assurance of salvation, comes from reactions based on one's feelings. "Sometimes I don't feel saved" or "I don't have the same feeling which I used to" are regular fare for the counselor. In fact, the feeling that Christianity might not be true after all may besiege all believers at some point. Here again, one is reminded of Uncle Screwtape who challenges young demon Wormwood:

**But there is a sort of attack on the emotions which can still be tried. It turns on making him feel . . . that all his religion has been a fantasy.<sup>13</sup>**

One vivid case of this type concerned a pastor of a prominent southern church who called to explain to me that his Christianity did not feel as vibrant as when he first became a Christian. Although trained well in seminary, he fell into some of the same pitfalls which he had probably helped others through over the years. After a few discussions he realized that his questionings were caused by his emotions, which allowed him to identify the area on which he most needed to work. Only then did he experience relief.

g) need for attention: In some cases, the expression of doubt is most obviously due to the need for friendship and love, often from one who feels that these are somehow lacking in his own life. Such is most often expressed by a person who apparently wishes to dominate the counselor's time and grows to depend on the interaction. The doubt could certainly be real, but the need for companionship attention and love<sup>14</sup> could be even greater, to the point where the problem never seems to get solved.

h) lack of sleep: A commonly overlooked cause of doubt can sometimes be remedied as simply as getting a normal amount of sleep. A biblical example here is Elijah, who, when he experienced depression, laid down to sleep. After Elijah had rested, an angel recommended food (I Kings 19:4-6).

One man who came to see me was experiencing some rather disconcerting doubt. He was a leader in the

Christian community, the type of person whom one might think would be embarrassed if others were to know why he was visiting me. After a little discussion we pinpointed the type of doubt as emotional and afterwards probed for the variety. It became obvious that he was suffering from a lack of sleep. After making an effort to get more sleep on a regular basis (including going to bed one day and waking up two days later!), he began doing much better. Soon afterwards he left the area for a new ministry but kept contact with me over a long period of time. Virtually every phone call I asked how his doubts were coming and he reported that everything was "back to normal." This just illustrates how cures for doubt are not always the typical ones!

i) peer pressure: I have long thought that one of the categories of doubt which is seldom mentioned but is extremely important is the pressure exerted on believers to be more moderate in their views. This assault is not a frontal attack, but is one which can continue to build up to quite a persuasive drone in its call to stop believing old "wives tales" in favor of "modern" approaches. To be more like our peers is often a desire which is difficult not to heed, at least in part. In fact the belief (whether true or false) that few other intelligent persons hold our position can produce devastating results, especially over a period of time. Our emotions are particularly vulnerable. But the doubt which is produced thereby generally professes no new facts, just the same old temptations to change.

j) identifying with fiction: To read fictional writings can sometimes cause us to be confronted with different kinds of ideas and persons. Plays, television and movies about fictional persons, times and places are even more graphic in their representations. But there is a subtle temptation here to identify with these characters and view issues through their eyes. I personally recall watching a popular fantasy movie where I was so caught up in the evil being experienced by one of the heroes that it temporarily colored my own perception until I perceived what should have been quite obvious: I was witnessing someone else's conception of the issues. But if such subtleties are allowed to go unchecked, one could experience corresponding emotional doubts.

k) Christian hypocrisy: Doubt can sometimes be caused by observing the beliefs and actions of fellow believers. Barth lists religious wars, persecutions, inquisitions and questionable stances on such issues as "slavery, race, war, women's rights, and social justice" as examples of the potentially offensive beliefs and behaviors of Christians which can, in turn, cause doubts.<sup>15</sup> However, while to view what is believed to be unbiblical positions is disheartening, it does not directly deal with the issue of the truthfulness of the Christian world view at all. Perhaps we need to be confronted even more frequently with man's failures; such could be a reminder of both the sinfulness from which God has rescued us and provide some impetus for further action.

l) forgiven sin: The fear that one's sins have not really been forgiven is a cause for doubt in many believers. More specifically, the idea that one has committed the unpardonable sin so that one cannot be forgiven strikes even more fear in the hearts of others. One young man who called me expressed just this latter sense of horrifying fear. He believed that the very fact that he had suffered doubt from time to time meant that he had committed the unpardonable sin! This person needed to learn that some of the popular conceptions about doubt are themselves mistaken. So while such quandaries can have factual ramifications, they perhaps more frequently are manifested in emotional terms. And while a good exegesis of relevant Scripture portions may certainly be called for as a crucially important part of the cure, the emotional elements will frequently have to be dealt with, as well.

m) anxiety about the future: It is not enough for Christians to be worried about the present. To be honest, anxiety concerning the unknown future has probably been a cause for fear in most believers at some time or another. For some, it is manifested in the query as to whether they can really "hold out" until the end. Again, a study of the Scripture and perhaps some treatment of the emotional portion is needed in order to show that this fear is misplaced.

n) judgment and Hell: Even in believers one frequently encounters the uncertainty that, after all, perhaps it is still the case that one could have done everything that the Bible requires for salvation (as far as one knows) but still be sent to Hell. If informal surveys can be trusted at all, this fear is very widely experienced by many Christians at least at some time. And, as in the cases of the previous two types of fear, both Scriptural exegesis and treatment of the emotional factors may be required.

### 3. Volitional Doubts

a) weak faith: Oftentimes a Christian wishes to increase his faith or perhaps desires to conquer some problem (like doubt) but simply thinks that he is unable to do so because it is too difficult to believe any further. In biblical terms, this individual can perhaps be said to be wavering between two positions (Js. 1:6-8). During my own period of doubt, I would have said that one of my chief struggles was with the issue of how to increase my faith.

b) immature faith: Sometimes faith suffers from a lack of development, often due to factors in operation when a person first committed his life to Christ and from the corresponding wrong ideas concerning that experience. For instance, perhaps the individual was very young at the time of his conversion, or later wondered if he was at all coerced during the process. Others are troubled that perhaps their hearts were not totally committed at

that time. As Michael Griffiths describes the problem:

**But becoming a Christian is not simply a matter of reciting a magic formula at the request of an evangelist, but the answer of the heart and will in believing response to the invitation of the Lord Himself.<sup>16</sup>**

While there are frequently emotional factors present, the key issue here is one of the will: did the individual truly commit himself to Christ? Thus, whether immaturity was present or not, that is not of chief importance. The issue is one of the surrender of the will. And when a person is truly uncertain as to whether he trusted Christ, I usually encourage him to pray and express his trust in the Lord once again, telling Him that if he is already a Christian, then this is simply a prayer of further commitment. Some may disagree with this practice, but I personally find nothing here that appears to be unbiblical.

c) lack of growth: Some uncertainty can be caused by the believer's failure to grow in his Christian life. It is as if the person realizes that further commitment might require getting serious with the Lord. But for whatever reasons, the decision not to progress in one's walk with the Lord can lead to uncertainty. One major reason for this dilemma is that when one does not grow he is not availing himself of much of the means by which doubt may be avoided. As in a human relationship, a lack of growth can even signal a drifting apart and can lead to various questions. But conversely, growing in our commitment is an excellent means of doubt prevention.

d) self-sufficiency: This kind of uncertainty arises from an attitude of arrogance towards God. Devoting an entire chapter to the topic, Guinness identifies this quandary as occurring when a Christian begins to decide that his will is to be preferred above God's will. This desire for autonomy manifests itself in various signs that the individual is attempting to break his allegiance to the Lord. Guinness likens it to a man whose bickering with his wife and public criticisms of her is indicative of an internal decision which has been at work.<sup>17</sup>

e) repentance: Not to be confused with the emotional anxiety which may come from wondering if one's sins have been forgiven, this category refers to a lack of repentance from one's sins. When one has unforgiven sin in his life, this can certainly contribute to a sense of separation from God, encouraging doubts. And it is the decision (either implicit or explicit) not to repent of these sins that can keep a person from having peace.

I recall an older man who came to discuss doubts. He was obviously depressed and did not even want to talk about his problem. After speaking to him several times and with a counselor who had also dealt with him, it was discovered that he was apparently involved in an entire lifestyle of sin at the time of his coming to see me. Later the man admitted that this was very possibly the reason for his lack of assurance, but he did not appear to be very concerned about changing. As far as I know, neither did his uncertainty change.

In another case, a young woman who had an outstanding Christian testimony began experiencing rather severe doubts after she decided that her marriage relationship was too binding. And again, as long as she remained in her rebellious state, the doubts also remained.

f) difficulty of application: One of the most common causes for the continuance of volitional doubt is, strangely enough, that believers are reticent to apply the biblical steps for healing, even after they are known. Since adopting the proper principles when one is hurting (and often right during the doubt) takes concentration, some conclude that it is easier to apply the steps only sporadically. Just like it may hurt to pull weeds, sometimes it is also difficult to deal with these problems in one's life. But one of the most frequent comments I hear is that, when biblical steps are applied the doubt is assuaged and, conversely, when they are not, the uncertainty returns.

I do not conclude that the various treatments will always work on each type of doubt, largely because the personal factors vary so much. But I cannot remember ever having anyone tell me, after applying them, that they do not either ease or heal the problem. And it should be mentioned again that we make no claims that these methods are the only correct remedies. In fact such a claim would be far from the truth. Other researchers have presented additional biblical remedies which can also lead to healing.

### C. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was twofold. Initially, the overall cause for doubt was discussed: sin. Mankind's sin and the continuing openness to Satan's temptations are the chief background from which doubts (as well as many other problems) emerge. Dealing with this temptation is a major way to combat doubt. While some initial suggestions have been given here, the subject will again be approached in subsequent chapters.

The main portion of this chapter was devoted to the subject of identifying various types of doubts. Over twenty different examples were placed in the three general categories with which we are functioning (factual, emotional and volitional doubt to). The intention here was not so much to provide either absolute categories or an exhaustive list of examples. Rather, the purpose was to produce a variety of samples so that individuals

can perceive both how widespread doubt is and get some idea about how to identify their type(s) of uncertainty.

We ended this chapter on the note that some persons continue to experience doubt because they decide, for whatever reasons, not to apply the biblical remedies. At the same time, many who have applied biblical maxims to doubt have often found healing. Now this is definitely not to assert or imply that every case will be solved. It must be said bluntly that some people are not healed. But when it is remembered that there are many individual factors, such as (but not limited to) the proper identification of doubt and the need for faithful (and correct) practice of biblical principles, such is not surprising. But I would not be fair if I did not also say that I have witnessed a high percentage of persons who have at least been helped, if not healed, by God's grace and power.<sup>18</sup>

It is by no means being pretended that the methods utilized here are unique. Other researchers in a variety of fields have come to quite similar conclusions and likewise report that positive results are attained.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, other scholars have utilized different methods with success, thereby indicating that no one approach necessarily has a "corner on the market." Certainly such exclusivity is not being claimed for the methods suggested in this book.

## **Endnotes--Chapter II**

<sup>1</sup>Other authors have also analyzed doubt into specific categories. Board identifies four groupings (pp. 4-16), which basically include the three I just listed plus another which I think is a sub-category of one of them. Guinness prefers seven divisions (Chapters 5-11) which I, again, think can be included under three headings. (Compare Bright's three categories of commitment, pp. 12-45.) But it is very important to note that the point here is not to arrive at an objective number of families of doubt or to attempt to prove that a certain figure is correct.

<sup>2</sup>See Barth, pp. 125-128; Guinness, pp. 67-184; Littleton, pp. 9- 10; Pinnock, pp. 109-111; Board, pp. 4-16; Wolfe, p.75.

<sup>3</sup>Guinness, pp. 44-45; cf. Barth, p. 125.

<sup>4</sup>C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961), pp. 126-127.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid*, Preface, p.3.

<sup>6</sup>Irwin Lutzer, *You're Richer Than You Think* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1978), Chapter 9.

<sup>7</sup>Incidentally, the biblical responses to doubt in subsequent chapters will include suggestions which can be used with Satanic temptations, as well.

<sup>8</sup>Paul is particularly adamant about the inability of man to solve his own problems. See II Cor. 4:7; 10:3-6; 12:9-10; Eph. 6:10; Phil. 2:12-13; 4:13.

<sup>9</sup>Pinnock, p. 109.

<sup>10</sup>Of course, this does not mean that Christians could very well have strong convictions (and strong emotions!) on these (or other similar) subjects. Neither does it mean that a person is not justified in defending his own view, but, due to the very nature of the issues, somewhat less dogmatism might be warranted.

<sup>11</sup>Board, pp. 9-14.

<sup>12</sup>Guinness, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup>Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup>It is precisely for this reason (and others) that counselors must take proper precautions while counseling members of the opposite sex. It is crucial that problems of this nature be handled before they even start to develop.

<sup>15</sup>Barth, pp. 70-72.

16Michael C. Griffiths, *Christian Assurance* (London: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962), p. 18.

17Guinness, pp. 70-72.

18Perhaps a note is needed concerning the use of the word "healed" since it has already been indicated that it is "human" to doubt. Thus, it is not being claimed that these persons never doubt again, but that the specific form which plagued them before had been resolved. In other words, their "problem" had been solved (even over long periods of time), although issues may still arise periodically. Follow-up shows this to be the case.

19Several of these sources will be documented in the endnotes of the following chapters.

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## **Chapter III**

### **Factual Doubt**

Earlier, factual doubt was referred to as the species of uncertainty which is frequently concerned with the evidence for Christianity. It is chiefly interested in issues which are related to the truthfulness of the faith and regularly expresses questions pertaining to either philosophical points of interest (such as the existence of God and the problem of pain) or historical acts (like miracles and Scripture). A major characteristic of doubt which is primarily factual is that it is generally satisfied if sufficient data is given in answer to its queries.

In this chapter it will obviously be impossible to argue for the truthfulness of Christian Theism as a whole when a complete volume would be unable to perform the entire task. However, using the facts of the gospel as the indispensable center of the Christian faith, we will begin by simply listing some of the best evidences for these individual beliefs. Informational endnotes will direct the interested reader to more detailed presentations of the basis for each point.

#### **A. A Factual Basis for the Gospel**

In I Corinthians 15:1-4, Paul provides one of the most widely cited lists of the content of the gospel. After relating to his readers that belief in this gospel is sufficient to save a person (verses 1-2), Paul states that Christ died for our sins, was buried and rose again on the third day, in agreement with the teaching of the Scriptures (verses 3-4).

From this passage, I think that we can denote at least four facts which compose the gospel.<sup>1</sup> At a minimum, the gospel includes Christ's atoning death, His burial and His resurrection from the dead (as signified by His appearances).<sup>2</sup> In addition to these three, I believe that the fourth fact is derived from Paul's use of the title "Christ" here instead of the proper name "Jesus." Without arguing a complicated topic at this point, I will simply say that Paul's use of this title has some special significance, as it does other places in his writings.<sup>3</sup> In fact, it would appear from his other work as well that Paul would not affirm that one who accepts the first three facts but who rejects what this title stands for concerning the person of Christ could be said to be a Christian in any orthodox sense.

At any rate, I will now turn to a listing of some of the data in favor of each of these four facts: the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, as well as His deity. For it would appear that, whether my last conclusion on the deity of Christ is accepted or not, it would be difficult to argue that these four facts are not crucial to any orthodox understanding of the Christian faith.

#### **1. The Death of Jesus**

a) The gospels accurately portray numerous details concerning Jesus and are trustworthy sources for a study of His life. As such, the major texts on Jesus' death provide noteworthy material for this fact,<sup>4</sup> especially in that there is such widespread agreement in these documents concerning the general outline of these events.<sup>5</sup>

b) The New Testament contains numerous creedal statements, which are oral testimonies (some apparently apostolic in nature) which circulated in the earliest church. Although they appear in written form in the New Testament, they actually predate the books in which they are contained. Some of these creeds are dated from 35-50 A.D. and they frequently report the death of Jesus.<sup>6</sup> This testimony provides early witnesses to these facts.<sup>7</sup>

c) A large number of non-Christian sources also report various aspects of the life of Jesus. Of the more than twenty such witnesses, dating largely from about 30-130 AD, twelve mention Jesus' death with some providing several details. Together quite an amount of data is given.<sup>8</sup> It is the most widely-reported fact

about Jesus in this non-Christian literature.

d) Medical science supplies strong evidence concerning the nature of death by crucifixion, which is essentially death by asphyxiation. Contrary to some popular thinking, a person does not just hang on the cross until he bleeds or dehydrates to death. To hang in the low position on the cross (without pushing upwards) for more than a minimal amount of time is to suffer asphyxiation according to virtually all medical researchers. So the authorities could tell when an individual had expired since one could not "play dead" by hanging low on the cross, while changing positions in order to breathe would obviously reveal that death had not yet occurred.<sup>9</sup> Incidentally, the discovery of the skeleton of a first century Jewish victim of crucifixion named Yohanan confirms many of these details.<sup>10</sup>

e) The spear wound in Jesus' side is not only a confirmed Roman practice,<sup>11</sup> but is a very strong medical argument for death, since the weapon most likely pierced Jesus' heart, as indicated by the flow of water. Most physicians who have studied this issue agree that the water most likely proceeded (at least partially) from the pericardium, a sac which surrounds the heart and holds watery fluid. In other words, the spear wound would have killed Jesus if He had not already expired.<sup>12</sup>

f) Somewhat related to the last point is another gory detail of crucifixion. If the spear had entered Jesus' lung and if He was still alive, the persons standing around the cross could have distinctly heard a sucking sound caused by the air being inhaled through the blood and other bodily fluids. Again, it would have been obvious to the authorities that Jesus was not dead.<sup>13</sup>

g) If the Shroud of Turin is the actual burial garment of Jesus, it would prove Jesus' death on at least two additional counts. The body of the man buried in the shroud is in a state of rigor mortis and at least the chest wound exhibits a post-mortem blood flow.<sup>14</sup> But it should be carefully noted here that even if the Shroud of Turin would ever be proven not to be Jesus' cloth, nothing in Christianity would change; only the cloth itself would be disproved. And even so, unless it is simply a fake (which it does not appear to be), it would still provide many corroborating details for the nature of crucifixion in general.

h) After all these evidences for Jesus' literal death by crucifixion, this writer believes that the strongest refutation of the so-called swoon theory was given over 150 years ago by a radical German critic, David Strauss. He pointed out that the greatest problem with any hypothesis which denied Jesus' death on the cross is that Jesus' appearances to the disciples would then obviously show that he was weak and sickly, in need of much medical care, as evidenced by his having escaped crucifixion alive but with unhealed wounds. So after such extraordinary events as surviving the cross, not dying in the tomb, moving the stone and walking to where the disciples were, Jesus would only have caused the disciples to want to nurse him back to health. They would have gotten a doctor before proclaiming him risen!<sup>15</sup>

But even worse, the early, eyewitness testimony proclaimed a glorified resurrection body, which would most obviously be at great odds with the bruised, beaten, bloody, pale, limping body of Jesus! And at this point, contemporary studies even strengthen Strauss' critique, for it is agreed even by virtually all critical scholars that the facts indicated that the earliest disciples unquestionably believed that they had seen the glorified body of the risen Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The fact of this belief is incompatible with seeing the crucified and revived (but seriously ill) body of Jesus.

Thus we conclude that the manuscript, historical and medical facts combine to firmly establish the fact of Jesus' death on the cross, due to the rigors of crucifixion. It is no wonder that this event is admitted by virtually all scholars, liberal or conservative.

## 2. The Burial of Jesus

a) All four gospels record Jesus' burial and, again, there is much agreement on the general details. The trustworthiness of these accounts provides good source material corroborating this fact.<sup>17</sup>

b) The creed in I Cor. 15:3-4 records Jesus' burial and, in all likelihood, dates from the 30s A.D. As such there is very early testimony which reveals that the burial was not a belief which was added decades after the occurrence itself, but actually predates the writing of the New Testament.<sup>18</sup>

c) There are also some extra-biblical sources which may help confirm the burial of Jesus.<sup>19</sup> Of perhaps the most interest here is an archaeological discovery known as the Nazareth Decree which, oddly enough, does not even specifically mention Jesus. Identifying itself as the "Ordinance of Caesar" and most probably dating from the reign of Emperor Claudius (41-54 A.D.), this marble slab mentions Jewish burial practices including the rolling of stones in front of tombs and the sealing of these sepulchers. The most interesting issue is why a Roman emperor would be troubled enough by occurrences in Palestine in order for him to decree that anyone guilty of robbing tombs would be punished by death, especially when the normal punishment for this crime was a fine. At any rate, whether this is an actual reference to Jesus' burial or not, useful information is thereby gained,<sup>20</sup> although this is admittedly not a primary evidence for His interment.

d) If the Shroud of Turin is the actual garment of Jesus, then an incredible amount of material is thus gleaned, for this cloth would then be his burial covering. As such, the shroud would be very valuable in providing information regarding the way the body was wrapped, as well as details gathered from the body image on the cloth. And, of course, the obvious fact would be that, if verified, it would provide actual empirical evidence for Jesus' burial itself.<sup>21</sup>

e) Paradoxically, one of the strongest evidences in favor of the burial of Jesus consists of the strong arguments for the empty tomb, for some of the same facts which indicate that Jesus' body was missing also show that He had been interred in the tomb beforehand. The evidences for the empty tomb, strictly speaking, belong in the next category of arguments for Jesus' resurrection.<sup>22</sup> But several of these, such as the pre-gospel traditions, the proclamation of the resurrection in Jerusalem, and the Jewish polemic which actually admitted the empty tomb also require the historicity of the burial.

It is for reasons such as these that even most critical exegetes accept the historical nature of the empty tomb,<sup>23</sup> thereby including the facticity of at least some elements of the burial, as well. Dunn notes that while the reports of the vacated tomb are doubted by some,

**scholarship as a whole has done more to substantiate than to disprove it. Whatever we make of it, here, we may say with confidence, is a piece of good historical information.<sup>24</sup>**

Dunn points out further that it is extremely difficult to deny the historicity of the empty tomb.<sup>25</sup> Certain portions of this data, conversely, also argue strongly for Jesus' burial.

f) Lastly, the burial of Jesus is quite a natural event. Consequently, of all of the facts included in the gospel, this one (in one sense) requires the least amount of evidence. Consequently, relatively few critics dispute the fact. Thus, while the point to be made here is not an actual evidence for Jesus' burial, it is still a consideration in its favor. Simply stated, a burial is the normal result of a death. As such, the facts which confirm Jesus' death would seem to lead naturally to His burial. Additionally, the evidence which we have strongly favors such an event.

### 3. The Resurrection of Jesus

a) The trustworthiness of the New Testament (and of the gospels, in particular) provides support for the literal and bodily resurrection of Jesus. Although critics frequently question several portions of the gospel narratives,<sup>26</sup> these passages can be defended successfully. The general unanimity of the New Testament witness and the reliability of these texts produce a strong case for Jesus' resurrection.<sup>27</sup>

b) The pre-New Testament creeds also strongly support the teaching of Jesus' resurrection. Not only is this event reported in this literature,<sup>28</sup> but it is utilized as evidence for other central Christian doctrines.<sup>29</sup>

One creedal passage in particular, I Cor. 15:3ff., provides a very powerful argument for Jesus' resurrection. Most critics who have investigated this subject date this tradition from the 30s A.D. and, further, think that Paul received it from the apostles themselves, probably Peter and James.<sup>30</sup> As such, this text provides crucially early and eyewitness testimony for Jesus' resurrection appearances.<sup>31</sup>

c) Numerous extra-biblical sources from about 30-180 AD either teach or imply the facticity of Jesus' resurrection. At least ten total sources are concerned with the topic of what happened to Jesus after His death, with each of these actually mentioning either the resurrection or Jesus' exaltation to heaven.<sup>32</sup> Yet, to be quite honest, there are questions about several of these sources which keep this from being a strong evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. But the data is still useful in a study of this subject.<sup>33</sup>

d) A much more important argument in favor of Jesus' resurrection concerns the failure of the various alternative theories which have purported to explain this event in completely natural terms. Not only have each of these theories been refuted by the known data,<sup>34</sup> but the critics themselves have generally rejected each of them. While Nineteenth Century older German liberals critiqued these theories individually, Twentieth Century critical scholars have usually repudiated them as a whole.<sup>35</sup> While the absence of alternative theories by itself does not necessarily prove Jesus' resurrection, that critics have generally even dismissed these naturalistic attempts because of their inability to account for the known facts is a strong indication of the problems facing such skeptical approaches.

e) But not only have critical attempts to explain the resurrection failed, there are very important evidences in favor of the facticity of this event. Factors such as the eyewitness testimony which has not been explained naturally, the changed lives of disciples who were willing to die specifically for their belief in the resurrection, the early date of the proclamation, the empty tomb and the testimonies of two former skeptical unbelievers (Paul and James, the brother of Jesus) are examples of the powerful arguments for the literal resurrection.<sup>36</sup>

f) If the Shroud of Turin is Jesus' burial cloth, there may even be some evidence present which indicates that He was raised from the dead. There is no bodily decomposition on the linen, meaning that the body was not in

the cloth for very long. Additionally, the chief pathologist who investigated the shroud has testified that the condition of the blood stains indicates that the body was not unwrapped. Lastly, it is our view that the evidence indicates the cause of the image on the material to be a scorch from a dead body. So the absence of a body which was possibly not unwrapped and a scorch from that dead body could provide empirical, repeatable evidence for Jesus' resurrection.<sup>37</sup>

g) I think that the strongest argument for the resurrection of Jesus is a case which can be based on the minimal historical facts alone. In other words, I think that even if one utilizes only those facts which are known to be historical and which are recognized as such by skeptical scholars, there is still enough data to show that Jesus literally rose from the dead. This reveals that the resurrection can be established by the information known to be historical by both skeptics and believers alike.<sup>38</sup>

There is simply an incredible amount of evidence for Jesus' literal resurrection from the dead. As the major event in the Christian faith which involves the supernatural working of God, the believer is on solid factual grounds with this occurrence, the corroboration of which can be approached and documented from any of several angles. On a practical note, when so many events are reported in Scripture, it is by the grace of God that it is this center of faith (I Cor. 15:12-20) which has received this degree of confirmation. As such, there is much relevance here for the subject of factual doubt, as we will perceive below.

#### 4. The Deity of Jesus Christ

a) We will not further belabor the subject of the trustworthiness of the New Testament but will just state here that if the gospel texts are accurate, Jesus unquestionably claimed to be deity. This is evident from numerous passages in all four gospels.<sup>39</sup>

b) Jesus' pronouncements and His actions reveal that He spoke and acted as God. His claims to deity are perhaps best seen in the self-designations "Son" in the context of speaking of God the Father, "Son of Man," His references to God as "Abba," and His answer to the high priest when asked if He was the Christ, the Son of God.<sup>40</sup> Further, His activities such as His proclamations that persons would be judged specifically by how they responded to His message of salvation and His claim to have the authority to forgive sin (which was judged by the Jewish scribes who were present to be a prerogative of God alone) are also important indicators of His own convictions in this area.<sup>41</sup> Together, His claims and His actions are strong arguments that Jesus taught that He was, indeed, deity.<sup>42</sup>

c) In one of the strongest arguments for the deity of Christ, Royce Gruenler points out that, utilizing only a minimalistic list of Jesus' evidenced sayings as assembled (and accepted) by radical New Testament critics themselves (and which contain none of the explicit Christological utterances which the gospels attribute to Jesus) one can still prove that Jesus was conscious of His own deity. In other words, even in the critically ascertainable synoptic gospel passages which "liberal" critics almost unanimously believe to preserve the authentic words of Jesus, we still find that He claimed divine authority. Thus, there is no necessary reason to distinguish the Jesus of the minimal authentic sayings from the Jesus who makes the lofty claims found in all four gospels. Jesus claimed divine prerogatives in both cases.<sup>43</sup>

d) While it is frequently claimed that the earliest church did not believe that Jesus was deity, a study of some of the early creeds reveal that this is not the case. They ascribe titles to Jesus such as "Christ" (or Messiah), "Son" and "Lord." And lest some challenge the meanings of these titles by claiming that these terms do not infer deity but some lesser role for Jesus, some of the contexts (such as Phil. 2:6-11) reveal exactly the opposite.<sup>44</sup> The early church proclaimed Jesus as deity even to the point of being "pre-existent" and "equal with God."<sup>45</sup>

e) Numerous extra-biblical sources, although certainly later than the creedal sources just discussed, also plainly refer to Jesus as deity. At least three non-Christian writings call Jesus divine, while four others relate that early Christians believed this about Jesus.<sup>46</sup> The earliest non-New Testament Christian writers clearly refer to Jesus as deity, including specifically calling Him God on numerous occasions.<sup>47</sup>

f) Since Jesus proclaimed Himself as deity, as revealed by both His teachings and His actions, and since the earliest church also held that He was deity, the question of verifying the teachings of Jesus is crucially important. It may be argued that Jesus' resurrection from the dead was the chief sign (miracle) which confirmed the truthfulness of His claims.<sup>48</sup>

After viewing the factual basis for the death,<sup>49</sup> burial, resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ, we have found that the evidence for each portion of the gospel message is extremely strong. As such, we have a firm foundation on which to address the issue of how we might make use of these facts in the treatment of doubt.

#### B. Applying Facts to Factual Doubt

##### 1. Simple and Compound Doubt



We began this chapter with the assertion that uncertainty which is factual in nature (or even primarily factual) is generally satisfied by the relevant evidence or other data. In other words, this sort of state is treated chiefly by a study of the appropriate grounds for faith.

Guinness expresses the issue this way:

**Faith does not feed on thin air but on facts. Its instinct is to root itself in truth, to earth itself in reality, and it is this which distinguishes faith from fantasy, the object of faith from a figment of imagination . . . . This is always the way. This type of doubt is silenced by facts, answered by truth and reassured by understanding . . . . Truth is the only sufficient answer faith can give doubt, for it is the truth of the matter, the facts of the case which give faith its solid foundation.50**

Likewise, Board states the problem similarly:

**Deep questions require deep study . . . . Christianity has something to do with fact and truth . . . . So doubts of error are met by knowledge and study.51**

We have concurred with this prognosis throughout this chapter. It has been our purpose to present a long list of evidences in favor of the death, burial, resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ. Although it was not possible to develop any of these points, informational footnotes have suggested some additional sources in order to facilitate just the sort of study which can be the primary correction to this type of uncertainty.

Persons who have come to me with factual doubts are often distinguished by their questions involving the truthfulness of Christianity (in whole or in part), the lack of observable emotional patterns and a seeming desire to accept a good answer. As such, the proper data should at least theoretically be a sufficient cure.

A simple and somewhat humorous illustration of this occurred in my own family. My oldest son, Robbie, has always been a very inquisitive child, frequently refusing to take easy answers at face value. Once, after he asked me how one can know that Jesus was really raised from the dead, we got into a simple discussion about history in general and how one can know, for instance, that George Washington ever existed. Just a short time later, during Easter season, Robbie's Sunday School teacher asked the entire class the same question about the resurrection, to which my son replied, "How do you know that George Washington ever lived?" After a moment of reflection, the teacher understood the connection and she responded, "Oh yes, you're Habermas' son, aren't you?" At any rate, Robbie's factual doubts had been solved by the data and he was convinced enough to share the answer with others.

At the same time, the counselor or teacher who does an insufficient job dealing with a question ought not necessarily assume that the person's doubt is of a different nature. Thus if an individual questions the deity of Christ, it will probably not help to tell him to "just believe," concluding, if he doesn't, that it must be a volitional issue. Guinness states the problem well:

**If someone is doubting the resurrection, it is irrelevant to assure him of Christ's promise never to leave him -- Christ never was with him if he has not risen . . . . If there is "no reason why" for faith, the time may come when there is "no reason why not" for doubt. And the best remedy for this doubt is to know the sure and sufficient reasons God has given us, to know why we can know God is there, to know why we can trust his revelation as true, to know why we can be sure of his love and his goodness, and to stand firm in our understanding of these truths.52**

On the other hand, uncertainty is frequently not a simple issue but a compound one. More than factual doubt is quite often present. Perhaps what was once a more simple factual uncertainty has progressed to emotional levels due to a person's not being able to deal with it adequately. A more complicated case would be one in which factual and emotional doubt leads to a volitional quandary because of the unsettled nature of the other issues.

In one such case, an outstanding young Christian intellectual was studying for his doctorate at a major northeastern university. There he found himself alone and without much fellowship with other believers. And even though he had studied Christian philosophy and apologetics, what started as a few intellectual questions smoldered until an emotional flame followed. This young student interpreted his emotions as a rejection of Christianity and acted accordingly. Over a period of a few months, he read several anti-Christian authors, further confirming his change in beliefs.

During this time, when he had the opportunity, he told several of his Christian friends that he was now an agnostic and that he had, indeed, repudiated his faith. Later, when this budding skeptic's former pastor had heard about the problem and then drove over to speak to him, the pastor discovered that volitional doubt was likewise operational--this graduate student both acted cold and had no intention (or apparent desire) to choose to believe otherwise.

This was an example of doubt that had started fairly simply but had later blossomed into a compound case involving factual, emotional and volitional factors. But the pastor rightly surmised in this case that, unless the factual objections were removed first, emotional healing and the response of the will would probably not occur. So, the pastor took several trips to see the student and, acting correctly, attempted to chip away at the intellectual problems. Over a period of a few more months, the pastor was successful in showing his former member that, on strictly factual grounds, Christianity was true.

When no further factual objections of any importance remained, the pastor then concentrated on the rebellious will of the student, suggesting repentance. While at first the advice was resisted, the student finally did repent, returning to a prosperous Christian belief and life. Some time later, things were still getting better with the fruits of true Christian commitment being evident. Here and in other situations of either salvation or such repentance, I must conclude that without the work of the Holy Spirit, the ultimate result would never have occurred.

## 2. Dealing with Factual Doubt

Our previous discussion points out the importance of identifying what type of doubt is present in an individual. And while the last illustration may show that such is sometimes a complicated matter, there are several indications which reveal that it is not as difficult as one may think. One need not untangle every last thread; disclosing the chief type and working with it can usually cause the situation to unravel significantly so that other aspects can also be treated. Additionally, love and concern can be shown to the person, which in itself often helps. Lastly, the helper is not "on his own" and need not feel that the burden is on him. We can each only do our best; changing lives is the Holy Spirit's domain. Believers need to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's working through them. Other believers can also be very helpful, as can personal study.

Having said all of this, how do we actually deal with factual doubt? I will suggest three steps, all of which follow from our preceding discussion.<sup>53</sup>

First, we need to learn the factual basis for the Christian faith. This is not to say that all Christians must become sophisticated apologists, but it does mean that we can at least have a good grasp of the factual basis for the gospel, as the center of the faith. And this is doubly crucial for the one who is either suffering factual doubt or who is helping another through it.

Of course, such a suggestion might take some study. Board states that, in working on this type of uncertainty, there "is no place for sloth."<sup>54</sup> Guinness asserts that "of all the families of doubt this is probably the one best helped by reading."<sup>55</sup> Be this as it may, having a sound factual basis for faith is the best remedy for factual doubt, as shown earlier in this section. And while an outlined case for the grounding for the gospel has already been supplied in this chapter, other relevant material and topics are also important here. But knowing why we believe the things we do is an excellent starting point.

Second, we cannot be content merely to know the basis for the Christian faith, and the gospel in particular, but we must constantly review and rehearse these facts. Thus, we must remind ourselves of this data.

After speaking of the subject of doubt, C. S. Lewis mentions this last point in his characteristic way:

**. . . make sure that, if you have once accepted Christianity, then some of its main doctrines shall be deliberately held before your mind for some time every day. That is why daily prayers and religious reading and church-going are necessary parts of the Christian life. We have to be continually reminded of what we believe. Neither this belief nor any other will automatically remain alive in the mind. It must be fed.<sup>56</sup>**

Lewis makes the worthwhile assertion here that such activity should occur daily, as well. To wait for the time that we experience doubt in order to "apply the facts" is not as affective. Besides, daily practice and review should act as a kind of doubt prevention. It is also recommended that such rehearsal might occur (in addition to Lewis' emphasis on prayer, reading and worship) in a daily period of meditation (see the later treatment of this subject).

Third, the factual basis for Christianity must be firmly held by faith. For me, this was always the toughest step, for I didn't think that faith was even relevant in this context, let alone knowing how to do it.

This point requires more attention than we can give it here. And since it is a matter of volition, as well, it is treated in more depth in that chapter. Suffice it to say at this juncture that faith is not a "weak sister." To quote Lewis, "Now Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods."<sup>57</sup>

One additional (and perhaps intriguing) assertion needs to be made on this subject and that is that faith

needs to shift from factual propositions of the gospel to the Christ of the gospel. This needs to be treated later, as well, but the point is that it is not the impersonal relationship of a believer with the historical facts that is needed, but a personal, living relationship with the Jesus of the facts.

Perhaps two final notes of application are needed here. First, with factual doubts, the chief issue is the truth of the factual basis for Christianity. And since the gospel is true, we should stress that this is the case whether one chooses to believe it or not. And there is a certain sense in which it must be said to the one doubting that other concerns are less relevant at this point. Did Jesus Christ die for our sins? Was Jesus Christ buried afterwards? Did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? Is Jesus Christ deity? We must stay on track here; to be sidetracked by pseudo problems is perhaps to lose the battle. How we feel about the data or if there is the "slightest chance" that it is false<sup>58</sup> are red herrings.

With regard to serious factual objections, each must be faced on its own grounds. The endnotes in this chapter should provide some useful sources. But briefly, the viewpoint from which the challenge comes may need to be identified, since it very possibly has a bearing on the answer. Then the explicit issue needs to be addressed. But once again, the major subject in both factual uncertainty and with factual objections is still the facts: what are they? The evidence proves each of the facts in the gospel, so this sort of uncertainty ought to subside as we continually apply this knowledge.

Second, if a person continues to balk and defend his doubt, then other types of uncertainty may be the issue. Initially we should be willing to check if we have done the best we can in presenting the factual basis for Christianity. But beyond that, we should be alert for other signs. Questions about the very possibility of being mistaken, especially in the absence of any new facts, probably identifies emotional doubt. On the other hand, the unwillingness to exercise further faith may indicate volitional concerns. And we turn to these other species of uncertainty in subsequent chapters.

### C. Conclusion

The gospel is the absolute center of the Christian faith. It is also the portion of Christianity which is most readily verified by the evidence. The atoning death, burial, resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ are established on extremely strong grounds. I think that it is even a further indication of God's grace that the evidence is so abundant at this crucial juncture rather than at less important points.

Applying such facts to factual uncertainty can be tricky especially because of the compound doubts which are frequently present. But learning the factual basis, continually reviewing it and holding on to it by faith should cure factual doubt. Practice is imperative.

Christians must regularly remind themselves that the chief concern here is the truthfulness of the faith. Factual doubts and objections should be handled in much the same way: what does the evidence indicate? If the factual uncertainty is not solved at this point, we should examine both the job we did in studying and communicating that basis and the likelihood that there is more to the doubt than just that factual element itself.

### Endnotes--Chapter III

1It should be noted that the word "gospel" in this discussion is used more narrowly of those facts which, in an orthodox sense, it is necessary for one to believe in order to be a Christian. To be more proper, the "gospel" is being used here of the facts which one must believe concerning Christ, for faith is placed in Him, not in the facts themselves. And I realize that any listing of the facts in the gospel will be open to some question and dialogue. So I will claim at this point simply that I think those listed here are the minimum number of beliefs which comprise the gospel as enunciated by many orthodox scholars.

2A very interesting point is made by those who think that the resurrection appearances should also be included as a distinct element in the gospel specifically as listed by Paul in I Cor. 15:3-5. The argument here is largely based on the "kai . . . kai . . . kai" sequence of verses 4-5 and asserts that, just as the burial and the resurrection of Christ are listed, the third kai also includes the appearances. A possible response is that, since no human being witnessed the actual resurrection itself (as far as is known), the fact that Jesus was indeed raised (v.4) is the conclusion drawn from the facts that He had actually died (v.3) and then later appeared (v.5), thereby meaning that the resurrection and appearances are construed as a whole. But the practical point to be made here is that, either way this question is solved, a defense of the resurrection is virtually always done in terms of the appearances anyway and the endnotes here will attest the same.

3See the sources in endnote 41 below for the relevance of the title "Christ" and other related issues.

4For a defense of various aspects of the trustworthiness of the gospels, including questions of authorship and eyewitness testimony (from both several viewpoints and on different difficulty levels), see: William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1942); Paul Althaus, "Fact and Faith in

the Kerygma," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966); Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1987); F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are they Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960); John Drane, *Introducing the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1986); Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), Chapter 16; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1971); Archibald M. Hunter, *Bible and Gospel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), Chapter 3; Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, Chapter 4; John Warwick Montgomery, *History and Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964, 1965), Chapters 1-2; John A. T. Robinson, *Can We Trust the New Testament?* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977); A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978); Bastiaan Van Elderen, "The Teaching of Jesus and the Gospel Records," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Saviour and Lord*, edited by Carl F. H. Henry, op.cit.

5For defenses of the further point of the inspiration of the New Testament as well, see: Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982); W. Arndt, *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955); Norman L. Geisler and William E. Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1968); R. Laird Harris, *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957); Robert P. Lightner, *The Saviour and the Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1966); Clark H. Pinnock, *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971); Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982); B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1948); John W. Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984).

6See Phil. 2:8; I Pet. 3:18; cf. Rom. 4:25 for examples of early creeds which report the death of Jesus. Additionally, I Cor. 15:3 and 11:26 are especially central in such a discussion.

7See Gary R. Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus: Historical Records of His Death and Resurrection* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), especially Chapter V.

8For these twelve sources and a discussion of their value, see Habermas, *Ibid.*, Chapters IV, VII.

9For some of the many medical doctors who have studied death by crucifixion, see, for example, Pierre Barbet, *A Doctor at Calvary* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1953); Robert Bucklin, "The Legal and Medical Aspects of the Trial and Death of Christ," *Medicine, Science and the Law*, January, 1970; William D. Edwards, Wesley J. Gabel and Floyd E. Hosmer, "On the Physical Death of Jesus Christ" in *Journal of the American Medical Association*, volume 255, number 11, March 21, 1986; C. Truman Davis, "The Crucifixion of Jesus: The Passion of Christ from a Medical Point of View" *Arizona Medicine*, March, 1965.

10See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 153-155. For a technical treatment of this archaeological find, see Nicu Haas, "Anthropological Observations on the Skeletal Remains from Giv'at ha-Mivtar," *Israel Exploration Journal*, volume 20, numbers 1-2.

11For a Roman statement, see Quintillian, *Declamationes maiores* 6,9. For another example, compare John Foxe, *Foxe's Christian Martyrs of the World* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), p. 96. The regularity of this practice is difficult to determine.

12Each of the medical doctors in endnote number 9 agrees with this general description, as examples of those who hold this position.

13Frederick T. Zugibe, *The Cross and the Shroud: A Medical Examiner Investigates the Crucifixion* (Cresskill: McDonagh and Company, 1981), p. 165.

14Kenneth E. Stevenson and Gary R. Habermas, *Verdict on the Shroud: Evidence for the Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1981; Wayne: Dell Publishing Company, 1982), see especially Chapter Ten.

15Strauss' famous critique appears in his work *A New Life of Jesus*, two volumes (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1879), volume I, pp. 408-412. Another critic, Albert Schweitzer, found Strauss' criticisms to be the "death-blow" to such rationalistic hypotheses like the old view that Jesus did not die. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, translated by W. Montgomery (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1968), pp. 56-57.

16For two examples, Reginald Fuller calls this early belief by Jesus' disciples "one of the indisputable facts of history." James D. G. Dunn states that it "is almost impossible to dispute" the historical fact of this conviction by the earliest Christians. See Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York:

Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 142; James D. G. Dunn, *The Evidence for Jesus* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1985), p. 75.

17See endnote number 4 above.

18See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 124-127

19For a discussion of these, see *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 110, 147.

20For further information, see *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156; cf. Paul L. Meier, *First Easter* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1973), pp. 119-120.

21For an example of such information, see Bonnie LaVoie, Gilbert LaVoie, Daniel Klutstein and John Regan, "In Accordance with Jewish Burial Custom, The Body of Jesus was not Washed," *Shroud Spectrum International*, volume I, number 3 (June, 1982), pp. 8-17.

22For good arguments for the empty tomb, see William Lane Craig, "The Empty Tomb of Jesus" in *Gospel Perspectives: Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, edited by R. T. France and David Wenham, volume II (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); Edward Lynn Bode, *The First Easter Morning*, *Analecta Biblica* 45 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970); Robert H. Stein, "Was the Tomb Really Empty?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, volume 20, number 1 (March, 1977).

23Craig, *Ibid.*, p. 194.

24Dunn, p. 69.

25*Ibid.*, p.75.

26In addition, it will be said below that the elements which are most crucial for a resurrection apologetic can be established on historical grounds apart from any belief in the inspiration or even the general trustworthiness of the New Testament.

27On the issue of the trustworthiness of the resurrection passages in particular (in addition to endnote number 4) several specialized works deal with both the more basic and the more advanced concerns. In the former category, see John Wenham, *Easter Enigma: Are the Resurrection Accounts in Conflict?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984) and Josh McDowell, *The Resurrection Factor* (San Bernardino: Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1981). Of a more advanced and technical nature, see Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984) and Murray J. Harris, *Raised Immortal: Resurrection and Immortality in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983).

28Lk. 24:34; II Tim. 2:8; cf. I Tim 3:15-16; Phil. 2:8-11.

29Rom. 1:3,4; 10:9-10.

30Dunn dates it as early as 32 or 33 A.D. (see pp. 69-70). Cf. Harris, pp. 9-14 and Osborne, pp. 221-233.

31For a survey of the reasoning behind these conclusions and the positions of various scholars, see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 124-127.

32These include six non-Christian and four Christian sources.

33For a listing of these ten sources, see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, Chapters IV, VI, VII. For a critical evaluation of them, see especially pages 112-115, 149-150, 161.

34While such a feat could take a book-length manuscript itself, the interested reader might consult what is still a classic treatment of the subject, James Orr's *The Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1965, from the 1908 edition). Cf. Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Rational Inquiry* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1976), pp. 114-171.

35For a brief summary of some of the critical attacks on these alternative theories themselves, see Gary Habermas and Antony Flew, *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead? The Resurrection Debate*, edited by Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), pp. 20-21, including endnotes.

36For a brief listing of these and other evidences for the resurrection, see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 127-129.

37For our conclusion on this issue, see Stevenson and Habermas, *Verdict on the Shroud*, Chapter Eleven.

8For this argument in more detailed form, see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 124-132.

39Besides the synoptic references in the next two endnotes (40 and 41) see John 4:25-26; 5:17-18; 10:27-33; 14:6. In addition to the sources in endnote number 4 above, see those in number 42, as well.

40For examples, see Matt. 11:27; Mk. 2:10-11; 10:45; 13:32; 14:36; 14:61-63.

41For examples, see Matt. 19:28-29; Mk. 2:1-12; 8:34-38; Lk. 12:8-9.

42There is much discussion on these issues in contemporary theology and, sadly, evangelicals have frequently failed to address many of the chief queries posed by critics. But this does not mean that the issues have not been answered. For an excellent treatment of the subject which not only answers many of the key questions but challenges the typical critical assessments, see Royce Gordon Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels: A Phenomenological and Exegetical Study of Synoptic Christology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982). For other important and noteworthy studies on these topics, see I. Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976); Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1976); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974). Compare also Martin Hengel, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) and C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

43See Gruenler, *Ibid.*, pp. 15, 29, 31 and, especially, Chapters 2-3. Gruenler adds that even in the Gospel of John, Jesus makes no explicit claims which are not appropriate based on what is known about His implicit claims derived from the minimalistic data discussed above.

44See especially I Cor. 11:23; 15:3; Rom. 1:3,4 and Phil. 2:6-11. Cf. Acts 8:37; I Cor. 12:3; Heb. 4:14; I Jn. 4:15.

45Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, translated by Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles M. Hall, revised edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1963), p. 235; cf. pp. 55, 57, 321. Cf. Hengel, pp. 57-83; Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, translated by Norman Perrin (London: SCM Press, LTD., 1966), p. 101 for instance.

46See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, p. 109 for a listing of these sources.

47See the clear testimonies of Clement of Rome, *Corinthians*, 36, 59; Ignatius, *Ephesians* 5, 7, 15, 18, 19, 20; *Magnesians* 6, 7, 8; *Romans*, Introduction, 3, 8; *Philadelphians* 7; *Smyrneans* 1, 4; *To Polycarp* 8; *Polycarp*, *Philippians* 12. Of the three authors here, only Clement of Rome does not specifically call Jesus God. It is noteworthy that several New Testament texts also refer to Jesus as God (see Jn. 1:1; 1:18; 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:8; II Pet. 1:1; cf. Phil. 2:6; Col. 2:9; Heb. 1:3) although there is some question concerning the grammar, syntax or text in a few of these instances.

48See Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980; Lanham: University Press of America, 1984), especially Chapters 1-3.

49In I Cor. 15:3 Paul states that it is not just the death of Jesus which plays such an important part in the gospel, but His atoning death (i.e. that Jesus died for our sins). For a defense of the atonement, see Habermas, *Ibid.*, pp. 108-112.

50Guinness, pp. 115-116.

51Board, pp. 7,9.

52Guinness, p. 117.

53Here and elsewhere in this book, the steps which are given should not be viewed as some "magic number" or as the healing process itself. In fact, the one suffering the doubt should ideally modify and expand these prescriptions in a biblical manner to fit his or her own needs. As Guinness aptly points out, assurance depends

on our "grasp of God," not our mastery of identifying doubt or memorizing certain steps (Guinness, p. 33).

54Board, p.7.

55Guinness, p. 118.

56Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

57Ibid., p. 123. I think that faith is much more than this (as Lewis also says), but this does not render this usage illegitimate.

58It is true that history can only provide facts according to high probability. But this ought to be no cause for doubt. We act every day based on probability and it never seems to bother us ("Will I arrive home from work safely?"). Additionally, such is all the factual certainty that any human enterprise (including science) can give us, so we are on strong grounds. And in well evidenced cases, such as the resurrection of Jesus, the term "proof" is warranted. Lastly, in pointing out the factual basis for Christianity we are deciding in favor of these facts, not against them. Thus, to continue to be bothered by the small chance to the contrary is a witness to one's emotional (not factual) doubt. (See Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 19-20 for some additional thoughts on the nature of historical research.)

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## **Chapter IV**

### **Emotional Doubt**

We have already referred to this species of uncertainty as emanating chiefly from one's passions or moods, usually involving a subjective response(s) by the individual. It perhaps most frequently masquerades as intellectual doubt and hence does not immediately reveal its disguised emotional basis. Such may often be discovered by careful questioning about the individual's beliefs on subjects such as the facts of the gospel. In my experience, it may soon be established by this means that the person who manifests this type of doubt will show that these factual issues are not primary. Rather, in this kind of uncertainty, it is the underlying feelings behind the individual's queries that are of prime interest. Additionally, such feelings are sometimes also accompanied by varying types of distraught psychological states, at least privately. The counselor or teacher will often observe such as a result of probing to the center of the issue.

How, then, can the helper assist in identifying this type of uncertainty? Several earmarks of emotional doubt serve to distinguish it from other species of uncertainty, especially the volitional variety. Very regularly, the factual data is judged by how one feels about it, rather than on its own merits. Thus, instead of coming to grips with the strength of the evidence, the one experiencing the quandary often responds by emoting about it. Another common sign concerns the periodic emotional "highs" which doubting individuals sometimes experience when they think that their doubts may have subsided. When such elation is followed later by a return to the previous state, all in the absence of any change in the actual state of the evidence, this may well be an indication that the person's passions are likely divorced from the facts on this subject of doubt.

Still another means of identifying uncertainty as emotional in nature occurs in the fair number of cases where its origin becomes known, such as with childhood problems or in the case of old wounds. One more indication, and in my experience usually the major signal which most quickly reveals a doubt as emotional, is sent when the suffering person responds to an admittedly strong presentation of the reasons why he should not doubt with a query which might be phrased in terms of, "Okay, but what if . . . ?"<sup>1</sup> While such questioning can (and does) have meanings other than this one, the "what if" perspective, more than perhaps any other, often precedes some inquiry as to why some extremely unlikely scenario (which is usually even admitted to be improbable) might not be true or might not occur after all. The questioner thereby exposes his position as one which is more concerned about (barely) possible options than about what the facts actually relate. This reveals, once again, that it is not the data which the individual considers determinative, as strong as that may be, but rather identifies the real issue as one involving strong feelings.<sup>2</sup>

There are still at least two other characteristics which commonly identify a doubt as emotional, but both of these are shared with volitional uncertainty and thus need to be distinguished. When no amount of evidence (which the doubter admits to be strong) ever brings a person at least some peace, even when these facts are properly applied, and especially when small, "picky" problems are continually raised, such most likely reveals either an emotional basis or the will not to believe (volitional).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, if peace is beginning to shed its light on the unsettled quandary but the doubter paradoxically finds himself fighting that peace, believing that he should not allow himself to experience it until the issue is completely settled, this likewise points to either emotional or volitional uncertainty.

The key to identifying which of the two types of doubt is primarily present in these last two illustrations is found in both the origin of the uncertainty in each particular case and how it manifests itself. For one example, emotional doubt is frequently revealed by distraught emotional states while volitional matters are generally communicated in a much more settled manner. Both our list of common doubts in Chapter II and our discussion of each overall species (in the appropriate chapters) should be helpful in such cases. But it also needs to be remembered that more than one kind of uncertainty is commonly present. And here, once again, the predominant type needs to be identified and worked on at the start of the healing process.

At this point a major misunderstanding of Christian doubt as a whole ought to be mentioned again. It would seem that many persons believe that most doubt is factual in nature. And while this assumption appears to be quite prevalent, I think that careful research will reveal that it is probably false.<sup>4</sup> In my own case studies involving Christians who experience uncertainty, if I have properly identified at least the primary individual doubts, 69% experience chiefly emotional doubt.

This is an interesting conclusion for me personally for at least a couple of reasons. Initially, I had to change my own views on this subject. Years ago I would have had to say that I also believed that factual doubts were predominant. So my study has forced a personal reappraisal of my position. Next, even emotional doubt (as we shall see) ought to be affected by a proper application of the facts, although with a different perspective, method and purpose. So my interest in apologetics was also relevant here as well.

But here a very important point needs to be heavily emphasized. Even if emotional doubts are the most prevalent variety among Christians, this does not require that emotions be viewed as bad. It is still true that they are God-given and, like many things in life, can either be properly or improperly utilized. In fact, we should even thank God regularly for our emotions. Even if they appear to make us uncomfortable on occasion, we should still be thankful for them. We should confirm the fact of our emotions and continue to pursue the proper use of them. After all, as we will see, emotional doubts usually come from the things which we tell ourselves. And they are part of us, not some outside force fighting against us.

It is an earlier point which we need to stress in this immediate context. Not to understand the nature of doubt or to misidentify it could affect a person's healing. And judging from some current approaches, there also appears to be some confusion as to what to actually do about emotional doubt. This is evident when some authors describe the phenomenon but have very little to say by way of suggested healing.<sup>5</sup> With this introductory understanding we will now proceed to a more in-depth description of emotional uncertainty.

#### A. Doubt, Imagination and Emotions

Several authors have written about the actual characteristics of emotional doubt, but, in my estimation, none better than C. S. Lewis. In several brief discussions of the subject, he sets forth a description of the plight that besets all human beings when one's feelings wage war on one's reason. Such assaults are described in the kind of minute detail which could only come from one who has intimately experienced such uncertainty (and Lewis fully acknowledges his personal acquaintance with such, as well).

As for the nature of such attacks, Lewis describes them as emotions which "rise up and carry out a sort of blitz" on one's belief.<sup>6</sup> And they plague all persons; in Lewis' words, "These irrational fluctuations in belief are not peculiar to religious belief. They are happening about all our beliefs all day long."<sup>7</sup> But our concern is with religious doubt, and pertaining to this, Lewis elaborates:

**And let us note that whichever view we embrace, mere feeling will continue to assault our conviction. Just as the Christian has his moments when the clamor of this visible and audible world is so persistent and the whisper of the spiritual world so faint that faith and reason can hardly stick to their guns, so, as I well remember, the atheist too has his moments of shuddering misgiving, of an all but irresistible suspicion that old tales may after all be true, that something or someone from outside may at any moment break into his neat, explicable, mechanical universe. Believe in God and you will have to face hours when it seems obvious that this material world is the only reality: disbelieve in Him and you must face hours when this material world seems to shout at you that it is not all.<sup>8</sup>**

Thus emotional doubt affects persons across a wide spectrum, casting both believers and unbelievers alike into the same dilemma. And unless one can control such uncertainty, one "can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion."<sup>9</sup>

To illustrate the affect of one's feelings on one's reason, Lewis likens his own response to the medical usage of anesthetics. Though completely convinced on good grounds that the anesthesia will do no harm, he witnessed that when it was time for it to be administered, "a mere childish panic begins inside me . . . I lose my faith in anesthetics." It is not reason warring against faith here because for Lewis, faith is based on reason. Rather, "The battle is between faith and reason on one side and emotion and imagination on the other."<sup>10</sup>



This analogy is reminiscent of another which is employed by Blaise Pascal, a Seventeenth Century French philosopher and mathematician who quipped:

**If the greatest philosopher in the world find himself upon a plank wider than actually necessary, but hanging over a precipice, his imagination will prevail, though his reason convince him of his safety. Many cannot bear the thought without a cold sweat. I will not state all its effects.11**

I think that the affect of Pascal's illustration is even more gripping, for many of us can indeed understand his point only too well. The reasonable conviction that we can walk across a board that is sufficiently wide (especially if we have done it many times before) does little to assist us if that object is placed across a chasm. In such a circumstance, reason is at the mercy of one's imagination. For those of us who value our reasoning faculties, this is a sobering (and even a humbling) thought, but it is so frequently true. It aptly describes the plight in which humans find themselves when imagination conquers reason.

If I may indulge myself for the sake of one last illustration, the popular (but somewhat cruel!) childhood game where one utilizes one's fists to alternately represent a rock, scissors or paper is also instructional. The rock would perhaps appear to be the "strongest" object here and, as one might expect, it crushes the scissors. And while the scissors naturally cut the paper, a completely unexpected result also occurs: the paper covers (and thereby "defeats") the rock! I think that such is also a poignant picture of the relationship between one's reason and one's emotions (or "imagination" as Lewis or Pascal might prefer). While our reason appears to be ever so logical, requiring evidence, a little dose of feelings effectively topples the castle.

And what about the cause of this sort of doubt? By describing a common scenario, Lewis is perhaps at his best:

**Our faith in Christ wavers not so much when real arguments come against it as when it looks improbable--when the whole world takes on that desolate look which really tells us much more about the state of our passions and even our digestion than about reality.12**

But perhaps surprisingly, we frequently disguise the emotion as a rational exercise:

**But everyone must have experienced days in which we are caught up in a great wave of confidence or down into a trough of anxiety though there are no new grounds either for the one or the other. Of course, once the mood is on us, we find reasons soon enough. We say that we've been 'thinking it over': but it is pretty plain that the mood has created the reasons and not vice versa.13**

And lastly, how does such imagination affect our conception of Christianity? Again Lewis points out:

**When once passion takes part in the game, the human reason, unassisted by Grace, has about as much chance of retaining its hold on truths already gained as a snowflake has of retaining its consistency in the mouth of a blast furnace. The sort of arguments against Christianity which our reason can be persuaded to accept at the moment of yielding to temptation are often preposterous. Reason may win truths; without Faith she will retain them just so long as Satan pleases.14**

From these insightful comments, we may glean several worthwhile pointers concerning the nature of emotional uncertainty. One's personal Christianity is more frequently threatened by one's view of his faith than by any actual problem. Thus, such questioning explains more about ourselves and other subjective factors than it does about Christianity.

Then, speaking as a "seasoned veteran," Lewis describes how emotional doubts usually thrive without input from any new objections to Christianity. Rather, the mood causes the believer to "invent" problems. Let me add here that the sort of concerns which affect believers during such moods are quite often the same "old" issues which the person has contemplated on several other occasions and which would not bother him if it were not for his current frame of mind. But Lewis notes how we quickly conclude that the factual problem is the reason for the anxiety, when such is usually not the case. Further, it is often the "preposterous" objections which are treated as respectable during these emotional periods of time.

## B. Models for Healing

There are numerous methods for treating patients with psychiatric or psychological problems of a religious nature, perhaps in part because of the different backgrounds and professional convictions of the counselors themselves. Some operate primarily from a medical perspective, others with a psychological or counseling model. A growing group of pastors who have gotten increasingly involved in the healing process broaden this field of study. And this is not to infer that those within these separate groupings necessarily agree with each

other, either!

On several occasions, I have observed the friendly rivalry between professionals who hold to these differing perspectives. The give-and-take is often fascinating as with an ongoing but amiable interchange which occurred between two friends of mine, a psychiatrist and a psychologist, who regularly discussed theoretical aspects concerning the subject of which proposed remedies really obtained the best results. On another occasion, I chaired a dialogue between two other scholars with different perspectives on whether the medical or psychological models were more conducive to theological endeavors. Another type of interaction which has really helped me has been derived from my referrals of certain persons to our campus counseling center and my continuing interaction in each of these cases.

But in spite of these differing approaches, the Christian who is suffering from doubt can take heart on at least three counts. Christian counselors such as those listed below agree that Scripture is central to the healing process and its truths are to be applied. Therefore, counseling goals and desired results are based on an objective Source.<sup>15</sup>

Additionally, there is widespread agreement among these professionals that more than one kind of treatment can work. After surveying a number of models, both psychological and medical, Gary Collins concludes that:

**A careful look at the Bible reveals, however, that a variety of techniques were used when counseling took place . . . . counseling must utilize a variety of techniques.<sup>16</sup>**

Lastly, there is an amazing amount of agreement among Christian researchers that a major (if not the chief) element in treating emotional doubt is cognitive in nature. That is, increasing numbers of professionals think that the primary approach to this type of uncertainty is to devise a strategy which applies rational truth to one's thoughts and actions. Thus, such a method requires both a cognitive response and a behavioral change.<sup>17</sup>

As an example, it would be amiss to describe C. S. Lewis' account of emotional uncertainty in such detail in the previous section of this chapter without also providing his answer to it. For Lewis, the answer is twofold, involving a cognitive change followed by a behavioral one. First, one needs to recognize that moods are going to change no matter who one is or what one believes. So individuals must be resolved, in Lewis' words, to teach these moods "where they get off." By this it is meant that one should actually expect changing emotions and be ready to dictate the truth whenever needed.<sup>18</sup> Second, Christians must "train the habit of Faith" by daily reviewing Christian doctrine in prayer, edification reading and church attendance.<sup>19</sup> In fact, it is asserted that only such "practice of Faith resulting in the habit of Faith will gradually" solve these dilemmas.<sup>20</sup>

Os Guinness also has a twofold remedy for emotional questioning. First, he suggests solving the immediate problem, which may be a lack of sleep, improper eating habits or overwork. Second and reminiscent of Lewis, Guinness asserts that the long-term answer consists of "training faith so that it is not overwhelmed by moods and emotions." One must not allow moods to dictate to faith, but faith must control the feelings.<sup>21</sup> Guinness graphically describes the second remedy this way:

**Unless we do this our emotions will lead us around by the nose, and we will be captives to every passing impulse or reaction. But once faith is trained to control the emotions and knows how to lean resolutely against weaknesses of character, another entryway of doubt is blocked and sealed shut forever.<sup>22</sup>**

Other authors present similar suggestions for the conquering of emotional doubt. There appears to be a wide range of agreement among Christian scholars in a variety of disciplines that such religious uncertainty can be dealt with primarily in cognitive terms. This process is variously described as preaching to oneself, arguing oneself out of moods, reasoning against doubts, or thinking in opposition to one's feelings.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly in terms of our earlier discussion of the medical and the psychological models of healing, some psychiatrists are also convinced that such cognitive methods are quite useful.<sup>24</sup>

But it should be carefully noted here that it is not being claimed that such is the only way to treat emotional doubt. We have only said that there is data which indicate that a cognitive approach<sup>25</sup> is a very helpful way to deal especially with emotional uncertainty and that there are several Christian researchers in various disciplines who have adopted this model.

### C. A Strategy For Healing Emotional Doubt

Perhaps some are wondering how we actually begin the process of conquering emotional doubt, given the preceding perspectives. Surprisingly, few writers have actually presented formulas which are immediately applicable. It will be our purpose here to do three things: to briefly view a New Testament passage which addresses this concern, followed by a presentation of a psychological strategy for possible healing and the

giving of some additional suggestions for the conquering of emotional uncertainty.

## 1. A Biblical Pattern

The Bible contains various kinds of instruction for persons who are suffering distress of any of several kinds.<sup>26</sup> So it is not our purpose here to pretend to offer advice from a single passage as if to say that it's the only possible technique to use with hurting individuals.<sup>27</sup> It is only being claimed here that this particular text is a very helpful one for dealing with anxiety (including that which is caused by doubt) from a biblical perspective.

The passage for consideration here is Phil. 4:6-9, concerning which our purpose will be to make some general application to religious uncertainty, not to exegete the text per se. This is a very familiar portion of Scripture which contains profound advice, promising the peace of God to the one who correctly applies the principles to his life. Indeed, Robert Mounce refers to a portion of this material as the "paragraph on mental health."<sup>28</sup>

After telling the Philippian believers to rejoice, repeating the injunction presumably because of the tough times they were facing (Phil. 4:4), Paul deals with the issue of anxiety (4:6). His language here indicates that these Christians were currently in a state of worry (*meden merimnate*), which may be similar to those who are presently suffering these (or other related) symptoms due to the presence of emotional doubt. After his statement of the problem, Paul's initial advice is to the point: pray. Ernest Scott notes here the explicit or implicit presence of four major aspects of prayer. Paul's treatment includes waiting upon God, which in turn shows the weakness of man and his dependence on Him. Further, prayer requires that Christians clearly state their requests, believing that God can answer. Lastly, we need to thank God for His provisions.<sup>29</sup>

So Paul's initial cure for anxiety is prayer; the result is being kept by the peace of God (4:7). The term sometimes translated "keep" (*phroureo*) is a military word indicating to "guard" or to "garrison." In this context, God's peace will act as a fortress to protect the believer's mind.

But praying followed by thanksgiving is not the entire strategy for the believer. Paul goes on to explain that thoughts other than those which tend to cause anxiety need to occupy the Christian's mind (4:8). Believers ought to concentrate, respectively, on those things which are true to reality (*alethes*), honorable or holy (*semnos*), righteous (*dikaios*), clean or pure (*hagnos*), on that which provokes love (*prospfiles*), or whatever has a good reputation (*euphema*). Two other categories for one's concentration are those thoughts which are excellent in virtue or moral quality (*arete*) and whatever deserves praise (*epainos*). It is on truths such as these in Phil. 4:8 that Christians are to think. Actually, this last term, "think" (*logizomai*), indicates a stronger action than simply a casual attention concerning these subjects. It refers to the process of habitually dwelling or reflecting on a topic.

Such a single minded concentration (or meditation) on proper thoughts needs to be practiced until it becomes a habit (4:9). Christian "modeling" is also very important in this verse, as the more mature believer provides a guide for other Christians. The result, again, is peace.<sup>30</sup>

From this passage, we may denote at least four biblical steps to the conquering of anxiety such as that which might accompany emotional doubt. These may be listed as follows:

- 1) believing prayer
- 2) thanksgiving
- 3) edifying thinking
- 4) practice

In short, the problem should be committed to God, with thanks, while one exchanges his old, anxious thoughts for righteous ones. This ought to be practiced until it becomes the norm. And not only are these steps delineated for application, but healing and peace are promised to those who follow its prescription.

## 2. A Psychological Approach

Several Christian psychologists have utilized chiefly cognitive methods to assist clients with their problems. Two who support such an effort are William Backus and Marie Chapian. Their co-authored volume, *Telling Yourself the Truth*, is not specifically addressed to the issue of doubts at all but presents a psychological approach to dealing with emotional problems. However, their particular method, termed *Misbelief Therapy*, is nonetheless applicable to emotional doubts and also makes use of biblical passages such as Phil. 4:6-9.<sup>31</sup> This section will endeavor to present some of their research with specific application to emotional uncertainty.

Backus and Chapien explain that our feelings are largely caused by the things which we tell ourselves. So if we relate untruths or lies, they even claim that these misbeliefs "are the direct cause of emotional turmoil, maladaptive behavior and most so-called 'mental illness'."<sup>32</sup> Even those things which we fear happening the most in our daily lives (such as embarrassments or failures) do not generally cause as much havoc for us as do our misbeliefs about them. "What you think and believe determines how you feel and what you do."<sup>33</sup>

Related to doubt, if a believer repeatedly tells himself that he is probably going to Hell or that Christianity may not be true, it should not be surprising if his behavior reflects these thoughts. In such cases, what the Christian tells himself is contrary to his deepest desires and conflict results. For Backus and Chapien, the correct response to these misbeliefs is a threefold strategy which is reminiscent of the last two steps of our biblical pattern from Phil. 4:6-9. They outline their approach in the following steps:

1. Locate your misbeliefs.

2. Remove them.

3. Replace misbeliefs with the truth.<sup>34</sup> Thus one is to listen to oneself in order to pick out the lies which one regularly relates. Then these misbeliefs need to be removed, which is done by arguing against them ("No, that is not true, because . . ."). Lastly, truth is supplied in the place of the lies. One does not simply attempt to rule out the anxious thoughts, for example, but to replace them with the truth.<sup>35</sup>

Backus and Chapien challenge the hurting person that they can control their own happiness. The issue is whether they wish to follow God's prescriptions or not. Healing can occur:

**. . . you can change your emotions, you can be an adjusted and happy human being, no matter what you have experienced in you life and no matter what your circumstances are.<sup>36</sup>**

Now some may object that others can be healed but that they cannot or that they have already tried everything but nothing works. Here Backus and Chapien point out that this is as good of a place to begin as any. These two objections need to be identified for what they are: lies. Whenever we catch ourselves thinking or saying that these (or any other) misbeliefs are true, we must stop ourselves immediately and correct them by going through the steps stated above. While one can no doubt imagine some reasons to believe that the misbeliefs are true, we must turn our thoughts elsewhere. Changing our thinking can work, explain these psychologists, "even if nothing else has because its effectiveness depends upon very explicit psychological laws which are as universal as the law of gravity."<sup>37</sup>

So the blame for the faulty thinking is placed squarely on the shoulders of the one who is suffering. People and events around us don't make us doubt or worry--the key is how we respond to and interpret these occurrences. And changing our misbeliefs really does alter both our feelings and our actions. While the outward circumstances may not change right away, what we tell ourselves about them can. The change in ourselves may be gradual and may take time, but it can happen; our problems can be remedied.<sup>38</sup>

How does all of this apply to emotional doubts? Instead of stating (and believing) our misbeliefs, we need to locate the lies we tell ourselves, argue against them and cite the truth. Instead of thinking that they may be going to Hell or that Christ may someday say "depart from me" (with no real reason for thinking so), believers need to object and replace these lies with the truth: "Jesus does not send saved persons to Hell. I know this to be true based on no less of an authority than that of the resurrected Jesus Himself. Besides, the Lord of the universe loves me and I have a unique place with Him" (see John 3:16-18; Rom. 8:28-39; Eph. 1:3-14).

Or instead of the emotional question of whether Christianity could just possibly be false after all, believers need to stop the query immediately by pointing out the misbelief. One applicable truth, for instance, is that anything could be doubted on the grounds of possibility, but wise persons don't base their lives on such. Then the Christian's argument needs to be one which actually recounts the factual basis for faith. A review of the evidences might be helpful. Further truth is supplied as we train our faith by daily practice and by not allowing emotional questions to shake it.

Likewise, when we do not "feel" saved we must not allow a frequent course of events to take place: an emotional letdown and further questioning followed by a "who cares" attitude. Rather, we need to forcefully identify the misbelief and argue against it, perhaps even with the jolting question, "Who cares how I feel? Feelings are simply irrelevant to the issue." Follow-up truth statements of relevant biblical facts are then needed.

As a last example, what about the concern that God does not answer a believer's prayers, like He has for so many others in biblical times? Once again, the lie should immediately be identified ("God doesn't answer prayers today"), followed by an argument such as the recounting of answers which God has already given to both others and to ourselves. (This is why the keeping of a list for enumerating at times like this is so very important.) More truth is supplied by the assertion that strong believers in biblical times like Job, David, John

the Baptist and Paul also experienced doubts, with several writers reporting the feeling that their prayers were not answered, either! So such emotions should not be allowed to question God's actions today or His love for me. As pointed out earlier, the circumstances are not the chief problem; the question is what we tell ourselves about the circumstances.

And what about complications which frequently accompany doubts, such as depression and anxiety? While constantly emphasizing my lack of expertise on these issues, Backus and Chapien do address these concerns from their professional backgrounds, further extending Misbelief Therapy to each of these topics.

They explain that depression is almost always provoked by a loss of some sort (such as a person, an idea, health or finances), which then causes the individual to devalue himself, his surroundings and his prospect for the future. This condition is also identified in Scripture, such as the person who is "cast down" (Ps. 42:5,6; 43:5).

And here, once again, each situation must be placed in perspective by identifying the misbeliefs. Lies include telling ourselves that we cannot go on after this loss or that the emotion itself is the worst thing in the world. Many have faced similar losses and the accompanying feelings and have progressed to successful lives. Backus and Chapien express it this way:

**Experience bears out the deception here. Many of us have told ourselves we "cannot live without" some person, object, scheme or notion. Then this adored "whatever" is removed from our lives and wonder of wonders, we recover.39**

The one who responds, "Yes, but that's someone else, not me" is likewise stating a misbelief. This vicious cycle must be broken in order for healing to occur properly. The lie needs to be identified and argued against. A proper response might be, "Okay, I feel very bad, but this is not the end of the world" or "I've felt horrible before and, with God's assistance, I've always recovered." When a person continues to react emotionally to a loss past a normal period of time, it is no longer the loss but the misbelief which is crippling him and to which he is responding.

The greatest truth we can substitute in place of the lies of depression is that Christians are loved by God and will receive eternal blessings from Him:

**Christians don't have to base their work on achievements or attributes. Even without any achievements and without any special merit or attractiveness, the Christian can know for certain he/she is important and loved. Our lives have been bought and paid for with the blood of Jesus Christ and that means we're free from the pressure to be something, do something, own something, achieve something or prove something in order to be important and loved. We can do all these things or not do them and still be loved and important.**

**Jesus loved [us] so much that He was willing to die on the cross so [we] could have eternal life with Him one day, as well as a fulfilling life here and now.40**

Further, no circumstances, pain, or loss can ever change these facts (Rom. 8:31-39). Leaning on God, we can never be ultimately disappointed, no matter how we feel now. It is simply a fact that eternal life with Jesus Christ not only outweighs all of our present suffering and pain, but it gives us a tremendous perspective from which to view these problems.41

Besides, virtually all depressed persons recover. Depressed Christians must face the truth of both probable recovery now and God's riches in eternity.42

On the other hand, anxiety "is ordinarily defined as fear in the absence of actual danger." It includes such "factors" as an overestimation of the likelihood of the danger and an exaggeration of how horrible it would be in reality.43 The "central theme" in anxiety is that what others think about me is of "crucial importance" to my thinking.44

People teach themselves to be anxious. It is important to realize that we create our own anxiety--not our circumstances. Again, such arises from the lies we tell ourselves and these need to be identified as such. One misbelief is that something "terrible" is going to happen to me:

**What does "terrible" mean? Usually it means something far worse than you think you can endure. You tell yourself the "terrible" is beyond human endurance, worse than anything on earth. Truly, nothing of this sort exists.45**

Another lie concerns the likelihood of our fears. Anxiety by its very nature generally involves imagining an evil which is actually very unlikely. (How many of our worst fears over the years have actually come true?) Yet the

anxious individual tells himself that the occurrence of this evil is unavoidable or inevitable.

We need to challenge such misbeliefs with the truth that, although we may be feeling bad, what we are imagining has not occurred. Even if something horrible has happened, it's not the end of a meaningful life, for believers still have the Lord, His love and eternal life. In other words, nothing is as terrible as we thought and, while painful things do happen, believers still possess their ultimate hope. And as just mentioned, the object of most anxiety never occurs at all.<sup>46</sup>

A recent psychological analysis of emotional doubt among evangelicals by James Beck found that it frequently occurs to persons who experience chronic uncertainty, often obsessively. Other characteristics include the regularity of a highly developed intellect which sometimes concentrates on minute studies of Scripture or philosophical questioning. The most common subjects which bothered individuals in a small sampling were the fear of having committed the unpardonable sin or other issues involving the salvation of the believer or the nature of God. The Bible itself is even a Source for such anxiety since the person is frequently worried by the implications of various sorts of passages. Beck notes that such anxiety, "characterized by irrationality and unreasonableness . . . can be one of the most distressing and painful of all emotional disorders." He points out that researchers from various schools of thought agree "that a major treatment goal is to work at the intense feelings of insecurity which are the core of the obsessive's struggles."<sup>47</sup>

Among several suggestions to assist such an individual in his emotional healing, Beck appears to agree with Lewis that individuals suffering from such fears as their having committed the unpardonable sin or who misunderstand God's nature need "a better grounding in the central truths of the Christian faith and its practice." Consequently, the doubter "may have to be trained to keep thought structures from deteriorating into such painful rumination."<sup>48</sup> This last point is also somewhat reminiscent of the methodology employed by Backus and Chapian.

But it must be stressed here that the improvement and healing of such conditions takes time. I have seen numerous cases where individuals have been significantly helped after just one (usually lengthy) meeting. But very frequently the conquering of the effects of doubt takes practice, especially so the more it is ingrained in the person. If we have reported misbeliefs to ourselves for more than a very short time, it should not surprise us that it also takes some time to cure the dilemma. And one key here, again, is repetition--both when we need the biblical remedy and even when we don't, as a preventative measure.

### 3. Additional Helps for Healing

We have seen that a biblical pattern for the healing of emotional doubts in Phil. 4:6-9 and the psychological approach taken by several Christian researchers are similar in some very important respects. There is much agreement that emotional uncertainty needs to be confronted with a rational approach which combines the truth with a specific volitional action pattern. Such an avenue might involve prayer with thanksgiving, along with locating, removing and replacing misbeliefs with edifying truth, as well as practice until such becomes a habit. This is not the only possible methodology for such uncertainty, but it appears to be a biblically and psychologically sound solution.

However, in spite of the explicit "1,2,3" approach utilized here, there is no magic number of steps which must be applied. Our purpose was to be specific enough to get someone started down the road to improvement and healing. But the individual who is suffering the doubt may well discover additional pointers which may be both biblical and which function better for him. Perhaps the best suggestion would be to apply a specific pattern such as that in Phil. 4:6-9 or in Backus and Chapian until one is familiar enough with the territory to change or alter the method. To that end, this section will suggest several additional helps which may hasten the healing process. I have known the application of each of these to be successful in helping to treat emotional questioning. They may be used together or separately.

a) We need to remind ourselves that emotional doubt is not primarily factual in nature. Therefore, it does not constitute any evidence against faith. Rather, emotional uncertainty is based on improbabilities (the "What ifs" of life!). In short, the facts actually oppose the worry.

b) We need to minimize the problems without neglecting the correction of them. Others have experienced the same or similar things before (I Cor. 10:13). Thus, our experience does not make us stand alone as some sort of emotional loner. In fact, to have such experiences is even human. But we still need to correct the faulty thinking.

c) We need to properly identify any accompanying feelings as occurring because we are telling ourselves misbeliefs,<sup>49</sup> not usually because we actually want to give up the Christian faith or something similar. In other words, when the believer responds to an issue by saying, "See, I'm probably not saved," unwanted feelings may well occur next. But they are usually the reaction to the misdirected statement itself, not an emotion which further proves that we are unsaved. So fear can be quite paradoxical in that unwanted emotions which some Christians interpret as proof of their diabolical state are (conversely) most frequently a confirmation of our true faith! That's primarily why we are upset at the suggestion that we are not a believer,

even when that thought was our own!

d) We need to realize that anxious states are frequently short-lived. At any rate, these unwanted emotional responses do not have to continue. For example, we have presented a biblical remedy to anxiety, found in prayer and thanksgiving (even for our emotions themselves) followed by replacing the worrisome thoughts with edifying ones, along with the repetition of these steps (Phil. 4:6-9). In this sense, we can break the mood and actually end the anxious state. Realizing that we can control our own emotions should cause us to relax even in the face of the emotional storm, calmly watching as it passes! This may sound too "flowery" to those who are suffering anxiety, but we can actually change the emotion in this biblically prescribed manner.

e) We need to practice thanksgiving and praise even during these emotional states! In the passage just mentioned (Phil. 4:6-9), we are specifically told that, during a time of anxiety, we are both to pray and give thanks (v.6) and that the major subject for edifying thought is that which is praiseworthy (v.8). Likewise, one of the psalmists reports his being downcast (depressed), but goes on to say that it is actually during these very times that he decides to praise God (Ps. 42:5-6, 11; 43:5) in order to change his disposition. There is no more edifying thought (Phil. 4:8) than this one.

f) We also need to trust God and believe Him during these emotional states, as well. There is no better time to develop faith in Him and perhaps no better way to help faith grow than to practice it right during the times while we think it is most in jeopardy. This will be more properly dealt with in the next chapter.

At any rate, it is hoped that the principles in this section will further compliment the biblical and psychological strategies mapped out earlier. Emotional doubt needs to have the truth forcefully applied to it.

#### D. Conclusion: A Work of God

More than with factual doubt, emotional uncertainty appears to lend itself more easily to "self-help" scenarios. But once we get the idea that we are doing the changing, a fundamental problem results. William Backus explains it this way:

**It's frightening to undertake a book on self- control . . . . I fear that the reader will interpret self-control as self-generated effort. If we proceed that way, we quickly abandon the only right ground: the grace of God.<sup>50</sup>**

In our conclusion, we need to alert our readers to this problem as forcefully as is possible. The power to change the believer's doubt is the Lord's; personal effort and our own will do not solve the issue, so we ought not attempt to take credit away from the Lord and to ourselves. This is more properly the concern of the next chapter.<sup>51</sup> Here we will just note that Scripture has much to say about utilizing our tongues and our thoughts in order to effect either negative or positive results.<sup>52</sup> So Satan can achieve negative results while God promotes positive ones (cf. Js. 4:7-8).

One biblical means of confronting emotional doubt is to pray with thanksgiving (even for one's emotions), replacing the anxious thoughts with edifying ones. Continual meditation on these concepts (practice) is also commanded (Phil. 4:6-9). A biblical approach to depression includes praising God (Ps. 42:11; 43:5). A psychological model for healing anxiety, depression and other problems, also making use of similar biblical principles, recommends locating, removing and replacing our misbeliefs which we tell ourselves.<sup>53</sup> And as we have been careful to mention throughout, this is not to say that other methods, such as the use of medicine, are not also needed in appropriate cases. But at each of these points, Scripture notes that God is the Source behind the healing, not our own self efforts or even the practicing of certain steps.<sup>54</sup> We will return to this last point in the next chapter.

#### Endnotes--Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>In some lectures, I have even defined emotional uncertainty as being a "what if" doubt in order to stress this element of passion.

<sup>2</sup>Incidentally, I like to use deferent types of responses to such "what if" queries, each of which is designed to "jolt" the doubter into a different frame of mind. I think the best one is the answer which basically says, "You know, you could just possibly be right. It is possible that X might happen after all. But in light of the (admitted) strong evidence against it, you are probably wrong and wise men choose the best data, not extremely unlikely possibilities." I think one reason this approach has merit is because the doubter usually does not expect me to admit his slight possibility. But I want to show him that the issue isn't where he thinks it is; the fact that something is possible (what isn't?) ought not to be the major concern.

If that slight possibility still bothers him, showing the depth of the emotional quandary, I will go straight to the more powerful remedies listed later in this chapter. But he should also know that the type of factual

certainty which he is rejecting is as strong as finite persons in a finite world can have, whether in science or any area of inductive study. And the gospel can be said to be factually proven. (Again, see Habermas, *Ancient Evidence*, pp. 19-20.) On the other hand, if he rejects my claim to certainty on these issues and does not admit my basis, then we are probably speaking of a more factual doubt and I might have to go back and work through the apologetic case as slowly as I need to do.

3Board terms this type of doubt as volitional (p. 15), but I think that this is to miss the possible emotional elements, as well.

4Guest (pp. 41-42) and Lewis (*Mere Christianity*, p. 124) agree with this assessment.

5As I did in the Introduction (Chapter I), I want to clearly explain once again that I am not a psychiatrist, psychologist or professional counselor. My professional interest in doubt arises chiefly from an apologetic, philosophical and theological background, which perhaps at least partially explains my emphasis on the more cognitive aspects. But it should be

carefully noted that since this book is not a medical, psycho- logical or counseling textbook, it therefore ought not be construed as such. Those with problems in these areas should seek professional Christian help in the specific area of the need(s).

6Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 123.

7This quotation is taken from what is perhaps C. S. Lewis' best writing on doubt. See "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" in *Christian Reflections*, edited by Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1967), p. 42.

8Ibid., p. 41

9Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

10Ibid., p. 122.

11Blaise Pascal, *Pensees: Thoughts on Religion and Other Subjects*, translated by William Finlayson Trotter, edited by H. S. Thayer (New York: Washington Square Press, Inc., 1965), 82, entitled "Imagination." This brief essay contains several worthwhile comments about the strength of human imagination, before which "reason has been obliged to yield."

12Lewis, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" p. 43.

13Ibid., p. 42.

14Ibid., p. 43.

15See Gary R. Collins, *The Rebuilding of Psychology: An Integration of Psychology and Christianity* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1977), pp. 137-138, 143-145, 150-152.

16Ibid., pp. 185, 190. See especially Chapter Ten as a whole.

17In light of the various approaches to (and definitions of) this term, I am defining "cognitive" here as a rational approach which utilizes a factual basis as the support for a specific volitional pattern. In other words, holding that factual truth is available, the appeal is then to the will to effect a strategy of healing based on that truth. But it should be carefully noted that the description in the text at this point is not a purely cognitive pattern of treatment. For example, behavioral changes are also required, as they are in Scripture. Also, we ought to be thankful for our emotions, as mentioned earlier. Again, the method encouraged here also recognizes that several approaches are both biblical and ought to be utilized or even combined.

18Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 123.

19Ibid., p. 124.

20Lewis, "Religion: Reality or Substitute?" p. 42.



21Guinness, pp. 163-167. Notice Guinness' stress on action coming first in these cases.

22Ibid., p. 168.

23Board, p. 5; D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and its Cure* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1965), p. 20; J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 19, 236; H. Norman Wright, *Now I Know Why I'm Depressed* (Eugene: Harvest House, 1984). Several of Larry Crabb's volumes depict similar emphases, although most of his and the other texts in this note are not dealing primarily with the issue of doubt.

24For example, see Paul D. Meier and Frank B. Minirth, *Happiness is a Choice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978) for this emphasis in the healing process written by two psychiatrists. Compare John White, *The Masks of Melancholy: A Christian Physician Looks at Depression and Suicide* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), who judges that while cognitive therapies do not always provide the proper approach in cases of depression (p. 196) they are still quite useful and White himself utilizes them in his combinational approach to this problem (p. 221).

25Neither are we suggesting that there is only one type of cognitive approach or that each of the authors above agrees in all matters. There certainly are varying emphases among these counselors.

26Gary Collins gives some examples on pp. 185-186.

27This is primarily why this section is entitled "A Biblical Pattern" instead of "The" example or even the "major" counseling approach in Scripture.

28Mounce is citing C. E. Simcox at this point. See Mounce's commentary in "The Epistle to the Philippians" in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, edited by Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Nashville: The Southwestern Company, 1962), p. 1330. Once again, the comment on mental health is made in our text from a biblical vantage point, not from a medical or psychological one.

29Ernest F. Scott, "Exegesis" of "Philippians" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, edited by George A. Buttrick, twelve volumes (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1955), vol. IX, p. 113.

30For a bibliography of noteworthy volumes which comment on Phil. 4:6-9 both from somewhat different perspectives and on differing levels of difficulty, see, in addition to Robert Mounce and Ernest Scott (above), William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975); F. F. Bruce, *Philippians: A Good News Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1983); Charles R. Eerdman, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966); William Hendriksen, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962); H. A. Ironside, *Notes on Philippians* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1922); J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1953); Terry L. Miethe, *A Christian's Guide to Faith and Reason* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, Publishers, 1987), Chapter 9; A. T. Robertson, *Paul's Joy in Christ: Studies in Philippians*, revised and edited by W. C. Strickland (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959); Lehman Strauss, *Devotional Studies in Philippians* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1959); Merrill C. Tenny, *Philippians: The Gospel at Work* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956); Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Four Volumes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), Volume Two; John F. Walvoord, *Philippians: Triumph in Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971).

31William Backus and Marie Chapien, *Telling Yourself the Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1980), Introduction. This book is strongly recommended and it is both readable and extremely practical. Its tendency to get to the heart of a problem, describe the condition intimately and propose a biblical solution which is carefully outlined and then reviewed from various angles is, as far I know, unparalleled in the literature of Christian counseling.

32Ibid., p. 17.

33Ibid., p.22; cf. p.20.

34Ibid., p.15.

35This might raise the issue for some regarding the difference between techniques such as "Misbelief Therapy" and various forms of "positive thinking." Although it is difficult to generalize for there are certainly many different forms of the latter, some possible differences might still be delineated. As just mentioned, the misbeliefs are not simply pushed out ("Just don't think about them any more."), but they are replaced with biblical truths. Additionally, we are not stressing what can possibly be ("I can be a record-breaking

salesman.") but rather what is already true ("God does love me."). Lastly, rather than centering on man's abilities, powers, "divinity," or self, the power of God is the key here, as He works through the Christian. If some type of positive thinking in fact actually agrees on each of these points, then this should no longer be an issue; the name of the technique is not the chief concern here. However, I still think that the description "positive thinking" is a misnomer for the general type of strategy which we are describing.

36Ibid., pp. 24-27, 33-34.

37Ibid., pp. 24-27; 33-34.

38Ibid., pp. 14, 17, 24-27, 75.

39Ibid., p. 43.

40Ibid., p. 40.

41Such a perspective is not just a passing concern in the New Testament, but I believe that it is the very center of the Christian life and the most significant way to view one's various problems. See Matt. 6:19-34; II Cor. 4:16-5:10; Phil. 3:18-21; Col. 3:1-4; I Pet. 1:3-9, 5:7-11; I Jn. 3:1-3.

42For these and other related truths, see Backus and Chapian, Chapter 4.

43Ibid., p.68; cf. pp. 72, 76.

44Ibid., p. 66.

45Ibid. p. 76.

46Ibid., see especially Chapter 6.

47James R. Beck, "Treatment of Spiritual Doubt Among Obsessing Evangelicals," *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, volume 9, number 3 (Fall 1981), pp. 224-231. For these two quotations, see pp. 225, 230, respectively.

48Ibid., p. 231; cf. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

49See Backus and Chapian, p. 17.

50William Backus, *Finding the Freedom of Self-Control* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1987), p.11.

51See Chapter V, Section A, "By Whose Will and Power?"

52See passages such as Ps. 34:13-14; 42:11; 43:5; Pro. 12:5; 15:4; 23:7; Matt. 9:29; II Cor. 10:5; Phil. 4:13.

53As stated earlier, Backus and Chapian conducted a follow-up study and reported a 95% improvement rate after the application of this Misbelief Therapy. (See Backus and Chapian, Introduction, p. 11.)

54Some of the same passages which encourage us to take positive action also explicitly state that it is God's power that is actually the key. (See II Cor. 10:5 and Phil. 4:13 plus Chapter VI, A for details.)

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## **Chapter V**

### **Volitional Doubt**

Our third category of uncertainty is chiefly related to one's will and one's ability to make certain choices. Regular issues of importance for this species of doubt might include the dilemma of weak faith or the questioning of whether one actually made a decision to trust Jesus Christ in the first place perhaps because of the young age at which the choice was made. Other volitional examples concern an unwillingness either to

repent of a sin(s) or to apply known truths to one's life.

Characteristics of volitional doubt may possibly involve an attitude of appreciation for the facts, while not really being willing to make the appropriate decision which seems to be indicated by them (without any objection to the data itself or its applicability). Or sometimes such identification is made by the realization that no number of facts ever brings the individual to the appropriate decision.<sup>1</sup> Or again, the person may continue to raise small, inconsequential "problems" which are obviously not the chief issues.

Another possible characteristic is a person's refusal to allow the continuation of the peace which he sometimes experiences, perhaps because the individual either misunderstands the nature of such peace or because he might believe that he is not ready to experience it until the last few issues are settled. I remember a discussion with a psychologist friend of mine years ago where the topic was a mutual acquaintance who had been struggling through a quandary over just this issue. At one point in our dialogue the psychologist asked me if I thought peace was itself a feeling which one had (emotional) or something which was brought about by a decision which one made (volitional). I answered that it was a feeling, after which I was startled by my friend's strong pronouncement that I was mistaken: peace was obtained by a decision.

Peace is not something which one necessarily "feels" but is a state of mind which occurs only by decision. Therefore, peace can be present even when a person is undergoing various sorts of turmoil. And in this sense the failure to have peace, especially when the way appears to be clear, is very possibly due to a volitional quandary since its absence is also a choice which is not being made. And at this point it perhaps becomes apparent in one respect that all doubt may have a volitional element because the individual both chooses to question and can decide not to do so, as well. Similarly, the desire to cover up sin or the refusal to confess and repent of it also tends generally to be a matter of the will.

In the last chapter it was mentioned that volitional and emotional doubt shared at least two characteristics which were just mentioned--the presence of small, "picky" problems and the refusal of peace. This raises the further issue of distinguishing between these two species of uncertainty at these points. I have already suggested that the key lies in both the origin of each individual doubt and the means by which it manifests itself. For instance doubt which is primarily volitional is likely to be expressed more calmly, without complications due to distraught emotional states. It may also tend to center much more on decision-making concerns, perhaps on why the person appears unable to actually effect a change in his life. And it is this crucial issue to which we now turn.

#### A. By Whose Will and Power?

Before we can actually discuss the activation of the will, we need to answer a tough question. It may be recalled that we ended the last chapter by posing a quandary raised by Backus, who testified that a "frightening" aspect of dealing with the issue of self-control was that Christians might conclude that they can change their behavior by a self-generated effort, thereby undermining the power of God.<sup>2</sup>

The problem here is at least threefold. Initially, only God can save persons. Absolutely nothing which we do can ever assist Him even one iota in our salvation and justification. Such is simply an act of God. And I hope the reader understands that this book has been written to Christians who have therefore already received God's gift of salvation. Thus I by no means wish to imply that we can ever effect our initial relationship with God or have any part in earning God's merit.

But additionally, even from Christians one can certainly get the frequent impression that it is possible to improve our initial standing with God by our good works after salvation. But the biblical testimony is that, while one's heavenly position (or rewards) is determined by post-conversion commitment, once we begin the Christian life by faith we ought never return to any view which holds that our works can complete the initial salvation itself. Such is even an abomination to God (Gal. 3:1-14; 5:1-6).

Further, while Scripture often encourages Christians to change their behavior and to progress towards maturity, it is clear that God is at work in their lives so that it is His power working through believers instead of their own. We cannot at this point introduce the entire issue of God's sovereignty and man's free will (as if we could completely solve it!), but it is sufficient here simply to say that Scripture both commands us to mature and states that the real power comes from the Lord.

So while many New Testament passages implore the believer to change his behavior (or to otherwise commit himself),<sup>3</sup> several texts mention that both God's activity and ours is involved.<sup>4</sup> A classic text is found in Phil. 2:12-13 where we are first told that believers are to "work out" their salvation (v. 12) only to find that it is God who is working in us (v. 13). In other places Paul states more specifically that it is not our power but that of God's power in us (II Cor. 4:7; 10:3-6; Gal. 2:20). Yet it is our choice to so act in accordance with God's will and power (Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 4:13). Other New Testament writers agree that believers must will to do God's will (Js. 4:4-10; I Pet. 1:18-2:5; I Jn. 3:23-24).

Thus, while Christians are commanded to make decisions by their own will, the more important will and true power is that of God. This in no way allows the believer to claim that his choice is not crucial, for we are specifically told that we are to choose to do God's will so that He can work through us; God does not force our wills.

So how does Backus face his own dilemma? First he poses the problem again, asking how a counselor can assist persons in need without implying some sort of self-effort? He answers:

**Despite this hazard, the Scriptures contain much instruction in how to change behavior, thoughts and feelings. But it is never suggested in the apostolic writings that the power to change comes from the self. Instead, the Word exhorts and instructs the new man, empowered by the Holy Spirit, in how to walk so as to please God.<sup>5</sup>**

There is at least one other sense in which it is actually God who works through believers. The universe which God has created has certain laws built into it; when one acts in accordance with them, a more harmonious life can be one result. For this reason, obeying His psychological laws can yield healing in one's thought life. In fact, even nonbelievers can to some extent take advantage of this benefit. Again Backus comments:

**None of the habit-changing techniques suggested in this book can work without God's blessing. That is true even for unbelievers making use of them. As His sun must shine even on the evil if their crops are to grow, so the sun of God's blessing can and does shine even on godless people using methods in line with God's principles, incorporated in His Word and in the design of His universe. Without God's sustaining blessing, no human effort would avail anything--ever.<sup>6</sup>**

Thus God works in persons, both more generally through His universal laws which affect both believers and unbelievers alike, as well as more specifically through Christians whose wills are in accordance with His will. But in both cases it is God's will which is more central and His power which is the true force in the universe. This provides a groundwork for our discussion of the Christian's will.

#### B. Activating the Christian's Will

We have observed that numerous scriptural passages encourage, implore and command Christians to utilize their own wills to obey the Lord. And believers are also responsible for their choices.

With regard to the specific issue of volitional doubt and the failure to act at crucial points in order to change one's behavior, perhaps the most critical single concern is the growth of the believer's faith. When one's faith becomes increasingly inactive there is frequently a tendency to drift away from crucial elements of Christianity. And as noted earlier, C. S. Lewis warns that most apostates are not argued away from Christianity: "Do not most people simply drift away?"<sup>7</sup>

So a lack of growth or commitment in a believer's life can signal a volitional problem. And as with most matters of the will, it often "spills over" into other areas. This is where one develops (and often invents) problems with Christianity, which may perhaps amount to excuses for the doubt which has already existed for some time.

Noting the utter seriousness of this species of doubt, attacking as it does the very resolution of the believer, one obvious question pertains to how a Christian's will can be activated (or re-activated). And since the most crucial subject in volitional doubt is probably the issue of how one's faith can grow, this will be an especially important topic for those whose commitment to Jesus Christ is either weak, immature or even waning.

So our concern is to help activate the believer's will and, as a specific expression of one's volition, to experience the growth of one's faith, as well. The former issue, in the general sense of changing one's behavior or breaking bad habits, is only of major concern to us as it impinges specifically on the presence of doubt. Otherwise it is much less the subject of this book than is the latter concern of faith. We have just indicated that the topic of how faith might grow is probably the single most crucial element in volitional doubt. This is primarily because most of the types of such uncertainty are concerned with (or are dealt with significantly by) the strength of one's faith.

In some cases, the solution would appear to be less problematical. In the case of those who trusted Christ as a child, the issue might concern the gaining of more knowledge about the nature of commitment or even of making a re-commitment. But for many others, motivation is a major factor; they need to desire to do God's will. To this end, I will suggest four steps to assist the believer in dealing with such a dilemma.

First, any strategy to assist the Christian's will in conforming to God's will should begin with a commitment to Him.<sup>8</sup> After all, if this is one's goal anyway, one should prayerfully communicate his intentions to submit to God at the outset. The act itself is helpful not only in affirming one's desire to the Lord, but in focusing one's

attention on the goal and its seriousness. And if the type of volitional doubt suffered is one that has involved rebellion against the Lord, this would also be the time to confess and repent of that sin. Earlier we mentioned that unconfessed sin can, by itself, lead to doubt (cf. Ps. 66:18).

Second, a principle described in the last chapter will be repeated briefly here. Doubts of the will also most frequently involve telling oneself misbeliefs. Backus lists several instances of lies which affect one's volitional capabilities.<sup>9</sup> For example, one might say or think that, "I can't control this habit" or, "Past events are making me do what I am." Some criticize their own person: "I'm so worthless that I deserve my problem." Other common responses include the misbelief that, "Others can be committed believers, but I just can't do it" or, "It takes too much work to change a habit or to more fully obey the Lord." Also very harmful to the overall goal of conquering volitional doubt is the lie that, "I can't increase my faith."

In the last chapter we have already discussed in some detail the treatment of these misbeliefs.<sup>10</sup> To summarize, the chief strategy consists of locating these lies, removing them by arguing against them and replacing them with the truth. Numerous other suggestions for healing were also enumerated.

The chief purpose in this step is to remove the misbeliefs which we tell ourselves in order to both clear the major obstacles which often keep the believer's will from being exercised and to utilize the administering of truth to actually start the healing process. In other words, Misbelief Therapy<sup>11</sup> can both weed out harmful thinking which affects an individual's ability to act, as well as allowing truth to motivate the person to the godly action which he wills.

Third, faith needs to be challenged; it needs to be given an ongoing vision which will inspire it to action. Human beings act most purposefully when they have strong personal reasons for doing so. And so faith is best motivated not by rules and prodding (although such is valid and is sometimes needed), but when God's reasons for seeking Him first become our reasons and desires. That is, when we are inspired enough by God's perspective of reality that we internalize His reasons as our own, then faith will be ready for action.

For some Christians, such inspiration might be said to occur when they get a glimpse of God's Person and His holiness,<sup>12</sup> or when they actually realize that Jesus is a living Person, making a personal relationship with Him possible.<sup>13</sup> According to Peter Kreeft, the deepest desire of all believers is for eternal life in heaven with God.<sup>14</sup> I mentioned in the last chapter that such an eternal home is the central hope for believers and that the New Testament repeatedly teaches that this is the perspective from which Christians ought to view this life.<sup>15</sup>

Actually, each of the subjects in the last paragraph is a different angle on a very similar truth. Believers naturally have a deep desire to know God and to be with Him forever. In fact, our Creator has made us that way (cf. Eccl. 3:11). Further, I think that this idea is the most motivating one for the Christian's faith. Could anything be more appealing than eternal life with the God of the universe, Who guarantees that such life will always be new, creative and inspiring, never static or boring? For the believer who does not sense a "tug" of desire for such, I would recommend that he cultivate the New Testament teachings on this subject, meditating on them deeply. Faith could have no greater impetus as a grounds for personal action; no stronger reasons to internalize God's perspective as our own could be given.

Fourth, faith must be activated. Once a commitment has been made, misbeliefs replaced and faith challenged with a biblical vision, the next step is performance. Our eternal destiny needs to inspire action and when it does so biblically it will have passed beyond the negative battle of fighting against doubt and into the positive realm of development in its own regard. Guinness states it this way:

**What is more, faith, like health, is best maintained by growth, nourishment and exercise and not by fighting sickness . . . . Equally, faith grows and flourishes when it is well nourished and exercised, so the best way to resist doubt is to build up faith rather than simply to fight against doubt.<sup>16</sup>**

The faith which is growing, then, is more healthy than that which is simply fighting against invasion. So we not only wish to provide strategies for handling doubt of various kinds, but, further, to both activate the will and to see faith grow. But of course, one question which this raises is how faith does progress. Years ago, I would have said that answering this question successfully was the key to solving my own doubts.

While this topic could easily be the subject of an entire treatise itself, a few brief comments will be made here. After his research on this topic, Elmer Towns has noted numerous ways in which faith grows. Among these are obedience to the Word of God, yielding to the Holy Spirit during trials, by constant communion with God (through the various disciplines of prayer, fellowship and Christian service), by expecting God to act or bless and by giving thanks to God.<sup>17</sup> Conversely, Towns explains that faith is hindered by such things as believing a lie, trusting one's reason instead of God's Word, "leaping" without a basis, always requiring a sign from God and taking a "small" view of life instead of seeing the large picture.<sup>18</sup>

Each of these topics and others could be expounded at great length, but such, perhaps regrettably, takes us away from our present topic. I think that possibly the most important thing which I could relate here is that, wherever our faith is, we need to take it from that point and move it forward by small steps. The actual "how" of this suggestion will be saved for the next section of this chapter, but it will just be briefly mentioned that developing faith during times of doubt may be one of the most effective methods of causing faith to grow. In other words, since many of the readers of this book are presumably dealing with their own doubt, why not use such as an opportunity to let one's faith grow? It just may be that doubt could be conquered and faith grow, simultaneously.

But perhaps someone might react by asking what about the believer who decides not to act and who rejects such strategies? Initially, it should be pointed out that everything which is said in this entire book could be rejected, for no one is forcing anyone to act. One could always refuse to take appropriate measures in solving any of the species of doubt, or on any other issue.

Additionally, other suggestions certainly could be made concerning the activation of one's will. For example, Backus encourages writing out a plan, including the enumeration of specific strategies, making clear and specific goals, and telling someone else about one's efforts in order to provide further motivation to change.<sup>19</sup> Such an approach would also appear to work well with the more general topic of the weaknesses of the will, including specific problems such as changing one's behavior, repentance, or breaking bad habits.<sup>20</sup> And again, as with other species of uncertainty, the doubter should adopt a biblical methodology which best assists his special needs.

But in this chapter we have suggested a fourfold strategy: that the doubter make an initial commitment to God (including repentance, if necessary), identify and replace his misbeliefs, challenge his faith with the vision to personally internalize God's eternal perspective, followed by action. One specific result should be an increase in one's faith. And in dealing with volitional doubt by this strategy, we have attempted to address both the more general issue of activating the believer's will with respect to making decisions (as with the use of Misbelief Therapy) and the more specific task of challenging faith and helping it to grow. We will now continue our discussion by making suggestions as to how faith in Jesus Christ, in particular, might be encouraged to increase.

### C. Exercising More Faith in Jesus Christ

It is our purpose in this section to more specifically view the issue of developing faith in the Person of Jesus Christ. We will look at this topic from two primary vantage points, each presented as questions. Should Christians continue to believe even when tough objections are raised against Christianity? And how do we actually practice belief, allowing it to grow?

In an essay entitled "On Obstinacy in Belief," C. S. Lewis entertains the first of these queries by admitting that believers do in fact think that it is laudatory to adhere to their faith in Christianity "against any evidence whatever."<sup>21</sup> But how can such obstinacy be defended? Why should Christians continue to believe in the face of possible objections to their faith? Shouldn't they, like good scientists, only proportion their belief to the facts?

Here Lewis proposes two answers. He defends such a continuing commitment holding, first, that Christianity is supported by the facts. So why should believers despair when the evidence (both of the past and present) continues to support the Christian message? Second, God is personal and, as such, should not be treated as the object of a laboratory experiment, but as a Friend with whom we are intimately involved. But to truly treat anyone as a friend is sometimes to trust that person "beyond the evidence, even against much evidence."<sup>22</sup> And conversely, no one deserves to be called a friend who deserts us when we are accused of something or who is not extremely cautious about accepting purported evidence against us. In fact, even the scientist must behave the same way if he is to have close friendships with others. This is shown by the way in which he will hold certain beliefs about those who are closest to him "with more certitude than the evidence, if weighed in the laboratory manner, would justify."<sup>23</sup>

Sometimes we must trust persons in the face of contrary evidence. The child with the splinter in his finger confronted by a needle or an individual learning to swim when he is forced to enter deep water for the first time may claim some reason for disbelieving that their best interests are being taken into consideration. But those who know better (and the child and the swimmer afterwards) usually understand the logic. Should an omnipotent God not have many ways which we do not understand? Besides, God has even warned us explicitly that there will be times when "apparent evidence" will be presented (including miracles) in an attempt to lead Christians astray (Mk. 13:22-23; II Thes. 2:9-12; Rev. 13:13-14). It is as if God is saying, "I told you so" (see especially Mk. 13:23). So why should we disbelieve, especially when we have good data on which to accept His testimony concerning this and other issues?<sup>24</sup>

So Lewis concludes:

**Our opponents, then, have a perfect right to dispute with us about the grounds of our original**

**assent. But they must not accuse us of sheer insanity if, after the assent has been given, our adherence to it is no longer proportioned to every fluctuation of the apparent evidence.<sup>25</sup>**

And here, I think, Lewis is certainly correct. Once a sufficient basis has been ascertained, it is a virtue to continue trusting in personal situations. It is not only true of friendships, but even in scientific theory. Scientists do not discard a model every time one (or even several) bits of data oppose their central thesis or framework.

### 1. Why Christians Should Continue to Trust Jesus Christ

This previous discussion, along with some additional considerations, provide ample reasons as to why we should continue to trust even when some apparent data which we are not able to explain opposes our position. We will give brief attention to several of these reasons.

First, an individual's salvation consists of trusting faith in the Jesus Christ of the gospel facts. And it must not be forgotten that our initial trust was well grounded in the factual data of the gospel, whether we realized it or not. This evidence is so strong that trust in other matters is warranted. In other words, the evidence for the facts of the gospel (and hence the central core of Christian theism) is sufficiently strong that it provides an extremely firm foundation for our continued faith even when other factors have not been totally explained. It even compels us to keep trusting until the new questions are worked out.

As we have already stated, science works in a similar manner. It does not overturn a model because some data are outstanding against it. If the original model is confirmed by a broad set of evidences, claimed exceptions are often either given tentative explanations, or judgment on the anomalies is simply suspended until more is known.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, the Christian is warranted in continued belief in Jesus Christ even if there are issues he is not able to explain. The chief reason for this is that the gospel facts, in particular, are established on especially strong grounds. Anomalies do not overturn the core data of Christian theism. It might even be said that since the gospel data is so strong, other questions are often of somewhat less consequence anyway.

But second, beyond the facts themselves and the basic model to which they contribute, we have also said that Jesus is a person and that our relationship to him is a personal one. The more we realize this and believe it, the more it will be obvious to us that our commitment extends even beyond the evidence. Just as an individual ought not to desert his best friend when the latter is in trouble, or as a lover ought not to abandon his loved one on the basis of a complaint or because there are some perceived problems in the relationship, so Jesus ought not to be disbelieved if contrary material surfaces. Relationships extend beyond the raw data on which they are based, and trusting Jesus extends beyond the strongly evidenced gospel facts.

Once when I was in the middle of quandary, worried that I was beginning to give up on my relationship with Jesus, my mother confronted me with a truth that I have never forgotten since that time. She asked me pointedly if I was willing to give up Jesus right then. When I responded by reporting my fear that I might stop believing, she repeated her question as to whether I would trade Jesus for someone else right now. As I responded in the negative (in fact, I was repulsed by the very thought), she asked me why that was so. And as I verbalized my answer, I realized something crucial: I didn't want to give up Jesus precisely because I had developed a personal relationship with Him and didn't want to follow any other person or teaching.

But I learned some other truths that day, as well. I realized that I should not allow my will to be "frozen" in indecision by an emotional fear of the future, or by a "what if" doubt concerning the present. I also was confronted by something else which I had never quite allowed to play a role in my fight against doubt before: I knew then that I was in love with Jesus. The moment that truth dawned on me, my struggle took on an entirely new dimension.

But my point here is that such a position of personal trust is not illogical; it is actually warranted by the data itself. Just as the initial decision was based on the facts, the resultant personal relationship is also, for one realizes that continuing and deepening commitment is based on what one knows about the Person. It is true of personal relationships in everyday life, as well.

A third reason to trust Jesus in the face of any new objections is that other formerly unexplained problems have since been dealt with sufficiently. What constitutes such issues are frequently person-related, indicating that individuals may have different examples in mind, but it is still true that many have been solved. To cite our own subjects in an earlier chapter, perhaps questions about Jesus' death or resurrection have bothered some believers; others may have wondered how it can be known that Jesus claimed to be deity. But the point is that the more one personally discovers answers to quandaries, the more one realizes that Jesus has proven trustworthy in the past. This should inspire more faith in believers, just like finding several times that my wife was trustworthy should enhance our relationship.

So to answer our initial query concerning why a believer should continue to trust Jesus Christ even in the presence of some unexplained, perhaps even contrary data, we have noted three responses. The central foundation for Christian Theism (as seen in the facts of the gospel) is proven to be firm. In light of this, other difficult data can be given a possible explanation or judgment may even be suspended, as scientific methodology also allows. Additionally, the believer's relationship is a personal one, demanding trust even beyond the initial evidence itself. Lastly, many potentially troublesome issues have been largely solved, contributing to the major conclusion that He has already proven to be trustworthy.

## 2. How Faith Might Be Increased

After attempting to lay a foundation for why a believer should continue to trust Jesus Christ even during times of uncertainty, we will now make a couple of suggestions as to how such faith might be exercised further. Two such points will be mentioned here.

First, one can sometimes get the impression that there is a misunderstanding of the nature of faith among some Christians who appear to understand it as sort of a "weaker sister" to the facts; as a passive "given" which simply occurs on cue after the data has been ascertained. Actually, while it is true that faith is based on the facts, this does not make it one iota less crucial, for the data of the gospel message and one's trust are equally important.

Additionally, faith is active, especially in that its chief importance is to personally trust the Jesus Christ of the facts. And here it should be pointed out that the New Testament term (*pisteuo*) is a very strong word compared to its English equivalent, indicating a commitment or surrender of oneself. In this case the yielding is to the Person of Jesus Christ.

And while lost Christians probably agree with this usage of faith, they often don't seem to realize that there is a further activity of faith: its ability to appropriate the truth so as to control doubts. We may recall Lewis' words at this juncture that, "Faith, in the sense in which I am here using the word, is the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods."<sup>27</sup> Thus, one place to start in an attempt to increase faith is to realize the potential that it has and that which it can accomplish. By a personal appropriation of the facts, which reason itself can never do, a believer's faith can be trained to stand firm.

Second, a technique which may be very helpful in increasing faith is to be applied during a period of doubt. In our treatment of emotional uncertainty it was suggested that the believer needs to actually practice both praise and thanksgiving, on the one hand, and faith on the other, while one is experiencing uncertainty. Thus, even the time when one feels the most unsure of his belief is an excellent opportunity to affirm that very trust. And such practice involves truth-telling, as well, since we are actually asserting our belief both to God and to ourselves. What one, in essence, is telling the Lord is that, "I still believe in you during the times when I don't feel good and even when I can't presently see my way out of my uncertainty."

Of course, some may object that if one isn't sure of the factual basis, then affirming one's faith may have little real affect. But it must be remembered that this chapter is a treatment of volitional doubt. Factual objections are handled in a different manner, as pointed out in Chapter III. Thus, if the doubts in question are factual, a study of the data may be necessary. But if the factual foundation is realized, then affirming faith during doubt is an excellent method to confront volitional uncertainty and so encourage that faith to grow.

I think that there are several benefits of such an affirmation, such as our demonstrating that we are not relying on our feelings, that we are really serious about correcting our doubt and that we are willing to obey God in offering thanks and praise during our difficult times (Phil. 4:6, 8). But for our purposes here, another major benefit is that such actually allows our faith to grow by teaching us that we can practice it during the really difficult times. We will have placed (and properly so) our wills above our feelings. And after such practice, we awake to the realization that our faith has in fact grown, as revealed by our readiness to trust more readily the next time we doubt.

Two biblical illustrations aptly point out these lessons. Job suffered much pain and yet it was right in the middle of his hurting that he learned to trust God (Job 38-42). Even though he still did not understand why he suffered like he did, Job learned that God was trustworthy. As a result, he responded during his uncertainty (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6) and found victory (42:7-17).

Paul tells us that Abraham believed God's promise that he would have a child in spite of his age and that of Sarah, his wife (Rom. 4:18-25). So while he could not see God's promise, he still trusted the One who had shown Himself to be trustworthy. In fact, he did so in this instance even when all the evidence appeared to point against him (v.18)! As a result, Abraham's faith blossomed into a life of trust (Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19).

Christians can grow in faith in a similar manner. Like Job and Abraham, believers know enough about God to trust Him in issues where we are not sure of the answers. In the words of a great devotional writer of the last generation, it is right during our times of struggle and doubt that we, too, can experience the victory of our



faith. F. B. Meyer recommends this prayer to God during these times of uncertainty:

**My God, the spring tide of emotion has passed away like a summer brook; but in my heart of hearts, in my will, Thou Knowest I am as devoted, as loyal, as desirous to be only for Thee, as in the blessed moment of unbroken retirement at Thy feet.<sup>28</sup>**

So must the believer pursue the growth of his faith even during times of doubt. In fact, it is during these periods when one can perhaps most effectively develop it by being willing to praise, thank and trust God even when there is no easy answer. Such practice allows God to work in us while we learn of our dependence upon Him.

#### D. Doubt Prevention

All the way throughout this entire section of the book we have presented descriptions of and strategies for conquering various types of doubt. But here we wish to view the overall issue from a different angle. The best approach to doubt is one which practices Christian living in such a way so as to prevent uncertainty ahead of time. Just as preventative medicine is rightly stressed by the medical community, so doubt prevention ought to be stressed by believers. In other words, Christians ought to be practicing "positive spiritual health" techniques before uncertainty strikes as a means not only of providing a barrier against doubt but also in the interest of cultivating the broader spiritual life, as well.

Another way to view this suggestion is by recognizing that regular Christian activities such as prayer, Bible reading and study, fellowship and witnessing about our faith to others have a crucial added dimension not normally appreciated: fighting uncertainty. We might also repeat here Lewis' assertion that practices such as these on a daily basis also serve to build up faith so that it, too, might habitually react in a biblical manner.<sup>29</sup> While I am far from an expert in the application of these areas, I would like to just briefly mention a few suggestions, followed by a brief treatment of another Christian discipline which is seldom recognized for its value and distinction.

With regard to prayer, several items are crucial but appear to be mentioned comparatively seldom; and each has to do with Christian "truth-telling." Prayer is a personal venture; as such it demands that certain conditions be met. The Scripture requires at least previous confession of sin (Ps. 66:18; I Jn. 1:9), obedience (Jn. 15:7; I Jn. 3:22), praying in Jesus' name (Jn. 16:23; 14:13, 14) and according to God's will (I Jn. 5:14, 15). Faith in God is also needed (Jn. 1:5-8; Mk. 11:24). But the way prayer is sometime practiced, Christians prefer to ignore or downplay the relationship while demanding answers. We claim that we are not treating God as a spiritual slot-machine but our methods often betray us. Would our loved ones be satisfied with the same amount of time and effort which we often devote to our relationship with God?

Two other brief misbeliefs concerning prayer are that God almost always answered prayer in biblical times and that He does not answer it as frequently for us today. But the biblical record simply shows that the first notion does not take account of the many times when biblical authors report unanswered prayer (in their terms!) and the rather sizeable periods of time when God was more-or-less silent in His communication with His people. This does not criticize the God of the universe; it only corrects a common misbelief.<sup>30</sup> Concerning answered prayer today, I think it is undeniable that rather fantastic answers occur regularly. But Christians interested in personal responses would do well to give attention to both the quality of the time spent with the Lord (He is a personal Being also!) and begin keeping a record of their prayers (and those of others) which were answered. Nothing corrects the second misbelief as quickly as a black-and-white list which contradicts the assumption itself.

More briefly, Bible reading and study can also serve as a crucially important roadblock to doubt. But as Guinness reminds us, we must be willing to give God's Word more concentration than we frequently do, being willing to sit under its judgment and being more receptive in its application to our lives.<sup>31</sup> Fellowship with believers and our witness to non-believers are also central in our overall plan. With regard to the former, social and emotional reinforcement are so vital to our continuing growth and fellowship helps to provide these needs; we are often oblivious to the opposite affects in our lives which contribute to the occurrence of doubt. With the latter, not only is it a chief means by which others are led by the Holy Spirit into God's blessings, but it likewise assists us in realizing anew that God still works in lives even today.

So in our attempt to prevent doubt ahead of time, we will close by remembering two truths. The overall emphasis of such preventive measures is the continual cultivation of a personal relationship with a personal God, spurred on by the practice not only of these spiritual disciplines, but also of the appropriate techniques for the treatment of each of the major species of doubt, which has been the subject of much of this volume. We must not fail to work on the first (as indicated in this section) and not be weary in the repeated renewal of the second. I think that these are keys to doubt prevention. Now we will turn to another spiritual discipline which can uniquely address each of these concerns, including the controlling of uncertainty, but which is largely a "lost art" among Christians today.<sup>32</sup>

#### E. Biblical Meditation

It is perhaps true that various forms of Eastern meditation techniques are better known in the West than are biblical methods. The former is a very broad category which generally emphasizes generally the emptying of one's mind of typical thought patterns, the disuse of reason and concentration on a word or puzzle which is supposed to be helpful in the achieving of a new level of consciousness.<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, the biblical pattern emphasizes what is frequently almost the opposite: the filling of the believer's mind by the thoughtful contemplation of any of a number of God's truths.<sup>34</sup>

Scripture (and Psalms, in particular) relates many details concerning meditation. As to its method, individuals apparently practiced it alone<sup>35</sup> by single-minded concentration on a particular theme.<sup>36</sup> Repetition of such thoughts was also normal fare.<sup>37</sup>

The most common topic mentioned in Scripture for the person's meditation is God's Law or His words. Various other themes include the attributes of God, His creation and works, His miracles, His promises, eternal life, and other edifying thoughts. In this last category, it is praiseworthy thinking, in particular, which is stressed.<sup>38</sup> But it should be remembered that picturing God Himself in our meditation is simply constructing an idol of Him. Thus, visualizing God is a form of idolatry (Ex. 20:4-6).

Wonderful blessings are promised to those who meditate. We are told that practitioners can receive guidance, protection, success, prospering, wisdom, understanding, and knowledge.<sup>39</sup>

So how should the believer today practice meditation? McCormick and Fish suggest concentrating single mindedly on one of the many themes which believers have from which to choose; rotating them on a daily (or otherwise regular) basis produces not only variety but also the opportunity to grow in several different areas. They not only briefly describe the process in biblical terms, but also provide numerous examples of content for possible meditation sessions.<sup>40</sup>

In terms of the subject of doubt in general (and its prevention in particular), meditation remains a powerful but largely unpracticed procedure. By its daily use, it certainly has the potential to transform lives. I personally could not recommend a better means not only to regularly review the actual strategies for controlling doubt, such as those outlined in this volume, but also to draw closer to God. In other words, one can actually review the biblical steps for combating uncertainty during meditation. It could well be the single "missing ingredient" in many Christian lives today.

## F. Conclusion

In a lecture on the relationship between the believer's intellect and faith, Francis Schaeffer points out that the major problem is not whether there is enough evidence for Christianity, for there is plenty of such data. Rather, the real issue, Schaeffer explains, is whether we believe God in spite of the proof. In other words, evidence not only doesn't force faith, but for some it may even be a facade in that a continual search for such facts hides the need to let faith grow. God wants us to believe in Him continually, at every moment, both when we are exuberant and when we are despondent, as well as at other times. So even when we are psychologically beaten, we must continue to believe in God, especially during those times when we do not even know the source of our troubles.<sup>41</sup>

The believer's faith needs to grow, most particularly during periods of doubt. So Christians need to be strengthened beyond the point where, as a colleague once remarked, their faith is dependent on the latest archaeological discovery. Accordingly, this chapter has attempted to set forth principles to remedy this situation. But it must be remembered here that it is God's power which is the key: believer's wills ought to be brought into conformity with His will.

I have suggested that the individual suffering volitional doubt begin with a commitment to God (including repentance, if necessary), next applying the principles of Misbelief Therapy (as explained in Chapter IV). One of the most important steps is the challenging of one's faith to view reality from God's eternal perspective. A heavenly motivation should assist us in the internalizing of God's reasons for action, making these reasons our own. Lastly, faith in Jesus Christ as a Person must be further activated.

It was suggested that the last point can be facilitated by both realizing that believers already have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and by cultivating those ties. In fact, the best time to develop such faith could paradoxically be right during one's doubts.

Once doubt is dealt with, the best long-term remedy is to practice a biblical pattern of doubt-prevention. Such should not only involve the regular Christian practices of prayer, Bible study, fellowship and witnessing, but these should be joined by biblical meditation. And in each of these, part of the focus should explicitly be on the continual review of various patterns for controlling doubt, such as those described in this volume. Practice is essential, as well.

Of course, as human beings it is not always easy to work on problems and repeatedly deal with painful issues.

But we said earlier that the regular testimony of those who practice such exercises is that, when properly applied, there is much relief; when such is not done, problems frequently remain. So while discipline is not always easy, it is crucially important. As Backus explains:

**The self-controlled person maintains progress toward a goal even when he is not in the mood, doesn't feel like making the effort, would momentarily enjoy something else, or finds working toward his goal downright unpleasant.<sup>42</sup>**

If doubt is handled in a biblical manner,<sup>43</sup> peace can definitely be the result. And as we have said, peace is obtained through a decision (cf. Rom. 15:13), so it can remain in spite of one's outward circumstances. Any new problems or challenges to the presence of this peace can also be treated by proper identification followed by an application of appropriate biblical remedies, whether those described here or others.

## **Endnotes--Chapter V**

<sup>1</sup>Although these statements might be said about the unbeliever who refuses to trust Jesus Christ (and this would still be a volitional issue), it should be remembered that we are primarily writing to (and about) Christians who still experience volitional problems.

<sup>2</sup>Backus, *Finding the Freedom of Self-Control*, p. 11. Actually, Backus begins this volume with this concern.

<sup>3</sup>For examples of the many such references, see Rom. 12:1-2; Gal. 6:4-5, 9-10; Heb. 10:36; Js. 4:4-10; I Pet. 5:7-11; II Pet. 3:18; I Jn. 2:3-6; II Jn. 9; Rev. 22:7.

<sup>4</sup>See especially II Cor. 4:5, 7; 10:3-6; 12:9-10; Gal 2:20; 5:16-26; Eph. 6:10-18; Phil. 2:12-13; 4:13; I Pet. 1:18-25; I Jn. 3:23-24.

<sup>5</sup>Backus, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>7</sup>Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

<sup>8</sup>Again, since this is written to the believer, we are not speaking of the initial experience of salvation but a recommitment of one's will to the Lord (cf. Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 5:18).

<sup>9</sup>Backus, especially pp. 158-161.

<sup>10</sup>See Chapter IV, Section C and Backus and Chapien, especially Chapters 1-4, 6.

<sup>11</sup>This is the title given by Backus and Chapien, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>We have already cited J. I. Packer's volume, *Knowing God*, which is described by the author as a book of meditations on this subject (pp. 7, 17). See also R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1985).

<sup>13</sup>See Herbert Lockyer, *Portraits of the Savior* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1983).

<sup>14</sup>Peter J. Kreeft, *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1980), pp. 22-27 for example.

<sup>15</sup>Again, see Matt. 6:19-34; II Cor. 4:6-5:10; Phil. 3:18-21; Col. 3:1-4; Heb. 10:34-35; 11:13-16; I Pet. 1:3-9; 5:7-11; I Jn. 3:1-3.

<sup>16</sup>Guinness, pp. 33-34.

<sup>17</sup>Elmer Towns, *Say-It-Faith* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1983), pp. 61-73, 112-120. The author makes it plain throughout the book that the title is not to be taken in the sense of either positive thinking or of the "health-wealth gospel."

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, Chapter Eleven.

19Backus, pp. 153-157.

20In fact, such goals are the specific purpose of Backus' book (Ibid.).

21This essay is contained in C. S. Lewis, *The World's Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1960), pp. 13-30. For this quotation, see p. 23.

22Ibid., pp. 25-26.

23Ibid., p. 16.

24Ibid., pp. 23-25.

25Ibid., p. 29.

26For an excellent treatment of the relationship between scientific models and anomalies and how the latter are treated in scientific theory, see J.P. Moreland, "The Rationality of Belief in Inerrancy," *Trinity Journal*, NS (1986), pp. 75-86.

27Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 123.

28F.B. Meyer, *The Secret of Guidance* (Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), pp. 25-26.

29Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p. 124.

30A later chapter in this book addresses these subjects.

31Guinness, pp. 147-149.

32This is Packer's description (see *Knowing God*, p. 18).

33For a further explanation of such notions and a critique of them, see Pat means, *The Mystical Maze* (U.S.: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1976); Douglas R. Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986); Gordon R. Lewis, *What Everyone Should Know About Transcendental Meditation* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1975); David K. Clark, *The Pantheism of Alan Watts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1978).

34For some of the biblical distinctions, see Thomas McCormick and Sharon Fish, *Meditation: A Practical Guide to a Spiritual Discipline* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983).

35See Gen. 24:63; Ps. 63:6; 77:2; 119:148.

36Ps. 62:1, 5, 6, 11-12; 77:1-3, 12, 119:15; cf. Ps. 27:4; 73:25; 103:1-5; Matt. 6:33.

37Ps. 77:3, 5, 11-12; Phil. 4:8-9.

38Many biblical passages deal with the proper topics for a believer's meditation. Related terms such as "seek" or "desire" can also denote such themes for concentration. Believers should meditate on God's law and precepts (Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:15, 23, 48, 78, 97, 99; cf. Pro. 2:1-5; 6:20-23; Js. 1:23-25), His Person (Ps. 27:4; 63:1-7; 73:25-26, although picturing God in our imagination is strictly forbidden in Scripture--Ex. 20:4-6), His creation (Ps. 104:24, 31-34; 143:5-6; 145:4-5), His mighty works or miracles (Ps. 77:12; 119:27), His promises (Ps. 119:148), eternal life (cf. Ps. 73:24-26; Matt 6:33) or other edifying and praiseworthy thoughts (Phil. 4:8-9).

39See Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:1-3; 119:1-16, 97-100; Pro. 2:1-5; 6:20- 22.

40McCormick and Fish, pp. 9-14, 35-36, 94-95 for examples. It should be very carefully noticed that there is a difference between the biblical imagery for meditation and man-made images (Ex. 20:4-6) which must be avoided (cf. pp. 67-68).

41Tape: Francis Schaeffer, "The Intellectual (Proof) and Faith," n.d.

43With the exception of Phil. 4:6-9, it is not being claimed here that the psychological or other strategies presented here are synonymous with biblical truth. But we have strived to present remedies which are biblical, nonetheless.

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## **Chapter VI**

### **When God Does Not Answer**

Many doubts are seemingly caused when believers do not receive the answers to their prayers or other needs like they think they should. In other words, uncertainty sometimes occurs when God does not act in the way that we think is required. We are giving this issue special attention not only because of its apparent frequency, but also because there is a crucially important set of principles which emerges from grappling with this problem. We will initially view several passages of Scripture which denote similar questions, followed by an investigation of two prominent biblical cases where such issues occur in greater detail. It is here that the key principles which deal with this uncertainty will hopefully emerge, reaching beyond this initial topic.

Before beginning our study it will perhaps be helpful to set forth a teaching which I think will be found in Scripture. When this general question is raised by believers, it appears that it is quite frequently couched in terms not only of why God does not answer, but such is contrasted with the biblical accounts where God almost always does answer. Thus, to frame the question more clearly, it is often said that God used to act frequently, but now He does not. But Scripture clearly points out that believers down through the ages have struggled with this exact same issue. And not only is there comfort in knowing this, but what has been learned from saints who deal with this question is even more instructive.<sup>1</sup>

#### A. Biblical Examples

Numerous times in Scripture a believer thinks that he is in need of assistance or cries out to God in prayer, only to find that God does not answer as he desired. In fact, such appears to be a fairly common experience, even in biblical times. And beyond the issue of prayer, we have other reports of God's silence.

One common contemporary complaint is that, "My prayers don't get through; it is as if they bounce off the ceiling" and yet the complaint in Lam. 3:44 sounds similar. Here it is poetically claimed that God had covered Himself with a cloud so that Israel's prayers could not get through. In this case the problem was the nation's sin (3:42). David also realized that known sin keeps an individual's prayers from being answered (Ps. 66:18). But in another passage, David speaks of his prayers going unanswered when he was apparently unaware of the reason and he relates how this affected him (Ps. 35:13-14, NIV).

A stunning Old Testament passage occurs in Ps. 74:9, where the writer reports that, at that time, God was neither working miraculous signs or sending prophets to His people. Then it is added that no one knew how long this silence would last.

This might be a shock to the seemingly common Christian attitude that God basically acted throughout the biblical period but is much less active today. As we will see, there are several "silent" periods in Scripture. Another example is Isa. 57:11, where the Lord Himself proclaims that He had "long been silent" towards the Israelites.

One very interesting passage occurs in Dan. 10:10-14, where Daniel describes a visitation from an angel. He had been mourning and fasting for three weeks (10:2-3). In answer to his deliberations, an angel was sent to him. In fact, we are told that God heard Daniel's words and sent the angel on his first day of supplication. However, the messenger was delayed for three weeks by "the prince of the Persian Kingdom," apparently denoting spiritual warfare, since Michael was then sent to assist him. After being freed, the initial angel came to Daniel to explain the Lord's message to him (10:10-14).

There are several interesting features in this passage, including the teaching that answers to prayers can actually be decreed, but delayed by external conditions. More specifically, most believers probably do not think of Satan's forces as hindering God's answers to prayer. Thus, a prayer could be heard and answered with the latter not being manifest for some time. Another feature is that, while we are not told of Daniel's response, he could presumably have considered his prayer to be unanswered. And believers today are at least tempted to consider their prayers as unanswered if such does not occur in a relatively short time, yet this may, in fact, not be the case even when we do not witness that answer immediately.

A major example of God's silence occurs between the testaments. It appears that we hear seemingly little

about the so-called 400 silent years before the birth of Christ. But if we had been one of the Jews living in that period of time, we might very well have wondered why neither we nor those for several generations before us had heard from the Lord. It might actually have been more unnerving living during that time than in others previously discussed. Had God given up on His people? While He had been angry in the past, had it ever lasted this long? And why would there be no communication at this time which directly followed the centuries of Hebrew prophets sent by God? But just as Scripture attests that the darkest night is still followed by a new morning (Ps. 30:5), the Jews who lived during these "dark ages" did not realize that the coming of the Messiah would be just around the corner, the event of all events which effectively broke the silence of those many years.

Such issues are also found in the New Testament. By far the major instance here is Jesus' own prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The texts tell us that, suffering deep distress and anguish to the point of sweating drops of blood, Jesus requested that His Father allow the coming events to be bypassed, but prayed that the Father's will, not His, be done. Certainly the petition requesting the Father's will was accomplished, but not the earlier request for removal of the immediate future (Mk. 14:33-36; Lk. 22:39-44; cf. Matt. 26:36-43). Here we have one of the cases where Jesus was tempted like we are, including the suffering of distraught emotions, yet without sinning (Heb. 4:15).

Paul also found that God does not always act in accordance with our will when he prayed three times that God would remove his apparent physical problem, all without success. Yet Paul learned what Jesus already knew, that the Father's will is preferable (II Cor. 12:7-10).

These biblical cases, then, point out how God does not always answer prayer the way that believers think He should. In fact, sometimes specific periods of silence ensue. It is simply a fact that believers struggled with such issues throughout Scripture and not just today. Many biblical saints presumably even lived their entire lives during the silent periods when God was not as active. But beyond the helpful knowledge that this was so, we need to ask what was learned from these dilemmas? Are there any helpful truths here which can also assist us today?

## B. The Case of Job

In an earlier chapter we looked briefly at the cases of two Old Testament believers, Job and Abraham. Here we want to dwell on each one in more detail, not only because the biblical accounts record that they wrestled with the problem of God's silence over an extended period of time, but especially because of the extraordinary truths which they learned through it.

To summarize very briefly, Job was tested by Satan and faced with various calamities such as the loss of his domestic animals, the deaths of his servants and children, as well as personal sickness (Job 1:6-2:7). Even though his wife suggested that he respond simply by cursing God and dying (2:9), Job refused to sin by charging God with fault in any of these problems (1:20-22; 2:10).

Most of the book is taken up by Job's dialogue with his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. And it is here that Job's complaint against God begins to surface. Job blames God for his troubles and specifically for injustice to him. And some of these charges are rather strongly stated.<sup>2</sup> He also challenges God to confront him (Job 13:3, 21-22). All the while, the silence of God is a main issue (19:7). Yet Job never loses hope, and even voices his trust in God (13:15; 19:25-27; 27:3-4).

Then a fourth person, Elihu, begins to dialogue with Job (Chapter 32). He speaks more truth than the other three friends and, in a sense, frequently speaks for God. Now the end of the story is well known. Job confronts the Lord Himself and, after repentance, is blessed by God more than he ever had been in the past. Yet, what transpires in this confrontation with God and what lessons Job learns are not as frequently recognized.

Initially, Elihu gets angry at Job for blaming his problems on God (Job 32:1-2). In the next six chapters he and Job converse (see list below), but the climax of the book occurs when God Himself challenges Job; in a sense it is almost like a final exam. God tells Job that He will ask the questions and Job can provide the answers, since he professes to know so much (38:1-3). The Lord's queries then concern such issues as whether Job could create the world (38:4-11), move the stars (38:31-33), or control the animal kingdom (Chapter 39). At this point, Job was confronted with the glory and awesomeness of God.

In fact, God also challenged Job to explain the problem of evil (Job 38:12-15; 40:8-14), insisting that, if he could, then the God of the universe would admit that Job could save himself (40:15)! By this time, Job had already confessed that he had nothing left to say (40:3-5). So after having confronted the Lord, Job concluded that he was now certain that the Lord was omnipotent (42:1-2). As a matter of fact, this conclusion had already been proclaimed by both Elihu and the Lord himself before Job came to the recognition of it himself.<sup>3</sup>

From his conversations with Elihu and later with the Lord, Job heard (and apparently learned) a number of lessons.<sup>4</sup> (1) He was not to assert his own righteousness against the Lord, especially in a rebellious and

scornful way (Job 32:2, 5-7; 40:4, 8; 42:5, 6). (2) One ought not blame God for His silence (33:14; 34:29; 35:12-16). (3) It does profit a man to follow God (34:9; 42:5ff.). (4) God is not to be condemned or blamed for evil (34:10, 12, 17; 38:12-15; 40:8-14). (5) God is personal (34:21-22; 42:12). (6) Man ought not trust in his own knowledge (34:35; 37:5, 24; 38:2, 4, 18; 39:2; 42:3). (7) Instead, man ought to trust in God (35:14; cf. 42:1-6). (8) God must punish if man goes too far (36:18), but He also rewards and blesses (36:16; 42:12). (9) God should be praised (36:24ff.; 37:14; 38:4ff.). (10) The works of God are incomprehensible (37:5, 23-24; 38:2-39).

The conclusion to Job's dilemma is a very instructive one. At the beginning of this book his major question concerned why he suffered. But, strangely, he never received an answer to that question. Indeed, Philip Yancey claims that for God to have explained the need for evil to Job would be like attempting to teach Einstein to a clam!<sup>5</sup> Yet Job was satisfied because he realized that God could do anything, including take care of evil. So Job made the decision that, based on what he did know about God, he could trust Him in those things which he did not know. And he made this decision while he was still tormented, before God blessed him.

This is a tremendous principle for believers today to learn, too. When God's silence or the presence of pain and evil can be explained, so much the better.<sup>6</sup> But even when such cannot be figured out, we ought to trust God, for we have enough of a basis to do so. After all, if man is finite, why do we frequently act as if we must be able to explain everything in the universe? At least this major principle should be garnered from the Book of Job. After all, if even Jesus resigned Himself to the will of His Father, why shouldn't Christians learn to do the same? But, as we have seen, there are many other lessons that are also applicable to the issue of God's silence.

### C. The Case of Abraham

Like Job, Abraham wrestled with the issue of God's silence and also learned some great truths which are applicable to doubts on the same subject today. To set the specific scene just briefly, God had spoken to Abraham (when his name was still Abram) and called him to take his family from his homeland of Ur, east of Israel, to Canaan. Abraham was promised that a great nation would come from him there and that they would, in turn, be the source of blessing for all the peoples of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3).

So Abraham took his family and, after several incidents, settled in the land of Canaan, where he and his wife Sarah later died and were buried. God greatly blessed his family and he became the father of the Israelites.

Throughout his long life, Abraham was characterized as a man of faith. The writer of Hebrews notes several of his accomplishments which were gained by trusting God. Initially he responded in faith and proceeded to Canaan, even though he did not know where he was going (Heb. 11:8-10). He also trusted God's promise that he and Sarah would have a child, even though they were elderly and Sarah had been barren. But the faith that God was trustworthy allowed him to be the father of a great nation (11:11-12). And then when God asked Abraham to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice, Abraham was willing because he even believed that God, having made him a promise, could raise his son from the dead if need be (11:17-19). So Abraham lived his life by faith and God honored that and blessed him.

But some might wonder how Abraham could ever have had a question about God's leading. After all, didn't Abraham speak directly to God basically whenever he wanted to do so? But yet, we find after an examination of the texts that Abraham may also have had a question concerning God's silence, in spite of our ideas to the contrary. For example, Gen. 16 ends when Abraham is 86 years old. As far as we are told, the next time God spoke to him was 13 years later when he was 99 years old (Gen. 17:1). Now it is hard to be dogmatic here, but if there were any major communications it is likely that we would at least have been told about these, based on the other major episodes of his life that are related to the reader. But it is also true that we cannot be sure. God may have spoken to him during this interval. But at the very least, neither do we have grounds for asserting that God communicated with Abraham throughout his life on a weekly or even a yearly basis. It does appear that there may have been gaps, and perhaps even sizeable ones.

Regardless, Abraham was a man of faith. But neither did God expect him to believe in a vacuum. Abraham was given warrant for his belief, as well. After all, God did speak to him and such communication must have been very convincing. And then there was the rather mysterious time when Abraham asked God how he might know that Canaan would be given to him as his possession (Gen. 15:8). The Lord responded by telling him that he could know this truth for certain and then proceeded to utilize a supernatural manifestation in order to make a covenant with Abraham (15:13-21). So faith does not exclude good grounds for belief. Yet Abraham exercised more faith than normal and as the writer of Hebrews makes the point, the great events in his life would not have been possible without this exercise of faith.

But here is the key in the case of Abraham: he not only exercised faith, but that faith grew as he trusted God more and more. Paul also utilizes Abraham as his example at this very juncture. When he could have just given up and ignored God's call, Abraham chose to believe instead and moved his family. And then when a child was promised, he still did not falter in his faith even though all the medical data opposed it. In both

cases Abraham did not give up or lapse into unbelief; but his faith was actually strengthened (Rom. 4:18-25).

Imagine a faith that actually grows when the pressure is the greatest! Yet that was Abraham's experience. And like Job, the chief reason is that he concluded that God was trustworthy; what he already knew about Him was enough to trust Him in unknown areas (Rom. 4:21).

None of this is to say, however, that Abraham did not experience hardships, even regarding his faith. Just as Job resorted to questioning God, Abraham also had his troublesome moments. We have already mentioned His need for assurance, resulting in a supernatural event (Gen. 15:8-21). There were also the times when Abraham concealed the identity of Sarah to protect his own life (12:10-20; 20:1-18), or when Abraham and Sarah resorted to allowing the maid, Hagar, to bear a son (Ishmael) for Abraham, since Sarah still had not gotten pregnant (16:1-16), all in spite of God's promises.

But, as a whole, Abraham regularly acted in faith. And his faith did not give way to unbelief. He was strengthened even during trying times because He trusted God (Rom. 4:18-25). And as we pointed out in Chapter V on Volitional Doubt, believers today can also let their faith grow precisely during the times when it is under attack.

#### D. Conclusion

There are many reasons why prayer may not be answered the way believers expect. But as pointed out above, this chapter is not primarily concerned with why prayers are not answered but how believers respond when they think that they have not been.<sup>7</sup> To this end we have endeavored to point out, initially, that it was common for believers in Scripture to both wonder why their prayers were not answered and to question God's silence, which sometimes lasted for long periods of time. Such a study should help us to see that we do not have as dichotomy between biblical times when God always answered prayer and today, when He often does not. Such a thesis simply is not supported by the facts. God answers many prayers according to the request, while believers have concluded that others have not been responded to (according to their own evaluations).

Using the experiences of Job and Abraham, we found that some believers have grown even during tough times. And like both of them, believers today can also resolve to trust the Lord even further, right during times of doubt and dismay. One principle here is that, since we know enough about God in other crucial areas, we can trust Him even in those further instances where we cannot figure things out completely. After all, I may not know why I am presently suffering, but this is still a world where God has raised Jesus from the dead and believers still have eternal life.

Here we need to practice exerting our faith during times of doubt, perhaps by directly affirming our belief to God during prayer or meditation. Another helpful practice is to literally list our answers to prayer as they come about, thereby providing a ready list for times when we experience questions as to how much God answers our prayers. Incidentally, such questions are more usually emotional in nature (see Chapter IV) and so just such a list is helpful in confronting our own untruths which we tell ourselves. And then, as Job and Abraham experienced, we can also witness the growth of our faith and the corresponding lessening of the grip of doubt.

#### Endnotes--Chapter VI

1It should be carefully noted that this chapter is not primarily concerned with the biblical conditions for answered prayer but rather with the doubt which proceeds from one's perception that prayer has not been answered, even if all conditions are thought to have been met. In other words, we are not really dealing with the reasons God does not appear to answer prayer as much as how an individual reacts when such is the case and what lessons can be learned through this experience. (But see endnote 7 below as well).

2For examples, see Job 7:11; 10:3-4, 13-14, 20-22; 12:6; 14:19; 16:9; 27:2.

3For some instances, see the various related claims in Job 33:12; 36:26; 37:5, 23; 40:2; cf. 33:17.

4Most of these following principles are repeated in the words of both Elihu and God.

5Philip Yancey, "When Bad Things Happen to Good People," Christianity Today, volume 27, number 12, August 5, 1983, p. 23.

6We are not asserting that the cause of specific sorts of pain and evil will never be known, for Scripture also provides a number of such reasons, as well. Rather, we are addressing issues for which the cause cannot always be ascertained.

7However, we can still briefly list some of the biblical conditions for answered prayer. Most of such factors are



personal in nature, such as the need to confess one's sin (Ps. 66:18; I Jn. 1:9), exercise faith (Mk. 11:24; Jn. 1:5-8), be obedient (Jn. 15:7; I Jn. 3:22), pray according to God's will (I Jn. 5:14-15) and in Jesus' name (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23). But we are also told that individual prayers are sometimes not answered when the nation itself has been in a state of sin (Lam. 3:42-44; cf. Isa. 57:11).

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## **Chapter VII**

### **Jesus As A Living Person**

The longer I work with the issue of doubt, the more I am convinced that a major key in the process is understanding, on a daily, practical basis, that Jesus is still intensely personal. In dealing with volitional doubt, in particular, we have already seen the importance of applying the New Testament teachings of the personhood of Jesus to one's life in order to both increase one's faith and to provide greater impetus to love and be committed to Him. It is definitely true that He lived, died and rose from the dead in first century Palestine. But it is also true that He is just as alive and just as personal to each believer today, but we frequently do not quite appropriate that personal element in our Christian lives. Herbert Lockyer states the issue this way:

**Have you met Jesus? . . . We try to feel His nearness. But He is not real to us. The tragedy is that Christ is not, to us, the living, bright Reality that He ought to be.<sup>1</sup>**

But not only did Jesus act in a deeply personal way while He walked on this earth but He has also provided the means for a truly personal relation to believers today. Appropriating the truth of that closeness can solve several problems regularly faced by the doubter.

#### A. Jesus in the Gospels

It appears that the subject of the various kindnesses which Jesus showed to different individuals and groups is a topic which is seldom mentioned in much detail. Yet this is an aspect<sup>2</sup> of His personality which can help provide a realization of His love for others. And I think that such a study serves to assist us in appreciating the personal element in His ministry. This, in turn, can also help us to formulate a foundation concerning how Jesus still has a personal relationship with believers today, as well.

Jesus' compassion is shown not only by His healings, but also by His attitude displayed in these acts. When a leprous man approached Jesus for healing, we are told that He was "filled with compassion" for him and responded that He was, indeed, willing to heal the individual (Mk. 1:41; cf. Matt. 8:2-3; Lk. 5:12-13). Just prior to the feeding of the five thousand it is explained that Jesus "had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14; Mk. 6:34). Then, before the feeding of the four thousand, we are again told that Jesus felt compassion for the people (Matt. 15:32; Mk. 8:2). In the case of the two blind men, "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes" (Matt. 20:34). And when ten men with leprosy approached, requesting that Jesus have mercy on them, He did, healing all of them (Lk. 17:13).

In each of these examples, the narratives are very brief. But one unmistakably gets the idea that Jesus felt deep compassion for those who were sick, hungry or without leadership. His method was not simply to heal persons by walking among them in a detached manner. He shared their burdens and experienced their pain. Then He exercised His powers, thereby revealing His mercy.

Jesus showed Himself to be humble and gentle on several occasions. One of the best known of these occurred when little children were brought to Jesus so He would place His hands on them and pray for them. (Luke even includes babies in the group.) After rebuking the disciples for attempting to stop this procedure, we are told that Jesus "took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them" (Mk. 10:16; cf. Matt. 19:13-15; Lk. 18:15-17). In another instance Jesus also took a little child up in His arms in order to make a point (Mk. 9:36-37).

In more than one situation Jesus taught His disciples to be servants. In fact, the greatest one was to serve.<sup>3</sup> And then by example, Jesus washed His disciples' feet; the Son of God humbled Himself to do this lowly job of service (John 13:1-17).

Additionally, in inviting individuals to come to Him, Jesus identified Himself with the words, "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29). And Matthew also cites Zech. 9:9 as a prophecy which mentions the gentleness of the Messiah (Matt. 21:5).

Further, in a number of rather striking statements, Jesus spoke of His followers as His friends and was very specific about His love for them. Most frequently, it is the disciples who are called the friends of Jesus (Lk.

12:4; Jn. 21:5). On one occasion He spoke of the growth in their relationship: "I no longer call you servants . . . Instead, I have called you friends . . . ." (Jn. 15:14-15). Jesus also called Lazarus His friend (Jn. 11:11).

We are additionally told, again primarily in the Gospel of John, that Jesus loved His disciples (Jn. 13:1, 34-35) and one disciple, in particular (Jn. 13:23). The depth of this relationship is seen in Jesus' statement, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you" (Jn. 15:9). This is even more apparent when Jesus points out that dying for one's friends constitutes the greatest love (Jn. 15:12-13).

The last two statements strikingly reveal that, by the term "love," Jesus does not refer to some weak or indecisive emotion. Rather, He compares His love for His disciples with nothing less than the Father's perfect love for Him. Then, after encouraging His disciples to love one another, He points out that the greatest love is indicated by one's dying for one's friends. These teachings indicate Jesus' true, sacrificial love. And this love is by no means limited to the disciples alone, since we are also told that Jesus loved Lazarus, Mary and Martha (Jn. 11:3, 5, 36), as well as the wealthy young man who questioned Him concerning eternal life (Mk. 10:21).

At first reflection, one might be tempted to think that the force of these last statements might be mitigated due to Jesus' commands to love one's enemies, as well. And Jesus certainly does teach not only that one's enemies should be loved, but that we should also bless them, pray for them and lend willingly to them (Lk. 6:27-36; Matt. 5:43-48). But this should only cause us to increase our appreciation for Jesus, for the admonition concerning this treatment of one's enemies is no mere empty rule but a genuine love on His part. Such is indicated both by Jesus' cry to His Father that His executors be forgiven, which He made right during the time that He experienced the most intense pain of crucifixion (Lk. 23:34) and by His earlier remarks concerning His willingness to die because of His love for persons (Jn. 15:13).

Jesus' offer of comfort was often given to His followers. Sometimes such was manifest in brief admonitions not to fear, as when He stilled a storm (Mk. 6:50) or when He calmed a frightened Peter, James and John during His transfiguration (Matt. 17:17). On other occasions, however, detailed offers were made as to how people might experience true rest. Some of the images which were used by Jesus specifically correlated with Old Testament promises of God's blessings for His people.

For example, in Matt. 11:28-30 Jesus invites all who are weary and burdened to find rest by exchanging their problems for discipleship. Besides the beautifully-worded offer to lay down one's burdens, this proposal is reminiscent of the promise that if we cast our cares on God, He will sustain and keep us from faltering (Ps. 55:22). A similar teaching in Ps. 68:19 relates that God daily bears the burdens of His people. So Jesus not only made a wonderful offer Himself, but He tapped resources that a person who was familiar with God's Old Testament promises would recognize.

In another instance, Jesus announces His love for those in Jerusalem, saying that He longed to gather the Jews to Him like a mother hen gathers her chicks under her wings, so as to provide shelter and protection (Matt. 23:37-39; Lk. 13:34-35). In a similar vein, Jesus also wept over Jerusalem on another occasion, desiring its peace (Lk. 19:42). One of the most common images in the Old Testament was that of God providing a refuge for His people as their Shield and Protector. Perhaps the best-known of these is Ps. 91, but literally dozens of passages in the Psalms alone repeat this message,<sup>4</sup> as do other texts.<sup>5</sup> In addition to Ps. 91, other key portions include Ps. 36:7-9 and 46:1-7, where we are told that believers find refuge in God, where all their needs are met and supplied in overabundance. The key here besides the theme of protection is that of total rest and fellowship with the God of the universe. And again, Jesus tapped into this gorgeous imagery in His offer of peace to His people.

Another picturesque image is provided when Jesus compares Himself to a good shepherd who constantly cares for believers, who are His sheep. John 10:1-18 graphically portrays this, which is also a common theme for those familiar with the Old Testament. Jesus calls His sheep by name, leads them out of the fold and directs them to peaceful pasture land (see especially Jn. 10:3-4,9). Like Ps. 91, there is a major counterpart here from the Book of Psalms as well. In Ps. 23 we find that God is our Shepherd and that His sheep lack nothing. He leads them out to beautiful green pastures and beside quiet waters where they rest comfortably. Even when facing death, the Lord's sheep have no need to fear because He is with them even then, comforting them. The sheep's desire (as in the earlier theme of refuge) is to spend eternity with the Shepherd. Other passages express very similar teachings.<sup>6</sup> Two other especially interesting texts refer to God gently carrying His sheep "close to His heart," paying particular attention to the young ones (Isa. 40:11) and carrying them that way forever (Ps. 28:9). These are quite reminiscent of Jesus as the good Shepherd of Jn. 10, and of Jesus' parable of the shepherd who searches far and wide for his lost animal, placing it on his shoulders and calling his friends to rejoice when it is found. Jesus' own interpretation refers to the rejoicing in heaven when a sinner repents (Lk. 15:3-7).

In particular, I think that these last two images are the greatest biblical pictures of Jesus' compassion, gentleness and love. The mother hen who gathers her chickens and protects them under her wings and the shepherd leading his sheep to peaceful pastures are simply graphic depictions of Jesus' treatment of believers.

With regard to the first image of the hen, Lockyer notes four keys in Jesus' attitude. First, He is a persistent

lover, noted by the phrase "how often" He wanted to so protect the Jews. Second, He is a tender lover, illustrated by the treatment of the mother hen for her chickens. Third, Jesus was an unwanted lover, since the Jews "would not" receive Him. Lastly, He is a Judgmental Lover because He was forced to turn them back over to themselves, desolate.<sup>7</sup>

And again this is reminiscent of Ps. 91 with its stress on particularly God being the believer's Shelter, Refuge and Fortress as they rest under His wings in the shadows, away from all that is evil (vs. 1-13). The promise is made, further, that all who so rest will also find deliverance from trouble, answers to prayer, long life and salvation (vs. 14-16).

The imagery of the shepherd caring for his sheep is equally instructive. What could be more restful than being guided by the Son of God, the Creator of the Universe, as He takes His followers to safe pastures where they rest by quiet waters? In fact, Rev. 7:15-17 adopts this very idea to describe the eternal rest offered to those who triumph and keep their faith pure through great tribulation.

And once again, with both images the supreme ideas are those of protection, rest and fellowship. Such eternal communion with the God of the universe should be a cause of great joy for the believer. By these and other teachings, Jesus communicated His compassion, gentleness, friendship, love and desire for restful fellowship with believers. To spend eternity with Jesus is a truly wonderful reward made possible solely through God's love and grace. And we have seen a foretaste of such in the earthly ministry of Jesus.

#### B. Jesus is Personally Alive Today

Perhaps many believers today would say that the chief issues involved in conceiving of Jesus as intensely personal today are that He walked on the earth 2000 years ago and that believers do not actually see Him as others once did. Interestingly, even believers shortly after Jesus' era apparently also dealt with this dilemma, although the time frame was more abbreviated (I Pet. 1:18). But a biblical presentation of the data, I think, bridges the gap between the past and the present. Utilizing Jesus' earthly ministry as our point of departure, we will attempt to show that Jesus made provision for believers to compensate for exactly this concern on their part.

Before proceeding to Jesus' answer to this issue, a few contemporary illustrations will perhaps show that we regularly recognize that personal relationships can exist even when persons have never met. For instance, I know several individuals whom I have never personally met except through regular telephone conversations. Yet I consider each to be a personal friend. Such has even led to close friendships.

Or again, the popular practice of writing letters to pen-pals has doubtless led to countless close and personal friendships among persons who have never met. And a last type of in absentia friendship most frequently seems to occur when a parent knows they are dying, so they produce a number of writings or tape recordings for future use by children who are not old enough to understand and who will not remember their parent. In some cases, these communications are prepared for (as yet) unborn children.

Now it must be granted that these cases do not correspond in several respects to the large physical separation between Jesus and Twentieth Century believers. But the chief point to be illustrated here is that, in the last two types of cases, in particular, we perceive situations where personal relationships exist and develop without any actual face to face contact. Yet presumably few would claim that these cannot constitute truly personal friendships. For our purposes, it will be good to keep this in mind as we present thirteen steps by which Jesus Himself laid the groundwork for personal interaction with individuals, both in the first century and onwards until today.

First, the Incarnation is explicitly the supreme act which reveals Jesus' humanity. What could be a greater act of relating to human persons, especially when it was initiated by God Himself? Thus, Jesus chose to become a man; the Son of God, Himself a divine Person, chose to be further related to human persons by becoming one of them. It is doubtful that a more personal act could be conceived than an infinite God becoming a man.

Second, we have already seen in the first section of this chapter how Jesus did not stay aloof but got involved with people's needs. Besides teaching His disciples, He also revealed His deep love and compassion for the sick, poor, hungry and outcasts. He dealt with both crowds and individuals. He blessed babies and children. He offered Jews protection and Christians leadership, calm, rest and fellowship. He even prayed for His enemies during His most intense pain. And much of this was done when Jesus was tired and weary, at much expense to His own physical needs. Then He taught that the same expression of self-sacrificial love was the chief fruit of a believer (Jn. 15:9-17). Such personal interaction with the needs of others is unparalleled among major religious teachers.

Third, Jesus repeatedly taught that sinners can have a personal relationship with Him by a faith-commitment. Thus, the same Jesus Christ who became man and who carried on the ministry such as we have outlined in this chapter actually invited individuals to experience a personal relationship with Him.

Fourth, Jesus prayed not only for the future welfare of His own disciples, but He even prayed specifically for those who would later become believers after them (Jn. 17:20). Thus, His prayer in this chapter was to eventually provide for believers today, up until His return (as do many of the exhortations in the New Testament epistles).

Fifth, Jesus died to show His love for us. In fact, it just may be that the death of Jesus is the single most convincing sign of His compassion for believers. And lest we think otherwise, His death was just as efficacious for us today as for anyone in the first century. What depth of love is shown when the infinite God of the universe cares for us enough to send His unique Son to die, especially with the explicit knowledge of the horribly tortuous death of crucifixion! And to think that the Son did it all without being forced; it was a totally voluntary act.

How many of us would willingly be tortured and die so that, say, a criminal could live? And yet this is precisely what Jesus did for us in His love while we were still offensive to Him in our sin (Rom. 5:8).

Then the pain that Jesus suffered is another angle from which to view the Cross. It assists us in understanding that God's own Son ultimately knows what it is like to suffer far more than virtually any humans ever do. We might not understand why we suffer sometimes, but He does.

Lastly, the Cross is also an intensely personal event. It was not only a death for the whole world but, at the exact same time, a death for each individual. Jesus, then, not only came to die for the world; He really came to die for me. New Testament offers of salvation to individuals specifically portray this aspect.

As a whole, then, the Cross reveals an intimate relationship between Jesus and believers. It shows His love, the pain He suffered, and the personal quality involved in His death. And, as we have said, it is as applicable to Twentieth Century believers as it was in the First Century.

Sixth, Jesus rose from the dead to prove His love for Christians. Thus, He did not simply claim that His death was special, including the factors just mentioned, but His resurrection sealed those statements, revealing that they were true. Additionally, the fact that the believer's eternal life is guaranteed by this same resurrection makes this event more important in personal terms, for it provides an example of the believer's own resurrected body.<sup>8</sup>

But at this point Jesus left His earthly ministry and took His place in heaven. This is an important juncture because it indicates a new order in God's personal relationship to believers, who also struggled even in the First Century with the issue of Jesus' being physically absent from them (Jn. 16:5-7, 12; cf. I Pet. 1:8). So as we proceed through the remainder of the thirteen points, we will not only be concerned with how Jesus continues to relate to believers today, but also how the original question was answered for the disciples.

The seventh step in Jesus' provision for Christians, and the specific one which He used to comfort the twelve disciples after telling them that He would be leaving them, is that the Holy Spirit would be sent to them (Jn. 14:12-19, 25-27). He would minister to them as Jesus had done previously, also presenting additional benefits (see Jn. 14:26; 16:12-15).

At this point what must not be concluded is that the ministry of the Holy Spirit would be quite inconsequential in the sense of bringing the disciples direction and comfort or that this new ministry would be unreal to them because He could not be seen. All one should have to do, for example, is to study the Book of Acts to perceive how real the Holy Spirit's ministry was to the apostles. He guided, empowered, and enlightened them on many an occasion and there is no hint that there was any dissatisfaction on the part of these believers.

As for Christians today, it sometimes does appear that the Holy Spirit is too often viewed in just the negative way mentioned above: His ministry is thought of as being too inconsequential and too unreal. I think many believers too frequently think (privately, of course) that the work of the Spirit is an unfair "trade" for the earthly, visible ministry of Jesus.

And yet, we must come to grips with the fact that for Jesus, the work of the Holy Spirit was very substantial, both as a fit reminder of Jesus' own ministry, as well as providing for genuinely new dimensions (Jn. 14:12; 16:13 for examples). Additionally, the New Testament reports that the Holy Spirit provides a specific testimony to the believer in order to certify His own, individual participation in salvation.<sup>9</sup> This topic is substantial enough to be the subject of the next chapter, so we will not pursue it here, except to say that this witness is real and deeper than human emotions, reason or sense experience, although it often affects these three. But the point here is that the Holy Spirit's overall work is not only quite substantial, but that it is the first link in the chain which provides the believer today with a personal witness to the living Jesus, as indicated by the Lord Himself (Jn. 16:14).

Eighth, and in an apparently separate sense, Jesus also promised to be with His followers through the end of this age -- or until He returns (Matt. 28:20; cf. Heb. 13:5-6). While this is possibly a reference to the ministry

of the Holy Spirit, it appears in Matthew to also refer separately to Jesus' presence with believers (cf. also Matt. 18:20). At any rate, it is clear that Jesus is, in some sense, promising His presence to Christians from the First Century to the present.

Ninth, Jesus also provided a love letter even for Twentieth Century believers--the New Testament. He promised the apostles that they would be His spokesmen and His witnesses (Matt. 10:40; Lk. 24:48; Acts 1:8). Additionally, the Holy Spirit would inspire them (see John 14:26; 16:12-15). The result of Jesus' promises was the writing of the New Testament, which remains, even for believers today, Jesus' love letter to us. It is an especially affective bridge between the First Century and ourselves, although we may sometimes forget that it is a document provided for us by Jesus Himself.

Further, the tenth connection between the living Jesus and believers today is that He taught us to pray in His name so that God will answer (Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24). In this sense, He is presently involved in meeting our needs and responding to our requests. When believers pray in Jesus' name and the prayer is answered,<sup>10</sup> Jesus has had a part in it, a further indication of His current involvement with our lives.

The eleventh indication which believers have today that Jesus is still personally involved with them is that He still serves as Mediator and High Priest. The Book of Hebrews repeatedly teaches that this is a continuing, unending priesthood (Heb. 7:23-8:6; 9:24-28), and as such also applies just as much to believers today as it did in the First Century. So Jesus did not "pass off the scene" so to speak, but has a continuing ministry with believers even at present. And the fact that He is our Mediator (I Tim. 2:5-6) likewise remains the case with no difference between the First and Twentieth Centuries.

The twelfth truth is that Jesus is not only the Creator of the universe and everything in it (Jn. 1:3; Col. 1:16), but He is also the Sustainer of the universe, as well (Col. 1:17; Heb. 1:3). In fact, Scripture teaches a "radical" dependency of creation on God, such that two biblical writers can poetically say that if God would withdraw His breath, everything would die (Job 34:14-15; Ps. 104:29).

Now at first thought some might contend that this does not sound too personal, but such would be to miss the point that, in order to sustain all life at every moment, God is intricately involved with each one of us. And if one thinks that God must also sustain the far reaches of the universe it should be said that such is, in fact, actually needed in order for life to exist on earth. Thus, the God Who controls the universe is also intimately involved with human life.<sup>11</sup>

Thirteenth, the very same Jesus who was so personally involved in the lives of so many individuals while He was on the earth, who prayed for believers, died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose again for us, who sent the Holy Spirit, provided the New Testament and serves as our High Priest and Mediator, as well as being the Sustainer of the universe, has also invited believers to spend eternity with Him! Such an offer is almost incomprehensible. Unlike individuals who are willing to share some (but not the best) things with others, Jesus wants to include Christians in His eternal plans. And to spend eternity with Jesus Christ represents the highest of Christian hopes; to praise Him and live with Him forever is beyond any specifically human dreams. Yet, Jesus freely offered this future to those who entrust their lives to Him.

A personal existence in heaven with the personal God of the universe is a fit conclusion to our study of how Jesus could have lived 2000 years ago and still be personally involved with believers today. After all, the point here was to show that Jesus is personally concerned with contemporary Christians and the opportunity to finally meet Him and spend eternity with Him clearly reveals the biblical thesis at its best.

### C. Conclusion

Near the beginning of this chapter we raised the issue of how Jesus could be separated from Twentieth Century believers by almost 2000 years and still remain personal, especially when no one today has ever seen Him. It was suggested by analogy that there might be at least some similarities in such human experiences as close friendships which evolve through telephone conversations, letter writing or tapes, each in the absence of face to face meetings. In the case of Jesus, knowing He would leave the world, He not only left a lifetime example of personal involvement but He also sent the Holy Spirit and prepared His disciples for the writing of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup> Thus, believers not only were given the Holy Spirit, but one result was the recording of the New Testament "love letters" for Christians down through the ages. In this sense, Jesus made sure that He left His followers with both the Holy Spirit and a written product, which may be at least reminiscent of those who leave messages of various sorts for their children because of their impending deaths.

At any rate, it is simply true that believers today do not operate by having seen Jesus in physical terms (I Pet. 1:8; cf. II Cor. 5:7). And yet it appears that Jesus has left an unbroken chain from the time of His earthly life to the present. After a tremendous personal example during His ministry, His sacrificial death and resurrection, He sent the Holy Spirit (Jesus' own chosen "Successor") as well as promising His presence to believers and His being High Priest, Mediator and Sustainer, all of which reveal this ongoing relationship. And the chance to actually meet Him and to spend eternity with Him is an unprecedented personal offer.

Therefore, Christians should realize that there is not a 2000 year gap, except in the sense that Jesus has not continued His earthly ministry during that time. But such is not synonymous with Jesus' absence from the lives of believers. And presently we do experience the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives (see next chapter), at least part of Whose ministry is to testify concerning Jesus (Jn. 16:14).

This conclusion is crucially important for those who suffer doubts. As asserted in Chapter V on Volitional Doubt, knowledge about one's ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ and developing it are very important in building up one's faith. Thus, to realize that one is really involved with a living Person is a key in responding to assaults on one's faith: doubts assail a personal relationship, not simply a body of beliefs. To illustrate, I will presumably respond differently to attacks on my wife's character because of a close personal relationship with her, as opposed to simply trying to defend someone's honor.

But even far beyond this, to know that Jesus is still personally related to me is hopefully to begin to build up our relationship in a positive manner. Earlier it was suggested that one of the best ways to cause faith to grow is, paradoxically, to practice during the doubt itself. And it might be remembered that it is healthier to move ahead and grow than it is to always be engaged in fighting battles. (This is where meditation is also helpful to work on this positive growth.) At any rate, much Christian doubt as a whole can be corrected by the knowledge that Jesus presently is with us, knows our needs and loves us.<sup>13</sup>

## **Endnotes -- Chapter VII**

1Herbert Lockyer, *Portraits of the Savior* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Publishers, 1983), p. VII.

2Since this is only an aspect of His personality, the picture presented here needs to be balanced by Jesus' total ministry, including, for example, His warnings of judgment for those who did not heed His words.

3See Lk. 22:24-27 (cf. Matt. 20:26-28; Mk. 10:43-45); Matt. 23:11-12.

4For a small sampling, see Ps. 3:3; 5:11; 9:9; 11:1; 16:1; 17:8; 18:2, 30; 25:20; 27:1; 28:7; 31:1-4, 19, 20; 32:7, for examples.

5For a few of these, see Isa. 17:10; 25:4-5; 31:5; 57:13; Jer. 16:19; 17:17.

6In particular, see Ps. 37:3; 74:1; 79:13; 80:1; 95:7; 100:3; Isa. 53:6.

7Lockyer, pp. 113-117. Interestingly, Ps. 7:10-11 also notes that God is both a Shield and a righteous Judge.

8See Jn. 14:3, 19; II Cor. 4:14; Phil. 3:21; I Jn. 3:2.

9See Jn. 14:17, 20; Rom. 8:15-17; Gal. 4:6-7; I Jn. 3:23; 4:13.

10For a brief listing of some other biblical conditions of answered prayer, see Chapter VI, endnote 7.

11For an excellent discussion of points such as these, see Robert Gange, *Origins and Destiny: A Scientist Examines God's Handiwork* (Waco: Word Books, 1986).

12See John Wenham, *Christ and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), especially Chapter 5 for some relevant data here.

13Chapter V explains such strategies in detail.

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## **Chapter VIII**

### **The Testimony of the Holy Spirit**

During my own periods of doubt and long before I had ever studied the work of the Holy Spirit, I had quite frequently experienced what I could best describe alternately either as unusually potent restraint or conviction. Even when my uncertainty was at its worst (in fact, especially during those times) I had the distinct impression that I could not "let go" of my Christian faith. In other words, even during the moments of severe doubt, when I felt as if my soul had been laid bare by the torrents of intellectual criticism or when I had considered believing something different, I would often experience the realization both that Christianity

(especially in its essence) was true and that I could really (and finally) never believe otherwise.<sup>1</sup> At the time I dismissed it as a rather strange conviction (because it seemed more certain than other regular impressions), and I just passed it off as being psychological in nature. But a residue of the conviction remained so that I frequently found myself wondering as to its nature. Thus, it was strong enough (and different enough, as well) that I continued to come back to it to query concerning its essence.

Upon reflection, I found that it was different than psychological states, which not only varied but which were not this strong. This inward conviction not only remained when the times were the roughest, but even when I experienced emotional doubt and asked "what if" I ever gave up Christianity? At those moments I was still convicted that the essence of Christianity was true and that my only option was to continue to believe. And in my quieter moments, the same conviction was likewise present regarding the reality of my own personal faith.

Years later, when studying the witness of the Holy Spirit, I thought that I had discovered a natural "fit" for my own experience. And while I had often envied those believers who quietly "just knew" that Christianity was correct, I joyfully realized that, whatever it was, I had that conviction also. In fact, the frequency of my doubts probably gave me far more than the average number of occasions on which I could observe this experience first hand.

Before beginning a discussion of the material for this chapter, a caution is perhaps necessary. To the reader who is inclined to conclude, as I did for years, that any such discussion is condemned to subjectivity, I plead at least for a fair reading of the material before any such conclusion is drawn. On the other hand, if the previous view is still held afterwards, it still does not affect the central thesis of this volume. In other words, one can ultimately reject the interpretation given in this chapter without threatening a cure for doubt. For that reader, this would then be what C.S. Lewis calls "A Chapter Not Strictly Necessary."<sup>2</sup> But if I am correct (or essentially so) then this becomes an integral part of solving the puzzle of doubt and is a conclusion which certainly ought not be dismissed. Ultimately, however, I realize that such a topic is somewhat person-related, in that each believer is asked to reflect on his own experience in light of Scripture. And I think that it is essentially this last subject of God's Word, in addition to the experience itself, which makes this discussion so difficult to just ignore or set on a shelf.

#### A. What is the Testimony of the Holy Spirit?

I had long believed that one of the most difficult issues in this entire topic was simply (or not so simply!) attempting to state what was to be included (and excluded) by the Holy Spirit's witness. What does the biblical teaching indicate? This problem was partly caused by a seeming confusion concerning the topic which is apparent from the differences in interpretation even among theologians of a similar persuasion.<sup>4</sup> And of course, if we are not able to arrive at a meaningful statement of this testimony, it will then be very difficult to apply any such conclusions to the issue of doubt.

Beginning our identification<sup>5</sup> with the elimination of some common notions concerning the witness of the Holy Spirit might initially be helpful. The biblical testimony does not identify this witness with such overt signs as an audible voice or some extraordinary experience. Neither does it emanate from human reason, sense experience or emotions.

Rather, after a study of passages such as Rom. 8:15-17 and Gal. 4:6-7, Bernard Ramm notes that the witness of the Holy Spirit is a "direct connection from the mind of God to the mind of the Christian." Such direct testimony therefore occurs at a deeper level than does data gained by sense experience or by reason. Thus, the Holy Spirit can reach redeemed persons to a more profound extent than these individuals' abilities to touch themselves.<sup>6</sup>

Arguing that this witness is actually intuitive in nature, Ramm illustrates how this ought not be a stumbling block because all forms of knowledge require "an irreducible intuitive element." So the testimony of the Spirit, once again, is direct and not a conclusion which follows from an argument.<sup>7</sup> William Craig refers to it as a self-evident assurance for the believer.<sup>8</sup>

Should all believers, then, experience the same at this point and all in the same way? Ramm carefully points out that the expressions of this witness are as varied as are individuals themselves. There are also different levels of intensity involved. For examples, one Christian might express his experience in a calm, settled manner while another is dogmatic. Still other believers might be inclined toward a bit more uncertainty and doubt even though they believe.<sup>9</sup>

At this point perhaps a clarification ought to be made. We are not speaking here of the entire ministry of the Holy Spirit. Such is, indeed, a broad subject and is far beyond the purview of this volume. Rather, we are speaking of a more specific portion of that ministry, namely, the testimony given directly to believers regarding their own salvation. And this work involves the other Members of the Godhead, as well.

So it has been said that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not manifest in outward phenomena such as

audible voices, extraordinary experiences or even in spiritual gifts. Such views are simply not supported by the New Testament. Rather, such is a direct communion between the Spirit and the redeemed individual, as indicated by passages such as Rom. 8:15-17 and Gal. 4:6-7. The conviction given is therefore more direct than that derived from other normal cognitive processes. Yet, this witness varies in its human expression and intensity while Scripture appears to say that the purpose for it is much more uniform.

## B. The Chief Purpose of the Witness

If we are correct that the testimony of the Holy Spirit is a direct, substantive connection with the believer, the next issue concerns its purpose. In fact, whatever else may be thought about the identification and nature of the witness, the portions of Scripture mentioned earlier appear to be rather straightforward and specific in their assertions that its purpose at least includes the subject of the individual's assurance of his own salvation. For instance, Rom. 8:15-17 refers to the Spirit of sonship or adoption (v. 15) whereby a response of "Abba" (the Aramaic which is translated as "Father" or even "Daddy") is evoked from the believer. But not only does the new believer now address the God of the universe in a different manner, but the Holy Spirit Himself gives witness directly to the Christian's spirit that he is, indeed, a child of God (v. 16). Then we are amazingly told that our being a child of God now entitles us to be co-heirs with Christ Himself (v. 17)!

But perhaps the chief point to be noticed here is that verse 16 portrays the Holy Spirit's testimony as a rather direct communication to the believer's spirit, specifically informing the Christian of his familial relationship to God. In another very similar passage (Gal. 4:6-7), we are likewise told that the Holy Spirit is in believers, crying out "Abba" to God (v. 6). And, once again, we are informed that this indicates we are sons of God and therefore heirs (v. 7).

There are other New Testament passages which present related messages. Jesus promised His disciples to send the Holy Spirit (John 14:16), and they are told that they would recognize Him because He would reside in them (v. 17). One consequence of this indwelling was that they would realize their own salvific relationship to Christ (v. 20).

John, likewise, applies such a promise to believers as a whole. At least twice he informs his readers that they would similarly know of their own salvation by the presence of the Holy Spirit in them (1 Jn. 3:24; 4:13). So, like Paul, here it is also recognized that it is the Holy Spirit Who provides the personal certainty of the believer's own salvation.

As we did in the earlier section where we attempted to partially explain the nature of the Holy Spirit's testimony by identifying what it also is not, a similar tact may be helpful here. It would appear from these verses, as well as others, that this witness is not given to judge the content of theology as a whole or to decide between positions where Christians may be in disagreement. Not only is there a certain lack of biblical support for this notion,<sup>10</sup> but there is far too much difference both in New Testament churches and today among spirit-filled believers.

Among commentators, a notable exception to the previous statement is the view of those who believe that the witness also includes the conviction that Scripture is God's Word (or even that there are two witnesses, one to the individual's salvation and one to the Text).<sup>11</sup> A popular passage in this regard is 1 Cor. 2, although it appears to refer to the wider ministry of the Holy Spirit, of which the witness is a specific part. Ramm remarks that the overall intent of this text is still Christological and soteriological, pointing back in the direction of our earlier statements. Yet it is admitted that there is a sense in which this witness will still lead to the recognition of Scripture as God's Word.<sup>12</sup>

But at any rate, I think few evangelical commentators would disagree that at least an important portion of the Holy Spirit's personal witness to the believer is to provide conviction of one's salvation. And many hold that this is the primary purpose of this testimony.

Ramm is especially adamant on this last point. He states "it is a witness to individual participation in salvation; of the divine adoption. The intent of the witness is to bear witness to our participation in this redemption."<sup>13</sup> Thus, the believer's certainty of his salvation is the chief product of the Holy Spirit's testimony. Such is the possession of all believers and is not dependent on such things as occupation or knowledge. In this sense, "the humblest person enjoys the same certainty as the learned theologians."<sup>14</sup>

We may conclude by saying that, even if the testimony of the Holy Spirit includes more, the chief purpose is convicting believers of their own participation in God's eternal Kingdom. Several New Testament passages agree at this point. As such, there are tremendous implications here for the subject of doubt. Since this conviction is directly from God Himself, the knowledge that one is indeed a believer should produce comfort and peace for those who question this very point.

## C. The Testimony of the Spirit and Proof



Especially for those interested in apologetics, the question of whether the Holy Spirit's testimony can be proved may be thought to be an important one. This is perhaps also the case for the individual who is tormented by the need for assurance of his own salvation.

At the outset it should simply be stated that the Spirit's witness cannot be proven in and of itself. Neither does it prove the Bible or Christianity to be true. Rather, the process works in the opposite direction. Apologetics proves Christianity to be true; the Holy Spirit, in turn, confesses that the individual believer is a Christian.

But the statement that the testimony of the Holy Spirit cannot be proven as a phenomenon by itself does not render it valueless, even in discussions concerning apologetics. Initially, this testimony is not proven by reason or sense experience, for instance, but neither can it be disconfirmed by them (or by other methods). Further, in his treatment of whether this witness is objective or subjective, Ramm interestingly argues that it is both. The subjective side is seen in the private, inward aspects of this testimony. Besides being incapable of proof, it cannot be shared or communicated with an unbeliever in any experiential way (I Cor. 2:14). In other words, while it can be defined, the witness cannot be explained so that the non-Christian can also experience it and remain a non-Christian.

But the testimony of the Holy Spirit also has objective aspects in that it is shared by all believers, hence it can be reported as an experienced phenomenon (even though it cannot be shared by others). Additionally, the content on which this witness is based, the facts of the gospel, are provable.<sup>15</sup> Another point might also be made here. If the Scripture can be attested by independent means, the words on this subject by Jesus, Paul and John receive an even more substantial evidential basis. So while the Holy Spirit's testimony is not objectively provable in and of itself, it is a reported experience of a great many believers and it is firmly anchored in a solid foundation.

But an additional assertion also needs to be made in this context. Even what otherwise might be considered as the subjective, individually-experienced side of this phenomenon can be said to have its special strengths. Why should an individual's private claims be questioned simply because they are private? In particular, is there any reason to disregard this experienced testimony? On the other hand, we have pointed out how it rests on strongly-attested evidential grounds, as well. Roderick Chisholm has shown how personal, experiential claims,<sup>16</sup> if unopposed by conflicting evidence, ought to be considered as trustworthy until there is reason not to do so.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Richard Swinburne introduces what he terms the "principle of credulity" whereby one's own experience is actually said to constitute evidence for that belief unless there is contrary data which disprove it.<sup>18</sup>

It must also be remembered that, since the Holy Spirit's witness cannot specifically be proven in any usual sense of that term, it is not being utilized here as an apologetic for Scripture or for Christianity. So the skeptic ought not conclude that this is presented as an argument for the truthfulness of the Christian faith. Rather, as carefully pointed out above, it is an individual indication from God to the believer that he has, indeed, experienced regeneration. So while the testimony of the Holy Spirit is not objectively verifiable, it still functions in its proper realm and therefore serves the individual in his quest for the certainty of his own belief. It is thus valuable in solving doubts of this nature. Again, why ought the Christian not be able to utilize his experience in this way, especially when it rests on a firm foundation?

There is a final thought worth adding at this point. Since Christians have good reasons on which to base their faith, why should it be surprising that, just as Scripture attests, they are personally confronted by the testimony of the Holy Spirit in their own lives? Or stated more succinctly, should not the discovery that there is such a witness be considered to be normal in light of the evidenced data which states just this?

#### D. Objections

This is a topic concerning which numerous questions or objections are possible, even from believers. We will attempt to answer a few prominent queries in this section.

Many believers would probably ask why they do not feel such a testimony at all? Here it must be remembered that if one is examining oneself for a feeling, it is perhaps no wonder that such is apparently unnoticed, for the witness is not an emotion at all, although it certainly can affect the emotions. In other words, while it can (and does) frequently affect the emotions, one ought not look for the witness in one's emotions.

Additionally, there is also an important sense in which there can be many hindrances to such a realization. The witness of the New Testament is that the Holy Spirit can be quenched or grieved (Eph. 4:30; I Thes. 5:19). For example, sin can certainly keep one from recognizing God's presence. But so can the simple denial that the New Testament teaching on the testimony of the Spirit is really true. Thus, if one denies the biblical record of the witness, it should not be surprising if one does not appear to experience it.

In fact, in a sort of vicious circle, doubt regarding one's faith can also be at least partially responsible for the lack of recognition of the nature of the Spirit's witness. In this case, the doubt itself can help to cause a

believer to be skeptical in regard to this subject of the Spirit's testimony because it is not objectively provable. So the very skepticism can militate against one's recognition of it.

In fact, this is what happened in my own case. For years I questioned the nature of this witness because it could not be proven. Hence, I simply tended to ignore the subject. But in this state I effectively cut off my recognition of it because of my subtle denial of its rightful place in my life. As a result, I did not properly identify what I now believe actually was, all during that time, the Holy Spirit's witness.

In sum, it is very difficult to assert in general terms what may be the issue in any one particular case, but there are, in fact, many possible reasons for a believer not being able to identify what might actually be this testimony. Perhaps most frequently, sin, the denial of the witness (subtle or otherwise) or a lack of recognition of its nature are the chief obstacles. As Ramm asserts:

**The remedy consists in the restoration of spiritual vision and sight, of the opening of ears and eyes resulting in an intuition of the truth of God.<sup>19</sup>**

But, at any rate, it is invalid to allow such questioning to keep a believer from recognizing that Scripture does, in fact, mean something quite specific by its teaching on this subject. In other words, one's inability to recognize the nature of the witness in no way denies the reality of it, while apologetics does prove the basis from which it is identified.

Another serious query concerns whether theological "liberals," adherents to non-Christian religions or cultists might not claim a similar witness to their own salvation. Might they not also say that they, too, are totally convinced of their own relationship to God? Here it is important to remember several points.

Initially, believers need not necessarily judge who belongs under each label. But beyond this, Ramm argues that these other groups basically do not have any specific doctrine of the witness. Pointed discussions address this claim.<sup>20</sup>

So the issue, then, is not whether someone claims to have assurance concerning their faith. This, no doubt, might be fairly frequently reported. Rather, the question is whether they specifically have the direct, inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. There are some similarities between assurance and this witness but they are not synonymous. The primary issue here, to repeat, is whether non-Christians have the conviction supplied by a direct act of God in us. Presumably, various kinds of assurance are easier to account for in other ways, but such do not necessarily exhibit the same characteristics outlined above.

Lastly, however, this question also basically involves an important apologetic issue: the truthfulness of the belief systems which are being discussed. In other words, since such claims to assurance (and even the witness of the Holy Spirit) are not evidential arguments in and of themselves, we also need to investigate the philosophies from which they emerge. And we have already said that apologetics establishes Christian theism while the witness of the Holy Spirit persuades the believer concerning his personal participation in Christian salvation.<sup>21</sup> So the point here is that more than just a claim is required; Christian claims concerning the Spirit's testimony are founded on a factual basis. However, if Ramm is correct in his assessment, there may not be many challenges to this specific Christian teaching anyway.

But some believers may assert that this doctrine is too emotional, prompting types of sensationalism or even that it is a witness which is independent of Scripture. And again, several responses should be made. To repeat our earlier assertion, the witness of the Holy Spirit is not an emotion at all. And while it can affect the emotions, this is no indictment against it, for so do many other Christian teachings which are not thereby labeled as dangerous.

Additionally, we have made it clear that this testimony is not independent of the Word of God. In fact it is quite the opposite in that it is both taught in Scripture and convicts the believer concerning the nature of the Bible. Also, such should not encourage believers who claim special, independent teachings from this witness, for we have already asserted that its primary function is to convict Christians of their own inclusion in the body of Christ, not to impart private interpretations.

Lastly, this objection misses the mark in that it ultimately does not matter whether someone thinks this teaching might be misused. The primary issue concerns whether it is taught in Scripture. In fact, a strange inversion of this question may now be seen. While the objection asserts that perhaps Scripture is being sidestepped, the query itself appears to overlook the biblical teaching on this subject.

Now perhaps some will question if the argument here is circular. If the witness proves the Scripture and the latter confirms the witness, we have a problem. And here it must again be said that the testimony of the Holy Spirit does not prove the Scripture; in fact, it is not a proof at all. While it can convict a believer that the Bible is the Word of God, this is just what it is and no more: a conviction. It does not actually constitute an argument for why Scripture should be believed. So there is no circularity here for there is no proof involved at

all.

Lastly, it may be asked if the witness can be explained psychologically. Could it be no more than one's personal endorsement on one's own beliefs, upbringing and culture? Initially, it must be remembered that the witness of the Spirit is more than being convinced that one's beliefs are true. Many Christians affirm that this testimony is much deeper and stronger. They point out that one's assurance often fluctuates but that the witness is, in a sense, a part of oneself; it is as if it were woven into the fabric of one's very being. It is what remains when normal assurance is assaulted to the point of despair. It is the deepest conviction possible with regard to one's salvation because it proceeds from God Himself to the believer.

In my own case, it was particularly when doubt assailed me the strongest that I often noticed this witness. As related above, it remained firm in those moments when I most feared I was going to lose my faith. Neither was it just a spark of light at those times: it burst forth with a conviction which I did not understand. The incident related earlier where my mother asked me if I would give up Jesus Christ right then was perhaps the time when this certainty was the clearest. I had passed it off as indefinable but I then realized that it really was the Holy Spirit's testimony.

An apt illustration here might be an anchor firmly embedded in rock, holding a ship in place. As the boat drifts the slack in the chain is taken up. But, if the anchor is firmly entrenched, the ship reaches a point where it can drift no further. And while it may float within the range of the chain's length, it cannot break free. To me, I witnessed my chain being pulled away on many occasions, only to find that I could not deny Christ or give Him up for another.

I am not arguing here either for or against the doctrine of eternal security; only that the personal affect on me was to confirm the true nature of my faith when I wondered if I was really a believer or if I could hold on to that salvation. I also realized that it was not my conviction or my strength that made this so.

But besides the indication that the witness of the Spirit is essentially different from (and deeper than) psychological certitude, it is simply the case that psychology cannot explain the objective evidences upon which the testimony of the Holy Spirit is based. This witness is essentially soteriological in nature and the basis for such, the gospel facts, is demonstrable. In other words, the primary function of the witness is to convict one of his personal salvation. That salvation is itself based on the gospel data, which can be historically verified and thus remains untouched by psychological inquiry. And as already said, since this basis is firm, I should not be surprised if I do, indeed, experience the testimony of the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised.

In sum, the believer is justified in making the assertion that the Holy Spirit testifies to him that he is, indeed, God's child. While this claim is not a proof, neither is it disproved by means such as sense experience or reason. However, it is based on a demonstrable foundation. So the experience of this witness ought not surprise the believer, inasmuch as it is just what Scripture attests. Thus, the discovery that this testimony is present in the Christian's life should be counted as normal in light of the objectively evidenced data which proclaims just this.

#### E. Conclusion

Too many Christian apologists and even theologians have virtually ignored the place of the testimony of the Holy Spirit, perhaps because of the difficulties involved both in defining it and identifying its domain. But such ought not be the case. Although this is a difficult subject,<sup>22</sup> its contribution, especially on the issue of doubt, is indispensable.

So here we have one more reason to point out that the answer to doubt is quite often not to introduce more evidence. We have seen in earlier chapters that most uncertainty is simply not factual in nature and needs to be handled differently. The work of the Holy Spirit now stands alongside the other methods both to the extent that He is the Author of the biblical texts that explain the remedies and by His direct testimony to believers that they truly are saved.

#### Endnotes Chapter VIII

<sup>1</sup>This is not a veiled reference to the doctrine of eternal security. I am simply describing my perception of my own experience.

<sup>2</sup>C. S. Lewis, *Miracles: A Preliminary Study* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), Chapter 9.

<sup>3</sup>For a brief discussion of the importance of person-relatedness to the presenting of arguments, see George Mavrodes, editor, *The Rationality of Belief in God* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), p. 50.

4For discussions of various positions, see William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1852, 1967), pp. 118-119; Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), pp. 184-185.

5For much of the content of this chapter I am indebted to the excellent study by Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959).

6Ibid., p. 54; cf. pp. 36, 52, 84, 86, 116.

7Ibid., p. 84.

8William Lane Craig, *Apologetics: An Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), pp. 18-19.

9Ramm, pp. 74, 76, 82.

10One possible exception is I Jn. 2:20, 26-27 which may speak of a broader area of certainty. Craig thinks that this passage concerns a believer's conviction regarding the "basic truths" of Christianity. Yet Craig still agrees that the Spirit's testimony is not the imparting of doctrine (pp. 18-19). On this last point, see Ramm, pp. 93-94. Although Raymond Brown believes that this passage does refer to the Holy Spirit, he sets forth a case for those expositors who think that the reference is to the anointing of the Word of God. See Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John, The Anchor Bible* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1982), vol. 30, pp. 345-347. However, while John does not specify his remarks in this difficult passage, he does say that assurance of one's salvation is included as at least part of the believer's knowledge (I Jn. 3:24; 4:13; cf. 5:13). Further, John would hardly deny the need for teachers in I Jn. 2:20, 26-27, since he was obviously one himself and this book itself exhibits the need for such.

11Cunningham asserts that the prominent view among the Reformers was that the Holy Spirit's testimony is a witness to Scripture, yet notes that such was strictly to avoid any claim to either independent special revelation or to the testimony of the church (p. 118). Ramm agrees, noting that the Reformers' interpretation sought to avoid both personal experience and reliance on the church (p. 102; cf. pp. 98-105).

12For an enlightening discussion of this topic, see Ramm, pp. 99-105; cf. also pp. 60-61, 68, 94.

13Ibid., p. 51.

14Ibid., p. 113; cf. p. 82.

15See Ibid., pp. 52, 75-76, 82, 117.

16We have argued that while the witness of the Holy Spirit is not a feeling, reason or sense experience itself, it does impinge on all three, for it affects the entire person.

17See Roderick Chisholm, *Theory of Knowledge*, second edition (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977), pp. 26-33. Ramm agrees at this point (p. 76).

18Richard Swinburne, "The Evidential Value of Religious Experience," in *The Sciences and Theology in the Twentieth Century*, edited by A. R. Peacocke (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 182-196.

19Ramm, p. 84.

20Ramm, p. 49, 106-107 and Chapter V.

21This comment is not meant as an attempt to solve the issue by an imperialistic edict. Rather, I am referring to the strength of the arguments for the nature of Christianity, as partially suggested in Chapter III, even though some relevant data were only outlined there. Once again, this book does not even attempt to set forth a complete apologetic program.

22It is certainly not being assumed that what is said in this chapter is the last word on this subject. Everything here ought to be judged by the rule of biblical data.

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## **Chapter IX**

### **Heaven: A New Perspective on Life**

In one sense, this could be viewed as the single most important chapter in this volume. Personally, I think that the New Testament perspective on heaven and its relationship to a believer's life is the most revolutionary idea (next to salvation) ever penned. And the key word here could well be just that: perspective. God invites us to view life and death from His vantage point. This applies to and can revolutionize every-day aspects of one's life as well, such as one's worries and cares, ethics and involvement with one's fellow man, possessions, wealth and even pain and death. The New Testament encourages believers to view each of these, indeed, one's entire existence, from what we will term a "top-down" perspective: God and His Kingdom first, followed by our involvement with others in this life. In fact, it will be our chief thesis that being sure of heaven and operating from its vantage point can free us to enjoy our life more while still being involved with what God has called us to do.

In this chapter we will attempt to briefly view numerous New Testament passages which develop this idea in detail, followed by a consideration of certain questions concerning this topic. Our overall goal will be to stress the New Testament imperative to apply this perspective in one's own life. The affect of this teaching on doubt will hopefully be made evident as we develop this theme.

#### A. Matthew 6:19-34: Worry

Few things dominate our modern lifestyle as much as anxiety about any number of ongoing concerns, both daily and longer range worries. And while this is Jesus' best-known teaching on the subject, I think it is frequently misunderstood. Too often, it is assumed that Jesus started that subject at verse 25 and that His chief purpose was to tell His followers not to worry because God will care for them, even as He cares for the birds, lilies and grass (6:26-32). Besides, worry cannot change a thing, including adding a year to our life or an inch to our height (6:27). So why do it?

While each of these statements is surely correct and true to Jesus' instruction as far as it goes, the overall indictment against worrying, as just presented, does not have the same "bite" as Jesus intended. The reason for this is that such encouragement is incomplete unless it is viewed in the more complete context of His words. Verse 25 begins with "Therefore," indicating that Jesus is basing what comes after on a previous point; verses 19-24 contain this content.

For Jesus, the believer should lay up treasures in heaven rather than on earth, for the former are indestructible, while the latter can decay or be stolen (6:19-20). Besides, as I Pet. 1:3-4 reminds us in language quite reminiscent of Jesus' words, our heavenly inheritance lasts forever, while earthly goods obviously do not. And our heart will be where our treasure is located (6:21). So if we live for earthly treasure we cannot, at the same time, serve God (6:24).

At this point, I think, Jesus' admonition against worry takes on an entirely new perspective. It is true that God sustains all of His nonhuman creation without their worrying about it and that anxiety cannot change things, but these are additional reasons. The heart of the issue is that, if our treasures are truly in heaven, then we will simply not be as concerned about temporal things. It is true that Christians may have possessions, bills and jobs, for examples, but these are, in and of themselves, of no ultimate value except for any spiritual results.<sup>1</sup> As far as a believer's loved ones are concerned, although this may be harsh, such relationships are only eternal to the extent to which the loved ones have also trusted the Lord.

So again, Jesus' point appears to be that if our heart and our treasures are in heaven, then we have no need to worry, for these cannot be disturbed. But conversely, if we are still anxious about earthly problems, we betray ourselves because then we are revealing that our hearts are at least partially elsewhere.

Similarly, when Jesus concludes His discourse by asserting that we need to seek God's Kingdom and His righteousness, first of all, thereby still being provided with our needs, He is once again maintaining this top-down perspective. Thus, the order of His comments is heaven (6:19-24), earth (6:25-32) and the proper perspective between them (6:33-34).

Therefore, to be anxious about our earthly needs is to betray our first love. And while believers are, of course, only human, thus revealing typical frailties from time to time, we need to practice Jesus' eternal perspective until it is our will, too.

#### B. Luke 10:25-37: Ethical Commitment

In this passage of Scripture (cf. Mk. 12:28-31; Matt. 22:34-40) Jesus is asked by a lawyer what was required

for one to gain eternal life. In the ensuing conversation, Jesus agreed that the first and greatest commandment was to love God with all of one's being, followed, second, by the command to love one's neighbor as oneself. When the lawyer responded by asking who one's neighbor was, Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan. Here, a traveling man (presumably a Jew) was attacked by thieves and, as he lay wounded, a priest and a Levite walked by and ignored him. But a Samaritan, normally having no relation with Jews because of religious differences, stopped, wrapped the man's wounds, took him to an inn and paid for his expenses himself. Then Jesus told the lawyer to go and do likewise.

So Jesus taught that there was an order in one's love commitment: first to God and then to man. And one ought to be radically committed to both, since the proper way to love God is with one's entire being and the proper way to love man is by self-sacrificial involvement.

It is very popular today in some critical circles to teach that what Jesus really meant was that by being committed to others, we are actually fulfilling our love of God. In other words, instead of the top-down perspective, we are told that Jesus actually instituted a bottom-up arrangement instead. Thus, salvation is not an act of faith in Jesus, per se, but active involvement with others, which actually is faith in God.

Such an assessment is apparently motivated by desires to generalize Jesus' teachings, often to make them compatible with those of other religious traditions. But this procedure actually has several pitfalls. Besides essentially teaching a type of works-righteousness, it very noticeably ignores Jesus' many injunctions concerning the need for personal faith in Him. Such teachings are found throughout the gospel tradition. Jesus did not say that commitment to one's fellow man constituted an implicit salvific trust in Him, but He did teach regularly that one must have faith in both His Person and His message.<sup>2</sup> Such interpretations are also reductionistic and tend to minimize Jesus' other unique claims about Himself, as well.

So we must be prepared to do justice to Jesus' teaching that loving God above all else is paramount and is a separate act. It is even the basis for loving man. In fact, in a sense, true love of God should issue forth into self-sacrificial love to others since God created man in His image and because Jesus Himself both practiced and commanded the same procedure. Once again, this is the top-down perspective which we have already identified. Whereas before this vantage point was applied to the problem of worry and anxiety, now the second subject is ethical involvement. In other words, while the issue of first importance remains the same (total trust in God), the second tier has varied according to the subject being discussed. But the perspective always remains the same: issues in this life are to be judged by God's heavenly vantage point.

#### C. II Cor. 4:7-5:10: Persecution, Pain and Death

It is frequently said that death is the cause of the strongest fears known to man. Yet, in this passage Paul handles the subject head-on and challenges believers to think about it in light of the top-down perspective.

At first Paul speaks of the persecution which he has undergone for the cause of Christ (4:7-16). Then he appears to shift the subject ever so slightly to the issue of pain and suffering in general (4:17-18). Lastly, his interest is the subject of death (5:1-10). To many, this might appear to be nothing short of a gruesome topic of conversation, but, through Paul, the Holy Spirit has inspired a beautiful meditation on an otherwise difficult subject.

At the outset, Paul points out that the persecution which he and others are undergoing will ultimately lead to their glorification (4:14). This is quite reminiscent of the same theme in I Pet. 1:3-9 (see next section) where early Christian persecution is also the topic. And in both places, the view is away from present circumstances to eternal life with the Lord.

Paul then speaks of afflictions which affect believers. His main point here is that such pain is only temporal and, as such, believers ought to be concentrating on eternal life instead (4:17-18).<sup>3</sup> Again, this is the top-down perspective and I think here it is shown to be a brilliant psychological tool as well as a time-space truth. Personally, I could think of no better topic of conversation with a Christian who is suffering pain.

Now some will immediately question this, pointing out that meditation on eternal life is all well and good, but that it is escapist if it is thought that such will lessen pain. And while this is a thoughtful response, I think that it is wide of the mark, and for at least two reasons. Initially, it needs to be strongly asserted that heaven is a fact, not an escape route.<sup>4</sup> Such is a crucial distinction, for if it is truly the place for redeemed believers, it cannot be just a fantasy to confuse suffering minds.

But also, I think there is a sense in which such meditation does, in fact, lessen pain. Just like those times when we think that we may really be sick, we frequently experience just such a lift after going to the doctor when we find out, perhaps, that it is a common form of the flu which has been "going around." On such occasions, one usually feels instantly better upon receiving the news. In a similar way, meditation on heaven can have the effect of causing one to realize that everything will ultimately be fine. After all even if a believer was to die, he should know that such is not the end; the illness is not terminal. Such is Paul's advice to the

suffering Christian (4:17-18). Eternal life can be both real and satisfying for those who suffer.

Then Paul turns from the subject of suffering to that of actual death (5:1-10). Here he assures the believer that, even if we were to experience bodily death, we would not face the prospect of extinction but would still be alive forever. Paul longed for the new body which God would give him (5:2, 4).<sup>5</sup> The reason why death is even preferable is that while we are in our physical bodies we do not see Christ and are separated from Him (5:6-7). But, knowing that death meant union with Christ, Paul preferred to be with Him (5:8). This is precisely why Paul asserts that He would personally favor dying and being with Christ; to die is actually to gain (Phil. 1:21-23).

So once again we perceive the top-down perspective with the upper level remaining virtually the same. In Matthew the chief goal for believers is to seek the Kingdom of God, where our indestructible treasures are located (6:19-21, 33). In Luke, after a question concerning eternal life, the highest priority is given to loving God with one's entire being (10:25-28). And here in Paul's teachings, believers should appropriate the reality of eternal life with Christ (II Cor. 5:1-8). In each passage, the goal for the believer is one's eternal life with God.

From this perspective, life takes on new meaning on its "down" level. For Jesus, worry and anxiety can be controlled by having one's treasures elsewhere (Matt. 6:25-32). To the lawyer, Jesus asserted that the love of others (even enemies) flows naturally from the love of God (Lk. 10:27, 29-37). Paul explains that considering eternal life with Christ should be of comfort in handling the subjects of persecution, pain and death (II Cor. 4:16-5:10).

And really, no message should be dearer to the hearts of believers. What is innately more precious than life and true fellowship with other persons? If this is so, what could be more desirable than an eternity spent, among other things, with loved ones and with Jesus Christ, the Creator and Sustainer of the Universe? I personally cannot think of a more desirable state in which to spend eternity.<sup>6</sup>

#### D. Other Passages

Far more than just these three New Testament passages teach what we have called the top-down perspective. It has also been applied to other areas of life, as well. It may even be the most frequently utilized message in the New Testament for motivating the Christian to action, whether in helping our fellow human beings or in solving a bothersome problem.

The ultimate contrast here is made by Jesus in Mk. 8:36-37 (cf. Matt. 16:26; Lk. 9:25) where He asserts that the sum total of the entire world is not worth one's soul; nothing should be taken in exchange for it. Accordingly, we are not to fear those who kill our bodies, for that is all they can do. That which can corrupt our soul and send us to Hell is far worse (Lk. 12:4-5; Matt. 10:28). In these passages, the comparison is between eternal life and what earth has to offer--whether temporary wealth or death. But even in the latter case, the believer has nothing to fear because all that can be lost is one's present life, which, once again, places us in the presence of Jesus Himself (II Cor. 5:8). What an important teaching that can even place death in perspective and bid us not to fear!

Perhaps a good general statement is the one located in Col. 3:3, where Paul simply states, "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Here the contrast is straightforward and the order of importance should be clear.

More specifically, the subject of physical desires is compared to heaven in Phil. 3:18-21. Here Paul begins his contrast by viewing those whose chief desire lies in the pursuit of earthly things such as food or in the desire for their own glory. He sorrowfully notes that they are enemies of Christ (3:18-19). But a sharp difference is found between these and believers who already have heavenly citizenship and who will later receive bodies like the glorious resurrection body of Jesus Himself (3:20-21).

The idea that Christians are presently citizens of heaven is a beautiful truth and is reminiscent of Jesus' teachings that believers currently have eternal life.<sup>7</sup> Such a reality that is true from the time of salvation provides even more impetus to lay up treasures there and to think "top-down," because we already are possessors of heaven!

The subject of wealth is another area for the application of thinking from God's perspective. Paul directs comments to those who are rich in I Tim. 6:17-19, warning these individuals not to be proud or trust in their possessions. Rather, they ought to trust in God Who is responsible for the wealth in the first place. Further, they are to engage in good works, being willing to utilize their wealth for distribution to those in need (6:17-18). Such activities build one's heavenly treasures, apparently affecting the quality of one's eternal life (6:19).

This passage in I Tim. is quite reminiscent of Jesus' words in Matt. 6:19-24 concerning the building of one's heavenly "bank account." In fact, Paul seems to say that sharing one's wealth appears to be a specific means

to that end.

Another text which contains some similar encouragement, only to very poor believers, is II Cor. 8:1-5. Here the Macedonian Christians, who lived in poverty themselves, willingly contributed to the needs of other believers (8:2-4). But even more interesting in terms of our thesis, the Macedonians presented themselves to the Lord first, and then to the needs of others (8:5). Although we are now speaking of poor believers instead of wealthy ones, the order is the same (see especially Lk. 10:25-37): God first and then others.

One sobering aspect of these exhortations concerns the believer's duty to share with others whenever someone is in need. Many times similar admonitions are made to average members of the Christian community to provide for those in need. Further, the New Testament as a whole contains many exhortations to sacrifice, even if one is not wealthy, for the sake of God's Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

And the issue of perspective should still be obvious here: God and His Kingdom is to be placed first above our wealth and possessions. Besides, what better investment could one possibly make than to invest in eternity? As Jesus has already told us, if it is given to the Lord, our wealth cannot later be stolen, rot or be devalued. It is safe, invested for eternity in the "banks" of heaven.<sup>9</sup>

The reality of persecution is the topic for a number of other perspectival comments. I Pet. 1:3-9 (mentioned just briefly above) is the most detailed of these texts. With the resurrection of Jesus as the foundation, we are informed that this historical event is the basis for the believer's eternal life. And the Christian's existence in heaven, like that of Jesus, is also incorruptible and permanent (3:3, 4).

As a result, Peter urges believers to view the present persecution as a temporary problem through which they would persevere and emerge with a much stronger faith (1:6-9). Strangely enough, Peter tells them to rejoice in their salvation and eternal life right while they are suffering (1:6). This is the chief top-down element in this passage. Just as Paul tells believers to meditate on eternal life during suffering, here Peter explains that true believers can rejoice even in the middle of persecution, all because of having a proper perspective on God and immortality. For the worst that can happen (in human terms) is to die, yet this ushers us into Christ's presence. For while we do not see Him now, full salvation follows (1:8-9) when we will be with Him forever (cf. I Pet. 5:10).

In two other portions, believers were thanked for assisting persecuted brethren. In Phil 4:14-17 Paul compliments the Philippian believers for being concerned with and taking care of his needs. His point was not that he wished to receive gifts but he wanted these Christians to add to their heavenly accounts (4:17). The author of Hebrews also praises his readers for joyfully identifying with the needs of believers who were in prison, reminding them of their rewards in heaven which are both more enduring and far better than earthly possessions (Heb. 10:34-35). In both contexts, the reality of heaven was held as the primary reward to be sought above earthly treasures. In fact, the latter were to be utilized to facilitate the former.

A fascinating item in the top-down perspective occurs in Hebrews 11. Here the subject is that of the believer as a pilgrim whose true home is not on earth but in heaven (cf. Phil. 3:21). For example, Abraham is said to have been looking for a city which was nowhere to be found on the earth, whose Builder was God (11:8-10). We read that Moses preferred to remain with his people rather than enjoy all the riches of Egypt because he was seeking God (11:24-27). In fact, numerous saints are described as being "foreigners and strangers on earth" (11:13). Their goal was to find a land other than their own; they were seeking a heavenly country (11:14-16). Yet, they did not receive these promises in their own lifetimes, but such is to be fulfilled in the future (11:13, 39-40).

This idea of the traveler on a journey is a truly exciting one because of the thought conveyed in the text that the goal was heaven (11:16). This is a rather revolutionary aspect of the top-down perspective in that it portrays the believer's time on earth as a continual, lifelong pilgrimage toward heaven. And in a sense, believers are never fulfilled until they arrive there. But it should be carefully noticed that these travelers were not inactive; each was committed to the Lord and to his individual ministry.

The idea of the believer's journey to heaven has also appeared as a major idea in classical Christian literature such as *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Another such example is Jonathan Edwards's "The Christian Pilgrim," which is an exhortation to the single-minded pursuit of eternal life. As Edwards explains:

**Therefore it becomes us to spend this life only as a journey towards heaven, as it becomes us to make the seeking of our highest end and proper good, the whole work of our lives; to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on any thing else, but that which is our proper end, and true happiness?<sup>10</sup>**

Lastly, we briefly mentioned earlier that Phil. 1:21-23 is a classic passage regarding death, where Paul asserts that, given his preference, he would choose dying and being with Christ, which is far better than living here. That kind of conviction is significant, especially because Paul had both seen the Lord (I Cor. 9:1) and had a



vision of heaven, perhaps while being left for dead outside Lystra (II Cor. 12:1-5). At any rate, he very much wished to be with Jesus (II Cor. 5:8). From Paul's top-down vantage point, heaven is not only to be preferred above earthly life, but his ministry unto the Lord was done in light of heaven (Phil. 1:24-26).

Even this brief survey indicates that there are many New Testament passages which argue that one's earthly actions ought to be done from the perspective of the Kingdom of God. This twofold stress on the believer loving God and spending eternity in a relationship with Him should be a tremendous catalyst in obeying Jesus' second command of radically loving one's fellow human being.

#### E. Questions

Some might pose several queries or even objections to the thesis presented here. For example, one may wonder about the Christian who asserts that, now that he is saved, he does not need to be involved in "earthly" things like social concerns. Or while it may manifest a different attitude, a similar result proceeds from those who are "so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good." While these could represent divergent positions, both advocate non-involvement in social concerns (or at least that such is not very crucial).

It should be fairly obvious that such theses are quite opposed to several of the texts discussed above. In Lk. 10:25-37, Jesus stated in the strongest terms that involvement with other persons in need is the second highest command. While it is true that such is not the very highest, it was given more importance than all the others after it. I Tim. 6:17-19 commands wealthy Christians to be generous in contributing to the needs of others. In Heb. 11, believing pilgrims are not only seeking heaven, but they were honored for their involvement with the needs of others in the world. Additionally, Christians are encouraged to do likewise (Heb. 12:1).

But not only are Christians told to practice such involvement with others, but we are also given examples of those who got involved in this way. In II Cor. 8:1-5, poor believers assisted others in spite of their own poverty. In both Phil. 4:14-18 and Heb. 10:34-35, believers contributed to other persecuted Christians.

Additionally, the Christian message might even be said to naturally lead to involvement with others as an integral extension of the gospel. Thus, one is saved by trusting commitment to Jesus Christ but, being the second commandment, believers are then to turn to assisting others. This is true for more than one reason. Jesus showed His love by dying for us (Jn. 15:13) and He called on believers to show self-sacrificial love to others (Jn. 15:12). It may be helpful here to be reminded that the parable of the good Samaritan in Lk. 10:30-37 is an answer to the question of the identity of the neighbor whom we should love (Lk. 10:27, 29). In fact, helping others is said to essentially be done to Christ Himself (Matt. 25:40; cf. 10:42). Conversely, when we do not show love to others, we fail to show it to Christ, as well (Matt. 25:45). Besides, if fellowship with God in heaven is the greatest good, love requires us to encourage others to exercise their choice or at least to be informed in this matter.

Lastly, the fact that some Christians do not practice the love of man called for by Jesus is not an indictment against Christianity as a whole. It simply shows that some do not obey Jesus, not that His teaching is thereby mistaken. In the case of those whose views keep them from being of any earthly good, it ought to be clear that this is not a biblical position; it is rather an example of the very self-centeredness and smugness against which Jesus constantly warned.

Another issue concerns those who question whether what is being taught here is any sort of salvation by works. So it is crucial to point out that a discussion of salvation per se has not been the point of this chapter at all. Basically, we have only spoken to believers who have already trusted in the Person of Jesus Christ and His death to pay for their sins, believing that He was later buried and raised from the dead (as outlined in Chapter IV). When we discussed love for one's fellow man, we were already referring to those who had previously become Christians. I want to be very clear about this. The first level of commitment is to God; that to our fellow man comes after salvation has already been attained.

A very important tendency in contemporary theology questions the last point and asserts that all Jesus meant was that by loving others one essentially does fulfill the first command to love God. In other words, this position holds that Jesus did not require any personal salvation in the sense of commitment to Himself. Rather, to be committed to one's fellow man is to be committed to Jesus Christ. Thus, there is no specific content which one must personally believe in order to obtain salvation. To say it the way it is frequently verbalized, we encounter God in our neighbor.

This is a serious challenge to the orthodox understanding that salvation is a personal relationship between the individual and God, achieved through the extension of the grace of God to the one who then trusts in Him. Such a concept is interpreted as being achieved through an encounter with one's neighbor. But there are at least two major problems with such conjecture.

Initially, this view does injustice to Jesus' repeated teachings that one's personal trust in Him is indispensable for salvation.<sup>11</sup> But additionally, it is also clear that His work (and His death, in particular) is crucial to one's salvation, and as far more than just as a moral example.<sup>12</sup> Thus, beyond simply a commitment to others, as important as that is, the nature of the gospel is chiefly the content of who Jesus is and what he has done. But in addition, salvation consists of personal trust in (and commitment to) the Jesus of that gospel content.<sup>13</sup> So, if one wishes to be consistent with the teachings of Jesus and the New Testament, one's trust in the Jesus of the gospel is required for personal salvation.

Now, of course, one may hold that Jesus was wrong or that He should not be interpreted literally. But such a position is opposed by the evidence, for instance, of His resurrection. For since Jesus was raised from the dead, this provides strong reasons to hold that His teachings on salvation are true, especially since it was His central message.<sup>14</sup> To restate this point, since Jesus was raised from the dead, His teachings are accurate. And if any of His teachings is true, those on the Kingdom of God and how to get there certainly would be since this is His chief message, as recognized by virtually all theologians who deal with this topic.<sup>15</sup>

Lastly, a serious query concerns the reason why believers lay up treasures in heaven, for one might wish to do so for the sake of rewards themselves or to display one's own glory. Recognizing that such selfish goals are certainly not the point in the New Testament passages such as those discussed above,<sup>16</sup> we should perhaps restate the nature of the biblical hope. We have said that the highest goal for man is to fellowship with Jesus and our loved ones forever. The loftiest statement of any human, ecclesiastical creed may be the one contained in the Westminster Confession which states that the "chief end of man is to worship God and enjoy Him forever" (Article).

For this reason, Christians should constantly examine their motives and determine to keep the top-down perspective in check so that both one's desires and one's practices are biblical. A constant balancing of priorities is crucial here.

Peter Kreeft proposes an interesting experiment which will perhaps be useful in ascertaining the true nature of one's motives with regard to our longing for eternal life.<sup>17</sup> If Jesus said to you, "Make your own heaven--you may have whatever you wish, including . . . wealth, . . . power, . . . pleasure, . . . peace, . . . or great glory and honor from all of your friends." While you are thinking about each of these, as well as other options, you then hear Jesus add, "However, there is only one condition--you will never see my face." What is your very first thought? Did you experience a sudden chill or did you feel crestfallen? Or were you secretly satisfied in spite of the condition?

If the former response was yours, this may be a fair indication that your desires may at least be heading in the right direction. If, on the other hand, the latter response was inwardly desirable, then I would suggest that something needs to be corrected, perhaps through repentance and the healing work of the Holy Spirit. Maybe meditations such as might emerge from Chap. VII on the Person of Jesus might be utilized in order to bring the delight of His presence and fellowship into our consciousness.

## F. Conclusion

It was stated at the outset that this could be the most important chapter in this volume. But its relationship to the subject of doubt may not be immediately known.

Earlier (Chapter V) it was said that perhaps the strongest impetus to affect one's volition and cause faith to grow is the nurturing of a heavenly vision. Thus, setting one's sights on this highest goal can cause one to make biblical decisions in light of it.

But this heavenly perspective can also have a tremendous affect on other sorts of doubt, as well. For example, assurance of the reality of eternal life could ultimately solve what is perhaps the chief question confronting those with factual doubts. In this case, the evidences for immortality, such as Jesus' resurrection, supply the factual basis, while practicing the top-down perspective then serves to apply the data to practical life situations such as those mentioned in the New Testament.<sup>18</sup> Thus, beyond the evidences themselves, this perspective specializes in the application of the facts. More particularly for factual doubters, continuing to center on the reality of heaven until it becomes a habit can serve to calm and perhaps even still the greatest uncertainty known to man. As Paul asserts in II Cor. 4:17-5:8, Christians can both know that they have eternal life (5:1-8) and meditate on its meaning for victory over life's concerns (4:17-18).

For those tending towards emotional doubts, the reality of eternal life with God in heaven could be the most comforting truth to calm raging fears. It will perhaps be remembered that the key in controlling this type of uncertainty is the constant practice of supplying truth instead of the untruths which one is believing (Phil. 4:6-9). But Christians could scarcely learn any deeper truth than that outlined in the New Testament. And with regard to the application to emotional doubts in particular, Jesus said it best in Matt. 6:19-34: the believer ought to lay up treasures in heaven, realizing that if his heart is truly there, he should be able to conquer life's anxieties. In this case, man's chief cause of worry (death) has been dealt with; if the worst that problems in this life, (such as emotional doubts) can do is affect the believer in earthly terms, he has nothing ultimate to

fear. And conversely, God has promised that over earthly needs will be met, as well (6:33).

Now it would be a mistake to assume that exhaustive knowledge of heaven is needed in order to fulfill these tasks. Neither is such being proclaimed here. As a matter of fact, we know comparatively little about the nature of eternal life. But the facts indicate that Jesus died and, by rising from the dead, revealed to us all that we need to know to conquer such doubts. In fact, not only does His resurrection insure the truthfulness of His teachings on this subject of central importance, as mentioned above, but when the disciples saw the risen Jesus, they actually saw walking, talking, eternal life.

Thus, the resurrection both confirms Jesus' teachings on the subject of eternal life, especially since it was His major message, and it is also an actual, direct example of that new life. As such, every bit of evidence for Jesus' resurrection is actually corroboration of the believers' life after death. We may not know very much above heaven, but the resurrected Jesus insured the truth of it and provided enough information to conduct our lives by His top-down perspective.

What a glorious truth has been provided for believers! Christianity is not based on a mere hope-so eternity. In the New Testament, Christian hope is based on the factual data; it is as sure as is the resurrection of Jesus (I Pet. 1:3-4). And beyond the mere facticity of this event, such a teaching also provides us with a heavenly perspective for the everyday doubts, problems and fears of life. These fears need not dominate a Christian's earthly existence.

### **Endnotes -- Chapter IX**

1. For example, Christians involved in a ministry of some sort (I mean in the broader sense, beyond the professional types alone) can certainly reap some eternal results.
2. There are at least two aspects to Jesus' demand for personal trust and commitment to Him. Jesus both required commitment to His own Person (see Matt. 10:37; 18:3,6; Mk. 10:29-30; Lk. 24:47; Jn. 1:12; 6:47) and the appropriation of the work which He performed in His death (Mk. 10:45; Matt. 26:28; Jn. 3:15-17).
3. The subject in 4:17-18, may in fact, still be that of persecution. But, except for rewards which accrue to believer's due specifically to such persecution, Paul's words would still apply to the issue of Christian suffering in general.
4. It must be remembered once again that this is not a book of apologetic evidences, as we pointed out in Chapter III above, although we did list some evidences for the resurrection there which are relevant at this point. For additional details and an argument from Jesus' resurrection to eternal life, see Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus: An Apologetic*, especially chapters IV-V and Appendix 3.
5. There is much discussion as to whether Paul is here speaking of the intermediate or the final, eternal state. But that he is addressing the issue of eternal life is not actually debated. See Robert Gundry, *Soma in Biblical Theology: With Emphasis on Pauline Anthropology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1987), pp. 149-154.
6. Again, see Kreeft's *Heaven: The Heart's Deepest Longing*.
7. This is most commonly a Johannine theme. See Jn. 3:36; 5:24; 6:47; I Jn. 5:13. Cf. Eph. 1:13-14; II Thess. 2:13-17.
8. See such passages as Matt. 19:27-30; Lk. 12:33; 14:33; Js. 2:15-17; I Jn. 3:17-18.
9. By these last statements it is not meant that Christians are to selfishly accumulate "heavenly wealth" as if for their own advantage. See section E below.
10. Ola Elizabeth Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards: Basic Writings* (New York: New American Library, 1966), p. 142.
11. For a few examples, see Matt. 10:37; 18:6; 19:28-29; Lk. 24:47; 1:12; 3:3-5, 36; 6:47. Compare I Cor. 15:1-2; I Pet. 1:21-23; I Jn. 5:13.
12. For instances, see Matt. 26:28; Mk. 10:45, Jn. 3:15-17. Compare I Cor. 15:3-4; Eph. 1:7; I Pet. 2:24.
13. Again, see Chapter IV for a discussion of the content of the gospel and its relation to one's faith.

14. Once more, to avoid confusion, this is not a volume of apologetics. An outline of some of the evidences for the resurrection is also included in Chapter III.

15. On the centrality of salvation in the teachings of Jesus, see particularly those texts where Jesus states the chief purpose of His coming, such as Mk. 2:17; 10:45; Lk. 19:10; Jn. 10:10. On the recognition of this point by contemporary theologians as a whole, see Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus*, Chapter IV-V.

16. In fact, Rev. 4:10-11 graphically portrays the 24 heavenly elders casting their crowns before God's throne so that He might receive the honor and glory.

17. This exercise is adapted from Kreeft's *Heaven*, p. 27.

18. Such a strategy would then be similar to that which was presented in Chap. III, where Christian evidences supplied the basis (even though such was not developed in this volume) for the practical application to the factual uncertainty.

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## **Chapter X**

### **Conclusion**

Christian doubt of several varieties is much more prevalent than many believers realize and it can be an extremely painful malady for those who suffer from its affects. In this manuscript we have attempted to cover a wide range of material on the subject. Even so, much more remains to be done.<sup>1</sup>

I have postulated that it is important for particular doubts to be identified as to the predominant variety which is present in order to best facilitate healing. So although doubts are frequently compound in nature, they can still be treated. The practice of biblical strategies is crucial to the conquering of Christian uncertainty and we have attempted to point out several of these in this text.

#### A. When a Warning is Required

As Os Guinness so clearly asserts in an excellent discussion, there too frequently come times in Christian's lives when it might appear obvious that a fellow believer, because of doubts, is in danger of denying some portion of his faith.<sup>2</sup> In such a case, in spite of all the evidences, or emotional supports, or admonitions to the will, a believer may continue down the path away from biblical teaching, refusing to avail himself of the needed solutions. And here is perhaps the clearest indication that such doubt ultimately comes down to a matter of the will: some persons just do not choose to react in a biblical manner.

Such a state of mind is very serious and it often requires a combination of traits by way of response. Sensitivity is crucial, especially the discernment needed to detect such a condition in another individual. Boldness may also be required, especially in cases where a strong response is needed due to the dire consequences at stake. Here even the meekest of believers may find himself in a situation where he is best positioned to respond to one in need. The possible dangers should outweigh the individual's desire not to get involved.

How might such a condition be recognized? Initially, it should be emphasized that there may be no clear-cut assurances that such a state has been reached. For instance, the individual in question may have exaggerated his reactions in order to get attention. Or the earmarks may simply have been missed or misinterpreted; maybe the person has kept most of the true conditions to himself.

At any rate, there are still some signs which, if they are observed in another, might indicate some concerns of this nature. Guinness notes one such factor as a constant complaining and grumbling against God, reminiscent of the attitude of ancient Israel. Another warning could come from the presence of questions about God, but with an attitude change which reveals that the doubts may actually have become unbelief. And in the end Guinness notes that the last stage may be signaled by the individual who denies everything but his basic belief in God. Here there is still an awareness and fear of God, but the emotions actually drive the person away instead of back towards Him.<sup>3</sup>

To these signs, a few additional ones might be added. Insensitivity to spiritual things is certainly a warning at least of a dulled spiritual awareness. The lack of Christian activity (or "fruit") is a scriptural indication of danger (Matt. 7:18-20; Heb. 6:7-8). Also, another pointer is the way in which God is spoken of by this person. Flippant remarks or callous language about Him can indicate problems as well.

Lastly, an important warning sign is illustrated by the Christian who regularly experiences a stultification of his will with specific regard to the state of his faith. Thus, given a situation where a decision must be made for or against continuing to follow Christ, the individual appears to be unable to choose. One young man who came to see me manifested just this problem. Having been involved in a sinful practice for a number of years, he had begun to drift away from his Christian convictions. In fact, in this case it was his lifestyle which was the primary cause of his growing preference for another philosophy; he was shifting his allegiance. It was necessary that he be confronted in clear terms in order to warn him of how his will had changed.

However, we must emphasize here that we are not called upon to make pronouncements concerning when an individual may have reached "the point of no return." This matter is up to God alone and ultimately known only to Him. We are, rather, to watch and judge ourselves first so that we do not fall (I Cor. 10-12; 11:31). We can then also provide genuine help (by the Lord's power) when it is needed and wherever possible, but not to act as the judge and jury.

But another caution also needs to be voiced here. It is certainly possible that the sensitive Christian reader who is not presently in danger of denying his faith will study this previous list of signs and fear that he is in a more serious state than he is, in actuality. This individual might well be reminded to apply the Misbelief Therapy spoken of earlier.<sup>4</sup> Or if the person is concerned about sin in his life, forgiveness may be sought from the God who has promised to forgive. In general, the Bible teaches that wherever true conviction remains, there is certainly hope and the possibility of forgiveness.

But what about those who are in danger at this point, as with those who actually do manifest some of these signs? What might believers do to help them? Guinness reminds the Christian that before any action is undertaken he should be sure that the problem has been prayerfully and correctly diagnosed. Such is too serious of a matter to take lightly. One must be sure that one's motives are clear, as well. There is no room for actions due to pride or resentment, for instance.<sup>5</sup>

Once these cautions have been observed, however, one does need to act in those cases where it is still plain that a fellow believer might be in danger of denying some portion of his faith. And after ascertaining if the person is at least willing to talk, it might be suggested, first, that there is an initial need to listen closely in order to correctly identify the type of doubt involved and how far it has progressed. Here one may choose to utilize some of the same data which we developed earlier for the identification of one's own uncertainty.<sup>6</sup> At any rate, the doubter should be apprised of the situation, including why he is expressing these doubts.

Second, the counselor should assist the doubter in working through the appropriate steps which apply to the particular type of uncertainty in question. Helping the doubter not only to understand the cause but also a cure for his problem could be very helpful in assisting him through this difficult time.

Another step in the possible healing process is to confront the doubter with both the peril involved in his indecision (or perhaps even in his actual decision against his Christian faith if such has already been made), along with God's promise of eternal life for those who correctly respond to His call. This is the point at which we have to be firm in our response to his condition. A possible approach involves a discussion of God's judgment, including a treatment of His future promises. But we must be careful not to pronounce any specific judgment on the individual himself since God is His judge and we do not know his final condition.<sup>7</sup> In other words, a general warning concerning God's judgment juxtaposed with a challenge regarding eternal life might be very helpful.

This emphasis on eternity is similar to our discussion in the last chapter about providing one's will with a vision for action. There we said that the best motivation for Christian behavior occurs when God's perspective influences us enough that His reasons for commitment become our reasons. And it was concluded that there is no greater impetus for faith and personal action than the prospect of eternal life in heaven with Jesus Christ, which is personally guaranteed by Him to be a creative, inspiring, learning experience which lasts forever. Such is the chief New Testament motivation for a believer's commitment.<sup>8</sup>

Lastly, the individual needs to be reminded that God can forgive our sins, including our doubts concerning Him. The hope of forgiveness might be just what the individual needs at this point in order to repent. Of course, true conviction and repentance is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is not even in the domain of human abilities. Nonetheless, we should stress the need for a true decision. Believers are called to counsel fellow believers in this regard (Gal. 6:1). In fact, few Christian activities are as rewarding as the prospect of helping an erring believer back to the Lord (Jn. 5:19-20).

So once we have prayerfully diagnosed a problem to the best of our ability, ascertaining if our motives are biblically correct, we need to confront the person at whatever level is needed. We have suggested that the counselor initially listen, identifying the type of doubt involved and approximately how far it has progressed. Then, working through the appropriate steps with them for that particular doubt could be vitally important in their recovery. Explaining both the seriousness of God's judgment and His promise of eternal life can supply the biblical impetus for action. Prompting the person to obey the Lord in repentance is a last step to restoration.

Of course, it should be recognized that regular follow-up will probably be needed. In fact, fellowship and constant progress in one's faith are especially important here to help insure a final victory. And since such restoration is ultimately due to God's prompting and activity, His guidance should be sought by such means as prayer, Scripture study and meditation, including both the counselor and the counselee. Doubt prevention techniques can be applied both to oneself and to another who is in need.<sup>9</sup> Remembering C. S. Lewis' admonition that believers are rarely argued away from Christianity in an abrupt fashion but more regularly "drift" away,<sup>10</sup> we need to be ever watching (I Cor. 10:12).

## B. The Christian's Hope

Few things are perceived by doubting individuals to be as blessed as is the prospect of being relieved of one's uncertainty, especially with regard to one's eternal destiny. And after everything has been said, it must still be acknowledged that doubt can even lead to positive results which otherwise might not occur. The correcting of one's thinking, the experience of more fruitful times of Bible study, prayer, witnessing and fellowship, the initiation of Christian meditation, a deeper pursuit of scholarly study and cultivation of viewing one's life from God's eternal perspective are just some of the benefits which might arise from the conquering of one's Christian doubts. Each of these can help motivate a believer to a deeper relationship with the Lord.

Scripture relates that Christ came to remove the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15). We are also told that the hope of Jesus' resurrection is to assure the believer of eternal life, an inheritance which is impervious to corruption and which is reserved for us in heaven (I Pet. 1:3-5; cf. Matt. 6:19-20). Such is God's promise to the one who is committed to Him.

In this way, the conquering of doubt can actually lead straight to a re-orientation process which cultivates God's eternal perspective. A glimpse of His holiness and the reality of eternal life with Him should motivate us to a lifetime of commitment, by His grace and power.

Backus and Chapian address the subject of this change as follows:

**Jesus Christ is the foundation of our lives, not ourselves alone and not another person or persons. When we become God's children the great I dies and there's a change, sweet as morning, that takes place and we trade banners: the old used I for a shiny impenetrable His.<sup>11</sup>**

In this process, the believer should recognize that loving and praising God for His own sake (apart from His promises and blessings to us) is the highest good in the universe. But fellowship with Him forever is also promised to us. Such blessings will be beyond our greatest expectations.

## Endnotes--Chapter X

1As mentioned at the outset, this manuscript has been composed as a follow-up to the Spring Lectureship at Western Seminary (January, 1988) and is part of a much larger (projected) manuscript for publication as a book. But even so, more work needs to be done, like the light which other disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry, education, sociology and exegetical theology might shed on the subject of doubt.

2 Guinness devotes a chapter to this aspect of the problem of uncertainty (Chapter 15). It should be noted that the doctrine of eternal security is not being denied here. As a matter of fact, this doctrine is not even being discussed at this juncture or elsewhere in the manuscript.

3Guinness, pp. 239-242.

4See especially Chapter IV in this manuscript for details.

5Guinness, pp. 243-244.

6See Chapter II for this emphasis.

7Even with the doctrine of eternal security, we can never finally tell whether a person ever truly committed his life to Christ in the first place, for instance (see I Jn. 2:19).

8See Chapter V, B. The highest good in the universe is arguably to praise God for His own sake. But our point here is that the New Testament utilizes the prospect of eternal life as the chief motivation for Christian action.

9See Chapter V, D, E.

10Mere Christianity, p. 124.

11Backus and Chapien, p. 41.

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## **Appendix: Development Theory and Doubt**

Abraham and Sarah had their doubts. John the Baptist and Peter expressed anxieties about their faith. Even the Lord Jesus, on the cross, raised questions concerning His relationship with the Father. In addition to identifying some of these Bible character profiles, the following section intends to provide a brief survey of relevant and related theories on doubt, utilizing the twin disciplines of theology and social science. A range of perspectives will be cited to illustrate the breadth of coverage that has been given to the topic of doubt. More restrictive, theological positions (e.g., "All doubt is wrong") will be compared and contrasted with less restrictive views (e.g., "Doubt is necessary for maturity"). The well-known "reporter's questions" will frame the organization of this overview in theology and social science.

A personal experience

A dozen mornings before Christmas in 1987, my five-and-one-half-year-old daughter rounded the corner of the bathroom where I was shaving and issued an unprovoked testimonial:

"I don't believe in Santa," Melissa began. "And I don't believe in the Easter Bunny either." Then, with resolve, she added, "And I don't believe in angels."

Catching my breath at this barrage of denials, I found myself unable to get a word in edgewise, for this second-oldest child subsequently offered a single retraction: "Oh, I guess I do believe in angels."

"Why do you still believe in angels?" I questioned, not really knowing how to start.

"Angels are up in heaven. When you get old and die and go up to heaven, they will be there," Melissa claimed matter-of-factly.

After I noted a couple of references to angels in the Bible, she reiterated, "Yeah, that's right, the Bible says a lot about angels. I do believe in angels."

My preschooler seemed finished with what she had to say, for she headed for the door. But I wanted to know more about the two other subjects that she categorically denied existence. "Then why don't you believe in Santa or the Easter Bunny?" I pressed.

Referring to the first denial, Melissa scientifically rationalized, "I've never heard him scratching when he comes down the inside of the chimney. And I don't hear his reindeer."

Turning her thoughts to the Easter Bunny, she deduced, "He really can't write names [i.e., on Easter cards] and stuff like that. He can't make all those baskets that quick. And he doesn't have money to buy those things [Easter candy, etc.]."

End of discussion. And beginning of a new growth phase for Melissa.

Just what was it that brought out this confession of denials in my daughter? How long had she been struggling with these issues? Did the ideas just suddenly "make sense" to her? Were her doubts simply a natural part of growing up or were they more like the green-eyed monster from Shakespeare's Othello?

"Who?"

You Are Not Alone

Goethe, the world renowned thinker, claimed that the primary theme throughout human civilization has been the relentless struggle between belief and unbelief. In certain historical periods (such as the Reformation), faith prevailed as victor—whereas on other occasions, unbelief and despair have been triumphant. Harvard's G. W. Allport admits, "Our own age, we know, is a period of doubt and negation."<sup>1</sup>

In 1985, the Gallup Organization conducted a telephone interview with more than one thousand adults concerning perceptions of their faith maturation. To a great extent, this national survey confirms the suspicion of Allport: we do live in a generation of doubt. Though the word doubt was never used by the interviewing team as such, synonymous phrases were employed throughout the survey (as, for example, the phrase "questioning early beliefs"<sup>2</sup>). The Gallup survey discovered that the majority of adults (65 percent) believe a person's faith "should" change (vs. "should not") throughout life "just as one's body and mind change."<sup>^</sup> (Only 32 percent believed faith should not change.) Church members were more convinced that faith should not change (should = 58 percent; should not = 39 percent), contrasted with nonmembers (73 percent and 24 percent, respectively). A comparison of all surveyed men and women shows almost identical results in gender, as males favor change (66 percent) over no change (32 percent), and females stand 64 percent to 32 percent in their respective selections. In response to a similar question the data shows that

**three in four adults believe a person's faith is strengthened by questioning curly beliefs. There is a high degree of consensus on this point among all demographic groups. Even among those who do not believe one's faith should change nearly four in five (79%) hold to the position that faith is made stronger by questioning early beliefs.<sup>4</sup>**

Asked about actual experiences they had, 71 percent of all respondents acknowledged that their "faith changed significantly" at some time in their recent or remote past. Only 29 percent stated that they had never experienced such a change.<sup>5</sup> When they were asked about the results of such a significant faith change, "the majority experiencing a change [reported! that their faith [was] stronger (82 percent) and more meaningful (81 percent) as a consequence." "Also as a result of this change, 49 percent of the national group believed that their faith was "a little different," 45 percent found their faith to be "totally different," and 6 percent had no opinion.<sup>7</sup>

But rather than highlighting a new trend, the Gallup survey simply affirms a historic pattern. For even the early church Father Tertullian expressed his personal anxiety over the tensions caused by doubt. On the one hand, he acknowledged that, a searching faith (prompted by doubt) produced certain rewards. On the other hand, he bemoaned the futility of doubt's endeavors:

**But if we are bound to go on seeking as long as there is any possibility of finding ... we shall be always seeking and never believing. What end will there be to seeking? What point of rest for belief? Where the fruition of finding? There will be no end . . . and I shall wish I had never begun to seek.<sup>8</sup>**

Religious educator Leon McKenzie concludes that doubt is a generic condition of humankind, just as natural as the functioning of the human senses. Moreover, doubt is an ever-present reality: "We come into the world with question marks in our heads. We strive for intelligibility and purpose. We seek a perspective or framework for our being-in-the-world." McKenzie then promises, "The question marks in our heads are never fully erased."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, several prominent studies indicate that this human condition of doubt is not limited to adulthood. Since doubt originates, in part, from the more pervasive intellectual (or cognitive) development of all persons, children and youth often experience very serious questioning of their faith as well. In fact (as it will be later shown), the period of adolescence typically brings about the most tumultuous faith struggles. With this in mind, psychology professor Michael Chandler observes that "between childhood and maturity there automatically occurs a deeply problematic period of epistemological confusion, marked by the collapse of absolute conviction and defined by an outcropping of nascent skeptical doubt" (emphasis added).<sup>10</sup>

Is there anyone who is immune to this perceived noxious condition? If there is, it tends not to be the Christian. For in the believer's sincerest attempts to search for truth and to confront the ultimate issues of life, there often appears to be some universal, ironic twist—where the seeker turns skeptic.

As an outgrowth of his doctoral work in social relations at Harvard, Philip M. Hefner observes that "doubt and the seeds of doubt—despair, skepticism, and angry question of God's justice—arc the central themes in the Judeo-Christian tradition." Prominent examples, he says, include Job's "sense of abandonment," "the Preacher's dry skepticism in Ecclesiastes," and Jesus' own lost cry of Matthew 27:46 (King James Version): "My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?"<sup>11</sup>

Echoing this observation, Allport has noted that "the mature religious sentiment is ordinarily fashioned in the workshop of doubt."<sup>12</sup> Even members of the esteemed profession of theology must succumb to this human tendency, as Protestant leader Karl Barth testifies:

**No theologian, whether young or old, pious or less pious, tested or untested, should have any doubt that for some reason or other and in some way or other he is also a doubter. . . . No one, not even the theologian, can escape doubt.<sup>13</sup>**



"what?"  
understanding the nature of doubt

Doubt has been broadly defined as "the calling into question of either beliefs or practices of one's religious tradition, or of organized religion in general."<sup>15</sup> Whether or not this definition is employed, one thing is certain: the subject of doubt is a volatile one. As such, it becomes imperative that certain misnomers or incorrect designations for doubt be identified and rejected as misleading.

#### WHAT DOUBT IS NOT

First, doubt is not necessarily sin. Christian educator Elmer Towns states that, contrary to some interpretations, "Eve did not sin when she doubted God, but when she disobeyed God. Today, doubts simply cannot be eradicated, even by the miracle of the new birth."<sup>15</sup> To look at it another way, within the context of Scripture there is a marked difference between the "doubt" of the Pharisees (see Matt. 21:23-27) and the "doubt" of John the Baptist (see Matt. 11:1-6). In the first case, a "don't confuse me with the facts" mentality is expressed. In the latter case, however, John's teachable attitude—in the midst of his doubt—could be paraphrased "Please help me to resolve this complex faith problem."

Second, doubt is not necessarily disbelief or denial. Barth comments, "Doubt only means swaying and staggering between Yes and No. It is only an uncertainty."<sup>16</sup> Allport elaborates this fact through a composite of comparison and contrast:

**Disbelief is a negative, rejecting response or attitude. ... Doubt, like disbelief, is technically a secondary condition of mental life. It is an unstable or hesitant reaction, produced by a collision of evidence with prior belief, or of one belief with another. It is apparent that disbelief is relatively more final and single-minded than is doubt.<sup>17</sup>**

Towns further illustrates this contrast: "Doubt is not. unbelief. Unbelief is rebellion against evidence that we cannot or will not accept. Doubt is stumbling over a stone that we do not understand. Unbelief is kicking at a stone that we understand all too well. <sup>18</sup>

Third, doubt is not necessarily detrimental. Columbia University's Philip Phenix offers a helpful distinction between differing types of doubt. He labels the first category "constructive doubt and faith," further describing the phrase as "faithful doubt"—a curious (if not contradictory) statement for some believers. Phenix proposes this description based upon "Tillich's reformulation of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith in a state of sin to read justification by faith in a state of doubt."<sup>19</sup> To put it in other terms, Phenix believes that questioning Christians could claim "the secure foundation of the human condition as a spiritual being" by participating in "the faith-evidencing activity of concerned and responsible doubting."<sup>20</sup>

Using a comparative analogy, Phenix titles his second category "destructive doubt." This educator comments that his experiences would classify persons in the latter group as closed-minded, since they are

**essentially faithless, in the sense that they presuppose the futility of any sustained quest for truth. . . . Abandoning the search for ultimate certainties, the skeptic unwittingly cuts the ground from under serious inquiry itself, thus discrediting even his own activity of doubting.<sup>21</sup>**

#### TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

It goes without saying that liberal believers would regard doubt as a more natural and acceptable phenomenon, whereas extremely conservative Christians seem to brand all doubt as wrong. More than mere suspicion, however, this statement has been documented by certain research findings. For instance, Hugh Alien studied more than three hundred college undergraduates, trying to determine (among other concerns) what correlation might exist between individual doubts and participation in religious activities. He discovered that collegiates of more conservative denominations (in his study, this included Methodists and Baptists) generally experienced more disruptive consequences of doubting than their counterparts in liberal denominations who questioned their faith. One of the more sobering conclusions Alien reached included evidence that even following a battle with doubt, faith struggles failed to dissipate.

**Methodists and Baptists who have resolved their doubts, however, do not return to the extremely high role of attendance shown by those who have never doubted. This leads to the conclusion that among the conservative denominations, doubt represents more of a departure from the religious denomination. Resolving the doubt is not sufficient to restore his habits of attendance.<sup>22</sup>**

Sometimes it boils down to the fact that certain fellowships simply ostracize those who have struggled with doubts, like those who have been divorced or those who have suffered some paralyzing illness or handicap. Believers often do not know how to respond in a facilitating manner. A young man recently wrote to me about doubt . and concluded: "Many Christians avoid this topic like the , plague, fearing it will somehow infect and conquer them."

In a similar vein, one young woman corresponded that she perceived the church was weighed down and "burdened with doubts." Yet, ironically, she had learned that it was foolhardy to generally expect any assistance from the Body of Christ. Her frank assessment is bone-chilling: "It is just about the worst place in the world for someone hurting. I got kinder responses from bar keepers."

One school of thought stresses: any doubt is compatible with faith. Some proponents would say that, like water combined with oil, any rationalization (which often leads to doubt) mixed with belief is totally antithetical to faith--is totally unacceptable. For them, it would seem that "religious commitment must transcend categories of ~ rational justification if it is not to be undermined by the criticism which is the obverse of such justification."<sup>23</sup>

This rationale is further explained by Helfaer, who states that right wing theology "rejects doubt partly for ! the very reason that doubt represents open interchange between the individual and his world and a change in conception of the world in the direction of expanding its contents and meanings in the light of experience."<sup>24</sup>

On the other side of the coin, there stands a second school of thought that emphasizes: doubts are not only compatible with faith but are actually imperative for faith to grow. One existentialist subgroup of this belief focuses on (be individual and his or her particular religious commitment. As a primary spokesman for this position, theologian Paul Tillich summarizes: "Existential doubt and faith are poles of the same reality, the stale of ultimate ' concern. . . . Serious doubt is confirmation of faith."<sup>25</sup>

In comparison with the first school of thought (which favors a more dualistic view of reality concerning faith and reason), religious existentialism partially bases its perspective on man's finiteness. Tillich explains: "Finitude includes doubt. . . . It is an expression of the acceptance of his [man's] finitude that he accepts the fact that doubt belongs to his essential being. . . . Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is an element of faith."<sup>26</sup>

Another subgroup valuing the compatibility of faith and human inquiry would also emphasize a more rationalistic stance for beliefs. Yet, they would not be branded as existentialists, by any means. In fact, many proponents would hold to a conservative theology. Virtually everyone in this ideological camp adheres to the following summative declaration: "Questioning my beliefs and even doubting their truth need not necessarily weaken my commitment."<sup>27</sup> The mature believer, from this vantage point, uses his or her renewed mind but does not foolishly abandon the tenets of faith for every minute question. To paraphrase Cardinal Newman's saying, even ten thousand faith struggles do not justify giving up on a belief, if you have nothing better to replace it.<sup>28</sup> For example, Towns speaks about a missionary who may doubt God's work in his life because of some misfortune or unanswered prayer. Rather than a response of faith denial, Towns suggests that the root cause may stem from this worker's ignorance of the true meaning of the life of faith. As an evangelical, Towns admits that rationalism cannot provide the final answer for believers. Yet Towns observes that faith struggles can often be helped by clear and logical thinking. In chorus, he shares the same tune as the religious existentialist (though from a markedly different theological position) when he summarizes, "Doubt comes when we do not know all of the answers."<sup>29</sup>

Tennyson put it this way: "There lives more faith in honest doubt,/Believe me, than in half the creeds."

In summary, (hen, rationalization and doubt are typically viewed as part and parcel of faith development--or they are not.

#### DIFFERENTIATING TERMS

One way to better comprehend (he nature of doubt is (o further study the essence of faith through its various descriptions. In his helpful book *Religion and Doubt: Toward a Faith of Your Own* Richard R. Creel provides a provocative comparison between four terms that arc often used synonymously to describe religious commitment. The distinctions Creel employs are helpful in clarifying the subject of doubt.

The first synonym Creel discusses is the word knowledge. He describes this term as a claim held to be "absolutely and demonstrably true."<sup>30</sup> Consequently, this religious conviction can be "proved" to anyone who is intelligent and unbiased enough to consider the evidence. For this first category, Creel offers the example of the Roman Catholic church's position regarding the certainty of God's existence (derived from the five proofs of Aquinas in the thirteenth century).

The second synonym Creel discusses is the term belief. Likewise based upon supportive evidence (though difficult to "prove beyond a shadow of a doubt"), this category of religious commitment can be described as "the most plausible explanation of the nature of reality." Creel further explains, "In other words, given the evidence presently at hand, you believe that your religion is more likely the true explanation of reality than any other explanation with which you are familiar." The pivotal issue here is that religious commitment is based upon the highest probability of alternative views.

Faith represents the third category of religious terminology, defined as emotional confidence. From this perspective there are

**feelings of confidence which normally accompany knowledge, but with regard to proposal ions about which you are neither rationally certain nor empirically confident, since you do not believe that you have either reasons which prove- them true or evidence which shows that they are probably true.**<sup>32</sup>

Creel claims that the term faith is not the consequence of an exerted will or intentional reasoning--it just "happens."

The fourth and final synonym used to describe religious commitment is hope. Distinguishing this stance from the earlier trio of options, Creel says: "You would not be claiming it to be true or logical on empirical grounds; nor would you be claiming to feel as though it is true."<sup>33</sup> On a more positive note, he concludes, "You would be claiming only that you hope it is true and that you believe that there is a possibility that it is true."<sup>34</sup>

The summary chart on the following page (adapted from Creel) contrasts these four alternative descriptions of religious commitment. In addition, the diagram cites areas that would tend to cause doubt in each case.

As Creel has pointed out, the dotted line on the chart indicates the degree to which human reason is utilized. That is, the first two categories assume that reason can be employed to identify ultimate reality. The latter two categories have little use for reason, relying more on emotion.

It should be noted at this juncture that we authors do not strictly adhere to Creel's four-part categorization. A major concern of ours, for instance, is that faith and doubt should not be viewed dualistically by separating rational from emotional categories. Also, some of his interpretations would be questionable in our minds. However, Creel's contribution indicates that he has seriously grappled with the what of doubt. He has attempted to isolate the many words we use as synonyms and to become more discerning in conceptualization and communication.

Alternative	Basis	Tendency Toward Doubt
Knowledge (Rational Certainty)	Proof	Fallacy in Logic
Belief (Empirical Confidence)	Probability	Conflicting Evidence
Faith (Emotional Confidence)	Feeling	Changing Emotions
Hope (Emotional Desire)	Attractiveness	Differing Perceptions

Fluctuation between human reason and emotion as the primary source or basis for religious commitment was verified in the 1985 Gallup study. When respondents were asked, "Would you describe the change [in your faith] mostly as coming about as a result, of a lot of thought and discussion about faith or coming about as a result of a strong emotional experience?" they were about equally divided in their responses. Forty-six percent of the national group chose the first phrase, and 49 percent identified with the second. There was no appre-

able difference between all males (48 percent to 40 percent, respectively, in these two categories) and all females (45 percent to 50 percent, respectively). However, education did appear to be a factor. Among all college graduates, 61 percent chose the rational component, compared with 34 percent for the emotional component, whereas 41 percent of high school graduates selected the former category and 53 percent opted for the latter category.<sup>35</sup>

"when? where? why?"  
 considering potential causes of doubt

When does doubt occur?

In the 1985 Gallup survey, nearly six out of ten persons (39 percent) reported that a change in their faith came during a stable time of life, whereas 40 percent said that faith change arose during turbulent, chaotic periods." Also, based upon the 71 percent who claimed to have had a significant faith change, 18 percent recalled that their experience came when they were eighteen to twenty-four years of age (the age interval with the highest recorded percentage). In descending order, other age periods included the following: 9 percent who cited a faith change when they were twenty-five to twenty-nine years of age, 7 percent who pointed to such a change identified the years when they were sixteen to seventeen years of age, and 6 percent noted that the faith change occurred when they were thirty to thirty-four years of age.

Besides age, when are doubts most likely to occur? James E. Marcia suggests a provocative theory of older teens and younger adults, which reflects helpful insights for this query.<sup>37</sup> Concisely stated, Marcia poses two primary factors determining personal identity formation.

Commitment and crisis. Commitment focuses upon the degree of allegiance to beliefs and life values. Occupational preferences and choices are also included. Crisis represents any meaningful decision-making moment that facilitates commitment.

Using this duo as perpendicular axes creates a 2 x 2 matrix like the one on the following page. For both the vertical and horizontal axes, the subcategory Yes indicates actual experience. The subcategory No points out inexperience. The combination of factors yields four options. Marcia's theory provides the following categories and technical terms.

		Crisis	
		No	Yes
Commitment	Yes	Identity Diffusion	Moratorium
	No	Foreclosure	Identity Achievement

Identity diffusion means that an individual has not developed significant values about life or held prominent vocational preferences (i.e., no commitment). Also, no crisis has been encountered.

Moratorium indicates that the individual has confronted a decision-making moment. Indeed, research shows that this person often tends to be churning in the middle of crisis. Consequently, the debilitating struggle (which may involve faith-defying experiences) "freezes" the young person. No major commitment can be secured.

Foreclosure. This is the flip side of Moratorium. It defines a state where beliefs and vocational decisions have been made, but they have come without any thought-provoking crises. For example, personal convictions here are based upon moral codes and opinions of outsiders (e.g., parents, church leaders, and other authority figures). Extrinsic-oriented values.

Finally, Identity and Achievement stands as Marcia's technical term for one who has "owned" personal values. Through the refining fire of crisis, genuine commitment is derived—intrinsic beliefs.

Adapting Marcia's research and terminology to the study of doubts, it would appear that substantial faith questioning primarily occurs in two of the four quadrants. "Moratorium" designates the spiritual condition of one wrestling with the beliefs--much like the unstable person portrayed by the apostle James: "a double-minded man." Their chaos is likened to a "wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind" (James 1:6-8, KJV). No wonder value commitment is nowhere to be found.

"Identity Achievement" typifies the second spiritual state in which doubts normally occur. In (.his case, however, growth and stability reign. Struggling through doubts has paradoxically strengthened this individual. In fact, analogy can be drawn from James's opening comments, where a rather curious spiritual equation is introduced: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds" (1:2), for trials test faith. Perseverance comes, and eventually maturity results (vv. 3- 4).

An earlier research project by Marcia verifies the basic faith-doubt implications cited above.<sup>38</sup> At one point in his survey, the question was raised, "Have you ever had any doubts about your religious beliefs?" Representative responses indicated cluster themes around each of Marcia's four categories, as the following samples suggest:

[Identity achievement] Yea, I even started wondering whether or not there was a god. I've pretty much resolved that now, though. The way it seems to me is ...

[Moratorium] Yes, I guess I'm going through that now. I just don't see how there can be a god and yet so much evil in the world or ...

[Foreclosure] No, not really, our family is pretty much in agreement on these things.

[Identity diffusion] Oh, I don't know. I guess so. Everyone goes through some sort of state like that. But it really doesn't bother me much. I figure one's just as good as the other!

Allport highlights at least a half-dozen instances where serious questioning of faith begins. First, reactive and negativistic doubt often surfaces when tragedies are encountered. The foxhole prayer that goes unanswered frequently results in militant atheism, souring any form of religious activity.

Second, extreme egocentrism (a relentless focus on self) often brings doubt with it. Childish expectations of faith in adulthood that are never fully resolved may cause an individual to "discard his conceptions and terminate once and for all his religious quest," Allport notes. Concerning the eventual outcome of this type of doubt, Allport adds, "A faith centered in self-advantage is bound to break up."<sup>39</sup>

Hypocrisy and failure within institutional religion induces a third form of doubt. In particular, doubt of this sort affects young people "who today seem supersensitive to the darker spots of religious history." For, even after bearing the standard excuses for the church's failure, Allport reports, doubters are still not "persuaded by the counter-argument that crimes of persecution and bigotry are to be charged up to secularism and corruption rather than to the religious hypothesis in its purity."<sup>40</sup>

The fourth type of doubt parallels the seed (based upon the parable of the Sower) that falls upon the rocky soil and is ultimately choked of its faith-life. In the gospel story, initial joy may be compared with "religious strivings . . . the pursuit of meanings beyond the range of our intellectual capacity . . . the longing that, values be conserved."<sup>41</sup>

But as the seed's eventual demise results from shallow soil, so doubt arises in this fourth case because the shallowness of its immature faith persists in retaining juvenile perceptions of being dependent upon others. In contrast to this fourth doubt form, Allport observes that "when well-formed, the mature religious sentiment develops a driving power in its own right, motivating action, transforming character, and ordering sub-systems of belief and conduct."<sup>42</sup>

Fifth, doubts occur because of scientific or rational scrutiny. Allport contests that, in theory, the concept of an "open-minded scientist" (i.e., one who thinks exclusively in scientific and rationalistic structures) is merely an illusion. "In playing the game of science, a definite set of axioms must be adopted. They include, first and foremost, the principle of determinism." "Identical happenings," he continues, "with identical histories, will have identical futures. There can be no intervention of Providence, . . . The axiom of determination must always be held; otherwise the game of science, as now conceived, cannot be played."<sup>43</sup> In other words, a world view that presupposes the superiority of scientific discovery and human reason (to the exclusion of supernatural reality) is potentially doomed to suffer doubt—since the glue that holds together life's puzzle has been discarded.

The sixth and last form of faith questioning that Allport suggests merely reflects a watered down version of the previous category—a generic brand of doubt, so to speak, for the nonprofessional "scientist." Typically this

mind-set is claimed to be a natural, or realist, view of life. Allport describes its consequence as "the commonest mode of doubting."<sup>44</sup>

A young woman was sharing a few of her personal doubts with me, when I asked, "What advice would you give to a believer who was doubting?" Characterizing Allport's sixth category, she confidently stated, "Helax, God is in control." But, then, without pausing, she qualified her advice: "And if He's not, we're in the wrong business!" She demonstrated faith mingled with realistic questions.

Specifically, Allport notes that the strife in this final category comes when particular tenets of religious teaching are pilled against so-called acceptable standards of evidence. Traditional stumbling blocks in our twentieth century age of enlightenment, for instance, include the rejection of both a literal fiery hell and a heaven with golden streets, he states. Allport recommends that in such cases appropriate literary interpretation and contextualization are often overlooked by doubters, as he illustrates: "The Bible affirms, 'There is no God/ but adds, 'says the fool in his heart.' Even the Fundamentalist must take the context into account."<sup>45</sup>

#### Why Does Doubt Occur?

The following section addresses the third divisional question (which may have causal significance) by using a trio of subtopics: (1) genetic factors affecting doubt, (2) genetic and environmental factors affecting doubt, and (3) specific reasons for doubt. Moving from general to more particular issues, (his section will catch a birds'-eye glimpse of human development theory as well as theories specifically confronting origins of religious doubt.

Genetic factors affecting doubt. When a comprehensive meaning of the word doubt is stressed, many relevant theorists in the field of human development would claim that doubt naturally arises from within people. Likewise they would tend to argue that such predilection to doubt represents a singular--and inherited--component of holistic growth. That is, just as it is expected that certain physiological and psychological changes will occur within every individual throughout all of life, the process of lifelong doubt, is recognized as one more natural phenomenon of human maturation. Also, just as individual distinctions are expected within other basic human growth patterns, wide-ranging experiences of doubt, are anticipated to differ from person to person.

Four areas of general human development must be considered as relevant to the subject of doubt.

1. Cognitive (or intellectual) development represents a foundational topic pertaining to faith and doubt formation. Jean Piaget, the famous Swiss-born psychologist, is said to have fashioned the modern-day approach to this discipline. Simply put, Piaget perceived that cognitive growth proceeds through a series of four stages; each new state is qualitatively distinct from the prior stage, as indicated below:

##### Stage 1: Sensory-motor intelligence (from 0 to 2 years of age)

The infant's intellectual condition is primarily demonstrated through behavioral ("motor") activity. This involves bodily movements and sensory expressions (e.g., touching, hearing, etc.).

##### Stage 2: Preoperational thought (2 to 7 years)

Language skills characterize this growth period. No longer restricted to behavioral motor activity, the young child becomes increasingly able to think (though in semi-logical patterns).

##### Stage 3: Concrete operations (7 to 11 years)

Logical and rational thinking distinguishes the early school-age child from his younger counterpart. He is limited to "concrete" (actual or real) applications of new-found skill—being unable to think hypothetically.

##### Stage 4: Formal operation!; (11 to 15 years)

Theoretically, the older child and young teen are capable of moving beyond actual objects of thought to abstract objects. This ability to hypothesize allows them to contemplate life beyond the realm of their own experiences.<sup>46</sup>

Within all four of these stages, several complex processes of cognitive growth are operating. Five basic concepts, in particular, need to be understood to further comprehend Piaget's theory. Schema refers to the intellectual structures that people use to categorize life experiences according to common characteristics. For example, if a young child regularly calls all cats "dogs," perhaps his schema would reveal that both cats and dogs are perceived by him to be friendly, furry, four-legged creatures. Adults, of course, would have more discerning schemata, based upon their latter stage development and personal experiences.

Assimilation defines the intellectual procedure whereby a person incorporates new perceptions into current, existing schemata. Using the illustration above, consider what might happen when the same child encounters

for the first time a caged lion at a zoo. If the child replies "dog" when he is asked the creature's name, that would indicate that his earlier schema has not been altered--simply one more animal has been added to it.

Accommodation represents the cognitive process that recognizes that former, existing schemata no longer adequately classify and categorize life experiences. Two options are open here. Using the above case to illustrate, either the child will need (1) to create a new schema (for example, recognizing that the lion is anything I like friendly, he may create a new cognitive category of 'features that includes animals that are both unfriendly and large) or (2) to modify existing schemata in order to account for new experiences (for example, realizing that the lion is unfriendly, the young child might reduce the characteristic of "dogs" to just furry and four-legged creatures). Both options are examples of accommodation.

Disequilibrium, the fourth of five basic concepts within cognitive studies, has particular significance for Piaget's theory and for the subject of doubt. When life experiences are not easily assimilated, they result in the tension of disequilibrium--an imbalance or instability of cognition. Barry J. Wadsworth, one of the interpreters of Piaget, concludes that "disequilibrium (a problem), always leads to active efforts to assimilate and accommodate. Disequilibrium is Piaget's primary explanatory concept of motivation."<sup>47</sup>

It may already be apparent to the reader how disequilibrium thus relates to the matter of doubt. As in the area of cognitive growth, disequilibrium may produce doubt, since it is necessary to regularly reassess current perceptions and beliefs about life. An example would be the first time a young Christian teen encounters the view that God really does not exist. That experience--what may or may not be a traumatic one--will motivate him to confront his cognitive (and faith) imbalance.

Equilibrium identifies a balance between assimilation and accommodation processes. Such a balance is necessary because neither extreme is healthy, too much assimilation (with little or no accommodation) would yield a few—but very large—schemata, since similarity is stressed, whereas too much accommodation (with little or no assimilation) would bring about a cumbersome number of very minute schemata, since dissimilarity is emphasized. The weakness of the former would be a person's inability to discern or differentiate his particular experiences, and the weakness of the latter would be the inability to group his experiences by common, larger categories of reality.

2. The second area of maturity--affective (or emotional) development--should not be so disconnected with cognitive growth that a dualistic view of people is generated; yet emotional development does represent a discrete domain of the human maturational process that must be considered separately regarding faith and doubt formation. Emotion, just like intellect, has the potential to contribute to total human growth. Likewise both have the capacity to elicit nonproductive (or counterproductive) consequences for growth. For instance, one study shows that two major types of cognitive-emotional misdirection have been identified in children. Such experiences in childhood often yield fearful and anxious results--doubt being just one.<sup>48</sup> The first type has been called "errors of inference," further defined as "predictions or conclusions that falsely represent reality."<sup>49</sup> Several illogical processes (including overgeneralization) prompt this condition. One example would be for a child who has recently lost his pet bird in death to conclude, "God must not like me very much."

The second type of cognitive-emotional misdirection incorporates two parts: "ego anxiety," or worry pertaining to one's self (e.g., "I must do well in the Sunday school contest, so my teacher will think I really love Jesus"); and "discomfort anxiety," or worry pertaining to the notion that only personal discomfort is threatening (e.g., "It would be just awful if I lost the Sunday school contest").<sup>50</sup>

But children are certainly not the only people who are controlled by such cognitive-emotional misdirection. Helfaer refers to one of his clients who was suffering from doubt through an exhibition of this identical behavior:

**He gives reality a very specific interpretation and uncritically suspends an openness to the possibility of other interpretations. On occasion he explicitly insists on his own interpretation regardless of an awareness of evidence that might contradict it. . . . That is, the feeling of tightness about a belief is accepted, without further criticism, as an indication of the truth of that belief. . . . The feeling of truth and reality, are higher-criteria for belief than the critical evaluation of reason. In this way faith is projected from intellectual doubt and reality-testing in general.<sup>51</sup>**

In some ways, these demonstrations of emotional one-sidedness reflect the opposite human condition of the earlier-described condition of extreme scientific rationalism.

3. Moral development (from certain angles, an extension of the two previous areas of human growth, especially cognitive theory) has been brought to the public's attention largely due to the research of Harvard's Lawrence Kohlberg. His theory, like Piaget's, stresses sequential, hierarchical stages of development. In fact, since his research focuses more upon the rationale that people offer for their actions (vs. their actual moral behavior itself), the link with cognitive theory is extremely significant. An overview of Kohlberg's theory below

reveals his three primary levels, each of which contains two stages.

"Preconventional" level--At this first, juncture of moral maturity, the individual responds to cultural rules which are enforced by those who exercise physical power. Specifically, the focus of attention is "self," since the person is motivated by what will reduce personal punishment and gain personal reward.

Stage 1: "Punishment and obedience orientation"--The physical results of behavior determine its goodness or badness. Being "good" characterizes avoidance of punishment as well as positive recognition for accomplishment.

Stage 2: "Instrumental relativist orientation"--Needs of others are given token attention, since moral behavior is somewhat reciprocal—but only by using the standard "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours."

"Conventional" level--The focus of attention and the source of motivation shifts from self to "others." The range of this others-orientation spans from family to friends to society.

Stage 3: "Good boy-nice girl orientation"--Goodness is now determined by a series of "informal" rules, whereby others are pleased or helped through personal behavior, and thus, they offer their approval.

Stage 4: "Law and order orientation"--More "formal" laws define morality (e.g., performing one's national or civic duty).

"Postconventional" level--Moral values based upon "principles"--apart from personal gain or group conformity—frame the distinction of this final level.

Stage 5: "Social-contract, legalistic orientation"--Right behavior tends to be based upon general individual rights which society has established. Procedural rules are sought through group consensus.

Stage 6: "Universal ethical principle orientation"--Self-ascribed ethical principles (based upon conscience) form the primary focus. Further emphasis centers upon a lifestyle congruent with such principles. Abstractness of moral code (e.g., the Golden Rule) is favored over concreteness (e.g., the Ten Commandments).<sup>52</sup>

Through a brief analysis, it may become apparent that several cross-references in the subject of doubt are potentially expressed in Kohlberg's theory. For instance, reconsider the three primary foci of each distinct level above (i.e., a focus on self, others, and principles, respectively). At the first level, the existence of God might be questioned by individuals when their mechanical and egocentric view of faith is not consistently satisfied (e.g., when the false dictum "Good people should never suffer" is violated). At the second level, God's love may be doubted when an individual is treated disloyally by a trusted family member or good friend. At the third level, disillusionment with God's divine order may occur either when faith is lost in the consensus process or when an individual experiences the turmoil of conflicting principles within the conscience.

4. Faith or spiritual development covers a broadly defined area of human growth, not simply the traditional topics of the Judeo-Christian heritage. James W. Fowler of Emory University stands as one of the prominent leaders in this field. Like Kohlberg, Fowler's position reveals definite ties with Piaget's cognitive theory, yet warrants a distinctive discipline all its own."<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps one of the most intriguing illustrations of Fowler's allegiance with cognitive-philosophical systems comes from his reference to the potential faith struggle that children have when they enter Piaget's first growth stage. (In review, the last cognitive stage is formal operations, often commencing in the preteen years; it provides the capacity to hypothesize—to mentally play with the abstract world of thought.) Referring to the older child's newly acclaimed ability to reorganize his perception of faith, Fowler comments, "This construction frequently gives way during a phase we have come to call eleven-year-old atheism" (emphasis added).<sup>54</sup> Such questioning of their earlier-perceived notions of God must, again, be partially understood within the context of their cognitive, emotional, and social maturation, as Fowler further explains:

**This phase comes when thoughtful children whose religious and social environments have given them sufficient emotional space to question and reckon for themselves begin to come to terms with the fact that ours is not a "quick-pay-off universe." The good do not always get rewarded; the wicked are not always punished.**<sup>55</sup>

By way of critiquing Fowler's explanation, someone might be quick to conclude, "If the environment that allowed the child to question his dissonant perceptions had been absent, the reassessment of the child's traditional faith would not have occurred." Although this may initially look like an accurate observation, it is actually shortsighted; for it must be fully stressed that research indicates such an environmental void would



have merely meant postponement of--not escape from--inevitable faith struggles later in life. In the case of such postponement, faith development tends to be dwarfed by other areas of human growth--on imbalance that may produce devastating consequences, as Fowler observes:

**In fact, we see a fair number of persons--usually men --who may exhibit considerable cognitive sophistication in their occupational worlds (as physicians or engineers, for example) but who in their emotional and faith lives are rather rigidly embedded in the structures of Mythic-Literal faith and imperial selfhood. To their marriages and family life they bring a rigidity--often coupled with authoritarian patterns--that inflicts psychic and sometimes physical violence on their partners and children. It often leads them to a kind of baffled bereftness in their forties and fifties, when in the shambles of their shattered families, for the first time they may begin the painful task of learning about the interior lives of selves--starting with their own.<sup>56</sup>**

Helpaer, in his own studies on doubt, verifies this noteworthy find of Fowler's. Selecting one man from his research who particularly failed to mature in his childhood faith, Helpaer outlines grievous patterns of doubt that were subsequently suffered in adulthood.

**The old faith, the earlier religious sublimations, could not possibly do the psychological work needed to contain these inner and miter threats. Since it could not provide the protection of faith, it was doubted. It is possible that the inner tension that precipitated his conversion when he was eight was the same form of anxiety that later became expressed, first in his early teens.<sup>57</sup>**

Later in his text, Helpaer offers further insight into this specific case study: "The inability to re-evaluate the world view of childhood and the childhood premises upon which conflicts were resolved and the sense of self established may be considered a form of doubt."<sup>58</sup>

These findings within the faith development research once again address the complexity and interrelated features of human growth. In particular, doubts--too long relegated to isolated tidbits of religious life--have now been documented to permeate all avenues of human existence: how we think, how we feel about ourselves, how we relate to others, and how we resolve the conflict of perceptual dissonance represent but a few correlations with faith struggles. The issue, then, becomes not so much whether to confront doubt, but when to address it, as Fowler summarizes, "At thirteen, when it comes much more naturally and painlessly, or at fifty-three, when it comes out of the agony of broken relationships."<sup>59</sup>

Texas Tech's Mark O. Webb offers a helpful perspective at this point, since he readily acknowledges parallels between faith development and other domains of human growth. But he also cautions against overlooking dissimilarities. For example, Webb likens doubt to "an internal warning" system, observing that one common motivation of mankind is somehow to maintain a state of equilibrium. (Thus, the correlated theories of Piaget, Festinger, and others provide invaluable resources.) However, Webb refuses to neglect doubt's peculiar condition. He contrasts what he calls religious experience and "normal doubt-resolution," which, he says, includes questions arising from secular and scientific investigations. Webb submits that the latter category of questioning permits objective evidence to be gathered and a choice between two alternatives to be made, whereas the former category, he claims, does not permit such convenience of scientific evaluation, given the nature of faith.

This dualistic distinction seems somewhat contrived. Nothing is mentioned, for instance, of the subjective presumptions of scientific methods and tasks earlier noted by Allport. Nevertheless, Webb's contribution here arises from his insight that religious doubt does pose a particular problem, since oftentimes the core issue of religious doubt "is not subject to normal empirical modes of inquiry."<sup>60</sup> Ranging far beyond such restrictive forms of scientific investigation, metaphysical questions (concerning the reality of a personal God and His handiwork) typically lie at the base of faith questioning. Webb concludes: "No method of resolving the doubt presents itself, since these things cannot be investigated by looking at the world. Consequently, the doubt remains, growing in intensity over time." Recalling that an equilibrated human condition is naturally sought, Webb observes that "a radical readjustment of the whole belief system takes place under the pressure of persistent doubt. That is why we have intense religious experiences, but only rarely do we have intense scientific experiences."<sup>61</sup>

Genetic and environmental factors affecting doubt. Building upon this single influence of heredity, many developmental theorists directly or indirectly agree with the assertion that "doubt" naturally arises from the combination of inherited traits, self-perception and social interaction. Erik II. Erikson perhaps best represents a prominent figure who values these complementary factors of personal and environmental features. Consequently, a brief summary of Erikson's theory will be presented--especially emphasizing his theory's first half, which discusses children and youth. Ramifications will be drawn for the subject of doubt.

First, it is important to note that Erikson modifies and expands Sigmund Freud's five stages of psychosexual theory, in offering his eight stages of psychosocial theory. In further contrast to Freud (who primarily

concentrated on birth through adolescence) Erikson postulates a life-span view for the total age range of human growth. Erikson believes that individuals develop healthily when particular life challenges of each stage are successfully negotiated. In order to value the dynamics of life, each of his eight stages is intentionally framed by a set of polarities (or tensions) highlighting particular life challenges. Also, based upon his research, Erikson includes a synthesizing virtue for every one of his stages. Erikson's theory of eight stages is presented below through a sequencing of four major periods of life.<sup>62</sup>

1. Early childhood. Erikson's first stage pitted the tension of "Trust versus Mistrust" (from birth to approximately eighteen months). Here, the infant is challenged by the need to trust others when private needs (e.g., hunger) are met. Conversely, distrust results when uncertainty and anxiety arise, as private needs go unattended. Erikson further describes the negative side of this stage as "that 'double take' which we call doubt--doubt in himself and doubt in the firmness and perspicacity of his trainers."<sup>63</sup> The virtue that is anticipated in the resolution of this tension is a new condition called "hope."

Stage 2 (from eighteen months to three years of age) highlights the challenge of "Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt." Positive resolution of this tension should yield self-worth and the virtue of "will," as the child's environment supports self-insistence. Erikson rephrases this polarity as a struggle "between self-expression and compulsive self-restraint or meek compliance. . . . From an unavoidable sense of loss of self-control and of parental over control comes a lasting propensity for doubt and shame."<sup>64</sup> Implications for religious doubt can be projected from Erikson's additional commentary on self assessment: "This basic sense of doubt... is the model for the habitual 'double take' or other later and more verbal forms of compulsive doubting."<sup>65</sup>

"Initiative versus Guilt" designates the third stage of psychosocial theory, incorporating ages three to six. The focus is on creating and instigating individual activities, leading to virtues of "purpose" and accomplishment. Fear of punishment or guilt stands at the opposite pole and is experienced as the young child is overcome by potential failure (even perceived failure) from such self-initiated activities.

2. School-age childhood. As the young child enters school, the start of Erikson's fourth stage, two major changes are experienced within a matter of years. First, a radical shift in social activities occurs. Prior to school age, peer interaction—particularly in larger groups—was minimal (excluding preschool or daycare experiences). During school age, approximately one-half of the child's waking hours are spent with other small children. This shift in social interaction will be challenged by the ideas, needs, and demands of his peers. Wadsworth summarizes: "Social behavior, by its very nature, is an important source of disequilibrium, doming to look at something from another's viewpoint, questioning one's reasoning, and seeking validation from others are all essentially acts of accommodation."<sup>66</sup>

The age-relevant need here, among others, is to seek recognition and approval of others (for the first, time on a broader scale). In fact, in simple terms, the research that discovered this need led Erikson to the conclusion that children proceed with self-evaluation (who they are), based upon self-accomplishment (what they do). He officially labels this fourth stage "Industry versus Inferiority," for six-year olds up through the start of puberty. Industry translates into comprehending the value of work as well as the attainment of technological skills.

Positive self-images, therefore, are constructed when schoolchildren feel good about the social support they receive for individual achievement. Conversely, they sense inferior attitudes when they experience self-defeating frustration and failure in their work. "Competence" is the intended virtue of resolution in this fourth stage crisis.

Besides the radical shift in the degree of social interaction, the second major change in school-age children comes as they develop the ability to think logically and rationally (Piaget's third of four stages). Contrasting their earlier preschool cognitive competencies, Chandler notes,

**So long as meanings were imagined to be features of objects rather than subjects, it was easy enough to suppose that the facts would remain the same regardless of who was in the business of collecting them. As meanings come to be understood as mental products that are actively manufactured rather than harvested as natural resources, however, the idea of absolute truth is emptied of much of its earlier significance, and the companion notion of objectivity deteriorates [emphasis added].<sup>67</sup>**

In other words, certain specific doubts will arise in the school-age child simply because of the cognitive movement from semi-logical to logical thinking. (That is precisely what had happened to my daughter Melissa, in the introductory story about her personal doubts.) Chandler has stated that this doubting process may have snowballing consequences. Using quite a vivid illustration, he concludes: "The effect of pulling on this small thread of insight is to eventually unravel the whole epistemic [i.e., nature of knowing] fabric of middle childhood."<sup>68</sup>

3. Adolescence. The potential for destructive, self-critical thinking continues when puberty is reached. Erikson calls this "a transitory total self-doubt."<sup>69</sup> One hopeful sign and recent finding for this period, however, may

indicate that, such self-doubt decreases as "adolescents become increasingly certain of the traits and characteristics they attribute to themselves. [It involves] a gradual consolidation of self-evaluations."<sup>70</sup> Regardless, doubt does advance to a new challenge, for young teenagers typically move into Piaget's fourth and final stage of formal operations (i.e., the ability to think abstractly and hypothesize). At the same time, they have entered Erikson's fifth stage, "Identity versus Role Confusion"—the stage holding "fidelity" as its anticipated virtue in resolution. That is, as the early teen begins to understand who he or she is, the teen continues to experiment with a variety of potential roles in order to fine tune identity. If psychosocial pressures and demands override a positive comprehension of self-in-the-world, confusion and despair reign in the teen years. Chandler depicts the multi-faceted struggles of adolescence in this manner:

**The price of all this new-found uncertainty is generic doubt, not the kind of mundane, case-specific doubt of middle childhood, but a wholesale, transcendental kind of doubt that threatens to annihilate the whole of one's system of beliefs. . . . What are novel to the adolescent period are those more unassuageable, universal doubts that have their roots in the remote conjectural possibility of hypothetical error. . . . Discovering some route around this impasse, some means of recovering an acceptable epistemological footing in an essentially uncertain world, it would be argued, is a primary developmental task of the adolescent period.<sup>71</sup>**

This "generic doubt" is elsewhere described as the "recognition of the universality of subjectivity,"<sup>72</sup> and for conservative Christians a totally relative world view is neither acceptable nor reassuring. Employing a horribly graphic metaphor for this age period, Chandler defines such cognitive (and faith) turmoil as a time when "acquired knowledge is the epistemological equivalent of a bullet in the brain."<sup>73</sup> To make matters worse, Chandler adds that his studies reveal that normative, adolescent reaction to these stressful times yields one of two outcomes: "either a blind dogmatic faith or a know-nothing skepticism."<sup>74</sup> Certainly, more than those two options exist, but Chandler's summative remarks, nevertheless, provide a startling commentary of youth who are overwhelmed by doubt.

4. Adulthood. Particularly recounting the second stage of "Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt," Erikson observes that adult faith questioning will be influenced by the degree of successful stage negotiation during early childhood maturation. Developmentally stated, Erikson asserts that the child's potential for "this basic sense of doubt. . . finds its adult expression in paranoid fears."<sup>75</sup> For the believer, Helfaer provides a helpful correlation between Erikson's theory and spiritual development, saying that "basic mistrust, shame and doubt, and guilt can all be given symbolic expression in the terms of religious belief."<sup>76</sup> An additional example of this connectedness includes the fact that one of the underlying themes of Erikson's research on Martin Luther was that (Luther's) Reformer's attempt to assess and affirm his own faith was based upon his experienced trust in early infancy."

In brief, the three adult psychosocial stages of Erikson are: Stage 6, "Intimacy versus Isolation," when younger adults seek serious commitments with others or withdraw socially, becoming self-absorbed; Stage 7, "Generativity versus Stagnation," where middle adults attempt to care for the next generation or continue in further forms of isolation, through self-indulgence; and Stage 8, "Ego Integrity versus Despair," as older adults review and accept their life accomplishments or become depressed and anxious over disapproving self-evaluations of life (virtues include "love," "care," and "wisdom," respectively). To follow through on the comparison Helfaer made, during any one of these three adult stages the potential for storing up or breaking down faith is possible.

Specific reasons for doubt. The third of three subtopics that confront the issue, Why does doubt occur? focuses on more particular matters of religious doubt (over against the generic doubt of the human condition).

A handful of studies have been conducted among those who suffer from religious doubt. From preliminary glances at such research, there exists no rhyme or reason for the causal source of spiritually disenchanted persons. For example, in Helfaer's studies alone, just a few of the complementary influences associated with doubt range from low self-esteem<sup>78</sup> to a lack of repentance,<sup>79</sup> and from the specific pressures of seminary training<sup>80</sup> to diverse personality orientations toward faith and doubt.<sup>81</sup> The safest conclusion to draw seems to be that we can identify correlations with doubt. We cannot be as certain about cause-effect formulas.

Maintaining a sensitivity for these findings, five broad categories were synthesized from religious literature as a response to the query, "Why?" These categories are not meant to be exhaustive but instead to be representative of doubt's possible origins (acknowledging that the "chicken or egg" controversy may be legitimately raised for each of these five categories).

1. Unstable home life. Several researchers have suggested that an unhealthy home environment contributes to potential doubt among its family membership.<sup>82</sup> Allport offers one overarching evaluation of home conditions, as it pertains to faith struggles:

**If, as Freud has said, the religious sentiment is at bottom as an extension of one's attitude toward one's physical father, then we would expect repressed animosity toward this father on occasion to be reflected in a hatred of religion. . . . Probably the truest statement would be that on occasion—**

**probably not often--both belief and doubt may reflect unconsciously one's attitude toward one's parent.<sup>83</sup>**

Helfaer's studies affirm evidence of counterproductive home life in his research on doubt. Specifically, Indies an example of one doubter's immature mother, who regularly expressed strong jealousy toward the father.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Helfaer states that the irresponsible behavior of this doubter's father, in part, precipitated religious questioning in the son.<sup>85</sup> To complicate an already unstable parental situation, this doubter confesses that his family was uprooted and moved forty times!<sup>86</sup>

Consider the broader issue of related emotional and psychological trauma arising from the home life. Albert Ellis and Michael Bernard note that whereas it is a myth that "parents are always to blame" for their children's maladjusted condition, "it appears that parents as role models and reinforcing-punishing agents play a major part in preventing, minimizing, or exacerbating emotional and behavioral problems in their children."<sup>87</sup> In this context, Russell M. Grieger and John D. Boyd point out a dozen faulty parenting styles that tend to promote emotional-behavioral problems in their children.<sup>88</sup>

2. Unhealthy religious character. Certain studies show that one significant element of religious life contrasts individuals possessing extrinsic orientation (that is, people who believe because of social group expectations and/or external reward) with those motivated by intrinsic orientation (that is, people who believe because of personal conviction, regardless of external influence). Using this factor, research indicates that usually individuals who are extrinsically motivated are significantly more prejudiced and rigid in their belief system than the intrinsically motivated.<sup>89</sup> In a similar vein, it appears that individuals who are dominated by an external locus of control (that is, they favor the authority and viewpoints of particular people over their own) typically cling to more irrational beliefs than individuals characterized by an internal locus of control.<sup>90</sup>

Using three standardized testing scales, it was discovered also "that a person who endorses irrational beliefs will tend to be dogmatic and also (end to be religious for reasons of social support and external reinforcement."<sup>91</sup> Of these two components (that is, dogmatism and extrinsic religious orientation), dogmatism was found to be "nearly twice as important in predicting" irrationality when compared to the combination of these two components." In this light, Chandler researched adolescents who were "especially susceptible to dogmatic conversion"<sup>91</sup> and noted comparisons between their faith struggles and their newfound cognitive capacity to hypothesize (as well as to doubt). Chandler summarizes his findings by saying that one of his more provocative discoveries was that "such dogmatic views are parasitic upon doubt and carry skepticism as their secret sharer."<sup>94</sup> In short, dogmatism and extrinsically oriented faith simply set people up for an imminent ambush with doubt.

Francis Bacon summarizes this truism when he observes: "If a man will begin with certainties, he shall end in doubts; but if he will be content to begin with doubts; he shall end in certainties."

3. Extreme personality types. Additional research indicates that certain kinds of persons may be more prone to faith questioning than other individuals. A sampling of two of those personality types are discussed below.

"Low-Integration" and "High-Integration" types refer to the extreme cognitive capacities to assimilate and/or accommodate life experiences. In studies conducted by Schroder, Driver, and Steufert, a quartet of cognitive levels were discovered,<sup>95</sup> including the following:

1. Low Complexity Integration—The category for people with mutually-restrictive, black-and-white categories of perception. Here, absolute descriptions such as "all" or "none" are often used to explain life.

2. Moderate Complexity Integration—The category representing "a movement away from absolutism.... Because of the availability of alternate schemata, 'right' and 'wrong' are not [as] fixed."<sup>96</sup> "Black and white" views of life are not as acceptable.

3. Moderately High Complexity--Persons possessing the ability to "vary combinations of alternate schemata. A person ... can simultaneously weigh the effects of taking different views."<sup>97</sup> By way of comparison, this third category of life perceptions demonstrates less frequent compartmentalizations of reality.

4. High Complexity Individuals who typically use "alternate complex combinations [to] provide the potential for relating and comparing different systems of interacting variables [and] the possibility of highly abstract function."<sup>98</sup> In other words, there is both the ability and the desire on the part of these persons to value paradoxes in life.

It appears that for those associated with either of the above two extreme categories, potential for doubt would be greatest. In the first extreme, the categorical "either or" mind-set would be often challenged to reconsider more complex perceptions of reality. Conversely, in the last extreme, the inability to distinguish discrete, cognitive classifications may cause opposite disturbances of doubt—expressed by a call for precision and order and the absence of ambiguity. (A parallel could be drawn between these two extremes and the

earlier-noted cognitive extremes contrasting "accommodation only" versus "assimilation only" thinking.)

A classic, prime suspect for doubt is the personality type known as the "Perfectionist" (technically described as an "obsessive-compulsive" individual). Of this personality, Freud once observed, "Another mental need, which is also shared by obsessional neurotics ... is the need for uncertainty in their life, or for doubt."<sup>1</sup> Freud proceeded to distinguish the perfectionist as one having a self-fulfilling predilection for failure, because they "turn their thoughts by preference to those subjects upon which all mankind are uncertain and upon which our knowledge and judgments must necessarily remain open to doubt."<sup>100</sup>

Erikson's studies likewise led him to encounter the potentially dysfunctional state of perfectionism. Tracing the origin of this mental condition to his theory's early second stage ("Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt"), Erikson brands the maladjustment as a "precocious conscience."<sup>101</sup> Through further elaboration of such an infant's disposition, he suggests that

**instead of willfully appropriating things in order to test them by repetitive play, he will become obsessed by his own repetitiveness and will want to have everything "just so," and only in a given sequence and tempo. By such infantile obsessiveness and procrastination, or by becoming a stickler for ritualistic repetitions, the child then learns to gain power over his parents. . . . Such hollow victory, then, is the infantile model for an adult compulsion neurosis.<sup>102</sup>**

Clinical psychologist James R. Beck claims that this pathological personality type often breeds "extensive doubt, fear, and/or relentless rumination."<sup>103</sup> Moreover, Beck shows that this condition may reside within nonbelievers and believers alike. On the one hand, Beck shows that the obsessive-compulsive, nonreligious individual may be compared to the person who has a nagging sensation that he may have violated a tax law. His fear of impending arrest plagues him. Concerning more philosophical matters, this type of person may also suffer despair from fears revolving around topics of death and the nature of evil.<sup>104</sup>

On the other hand, Beck suggests that the Christian who experiences this unsettling condition may, for example, be continually struggling with a Bible passage that "causes him or her to question status with God and spiritual position and place in the future."<sup>105</sup> Doubting one's conversion experience or questioning whether or not a particular sin has nullified his salvation are quite typical anxieties for this individual.

4. Psychological factors. Webb posits that all "religious experiences fall neatly into two categories."<sup>106</sup> The first (his "Type A") contains experiences that are unexpected and unprovoked by the individual in question. Saul and his Damascus Road conversion would typify this category. The second ("Type B") incorporates all those who actively seek religious enlightenment. The very nature of this latter category, Webb contends, often correlates with certain intentional alterations in biochemical or physical conditions. Drug abuse (even some types of incense), for example, expresses one of the most blatant, causal factors for physiological as well as religious experiential change. Irrespective of his overly simplified dichotomy, Webb still offers believers a sobering word of insight. For his research indicates that less extreme faith practices--even fasting and meditation--are also reported to contribute directly to questioning of faith. Webb convincingly warns that "causing an unusual biochemical state may bring about a change of outlook which can induce doubt."<sup>107</sup>

5. Life events. The Gallup survey mentioned earlier reveals that there are specific experiences that impact faith--times when reappraisals of personal belief are often made. The four life events affecting faith determined to be the most frequently cited by respondents include: (1) experiencing the death of a loved one (86 percent), (2) receiving a promotion or honor on the job (08 percent), (8) having a baby (either as a mother or Hit her; 65 percent), and (4) having a "born again" conversion (31 percent).<sup>108</sup> It is significant to note that actual experience of such a life event (determined by the respondent's reply of either a simple yes or no) is distinguished from the degrees of influence it had in the individual's life (that is, the respondent's choice between being affected "a great deal, some, or not at all"). Consequently, a second set of complementary statistics should be considered. Eighty percent of those who had a "born again" conversion (again, 31 percent of the total respondents) claim that this experience affected them a "great deal"--the highest percentage in the category of "degree" among this quartet of life events.<sup>109</sup> Of that 80-percent figure, 84 percent of the women and 75 percent of the men (yielding a composite of 80 percent) claim that they were greatly affected by their conversion.<sup>110</sup>

Seventy-two percent of those who had a baby claim "a great deal" of impact regarding their reassessment of life's purpose. Fifty-eight percent of those experiencing the loss of a loved one identify the experience as having the highest level of impact, and only 24 percent say that their vocational promotion or honor affected their faith reappraisal to the same degree.<sup>111</sup>

"How?"

Potential Cures For Doubt

Several avenues of counsel may be pursued when attempting to minister to the doubter struggling with faith. The following half dozen suggestions represent just a few of the possible remedies, not meant to stand as iso-

lated pieces of advice for cure. In fact an intentional integration of ideas has been sought, and, for this reason, a selection of insights from both Christian and secular sources were chosen for their therapeutic benefits.

#### Change Misunderstandings About Faith and Doubt

Generally, doubt has been defined as the antithesis of faith, but that is clearly not the truth. As many believers would acknowledge, Towns claims, "I have never met an honest and sincere Christian who has not experienced doubt."<sup>112</sup> Yet something can be said for the confusion that arises, because there are so many misconceptions about faith and doubt. In light of this condition, Creel offers three "noetic perversions of faith." (The word noetic originates from the Greek nous, meaning mind; consequently, Creel refers to the cognitive or intellectual misunderstandings of faith. Without altering Creel's intentions, one could easily expand his topic to read "noetic perversions of faith and doubt").

First is the perversion of dogmatism. "Dogmatism, I am convinced, is the attitude of those who cannot live with the ambiguity of human experience--or who don't see the ambiguity (and not seeing it may be a function of not wanting to see it)."<sup>113</sup> As a follow-up to Towns' testimony, Creel summarizes his studies: "Most of these Christians wanted to believe with all of their hearts, but unanswered questions plague them."<sup>114</sup>

Believers often suffer from one particular root of dogmatism: the tension found in theological paradoxes--two truths that seem to be contradictory but actually coexist, much like parallel rails on a train track. A paradoxical example in Scripture would be Philippians 2:12-13: "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to His good purpose." Here, Paul claims that individual Christians and God Himself are both responsible to pursue the ongoing tasks of salvation. That does not mean that man earns his salvation in any way. But it does point out that regeneration is not an "either/or" matter (that is, God or man) but a "both/and" reality. A person who is overly dogmatic cannot handle this tension and ambiguity. Such a person often suffers from doubt, trying to package Scripture into neat little boxes that never seem to fit.

Perhaps it was this understanding of dogmatism that led the skeptic Voltaire to write, "Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainly is an absurd one."

Next, Creel identifies the intellectual perversion of exclusiveness, explaining to his readers in the second person, "You don't take seriously what the person says who disagrees with you; you only try to figure out how to convert him. If he proves impervious to your appeals and arguments, then you avoid him."<sup>115</sup> In Luke 9:49-50 Jesus rebukes His beloved disciple John, who had earlier restrained someone from casting out a demon. The Lord saw that John's rationale for his restraining actions ("because he is not one of us") was extremely selfish and myopic. Jesus much prefers a far broader category of just two types of people: those "for us" and those "against us." It is fairly easy to see how exclusivistic thinking leads to doubts and false guilt (that is, guilt that comes from man's standards of living, not God's).

Third, Creel points out the perversion of *coercion*: "the willingness to use propaganda or force to make people commit themselves, or at least, say that they are committing themselves, to a certain religious position, whether it be theistic, such as Christianity, or atheistic, such as communism."<sup>116</sup> Implications for doubt are self-evident for this perversion, since coercion fosters an unhealthy and unstable state of commitment--to say nothing of the warped ethics involved.

Again, the Lord's example is instructive here. In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus returns to His homeland, seeking to minister to family and friends. Upon their rejection of Him, the Lord proclaims the now-famous dictum "A prophet is not without honor but in his own country" (v. 4, KJV). In addition, Mark records that the Son of God was limited to healing just "a few sick people" (v. 5) and that "he was amazed at their lack of faith" (v. 6).

The point is foundational: even though this hometown crowd probably included several relatives and friends, Christ refused to manipulate their faith. In fact, His public ministry was quite severely restricted because Jesus affirmed man's freedom to choose or reject Him. His commendable response to Jewish abuse heaped on Him personifies what is recorded of God the Father in Psalm 78:41 concerning the identical, sinful rejection by the Old Testament forefathers: "Again and again they put God to the test and vexed the Holy One of Israel."

#### Emphasize Healthy Thinking

Broadening the first suggested remedy for doubt, results in the second recommended task of comprehensive mental fitness. In secular psychological theory, one prominent example of this remedy is called Rational-Emotive Therapy (R.E.T.). The founder of this theory, Albert Ellis, Executive Director of the Institute of R. E. T. in New York City, describes this discipline of cognitive control by articulating its overriding aims:

**The main subgoals of RET consist of helping people to think more rationally (scientifically, clearly, flexibly); to feel more appropriately; and to act more functionally (efficiently, undefeatingly) in**

## **order to achieve their goals of Jiving longer and more happily.<sup>117</sup>**

By way of appropriation, Salzman employs R. E. T. techniques when he suggests that the obsessive-compulsive individual must "acknowledge that anxiety is universal and omnipresent and cannot be permanently eliminated from life. This means abandoning attempts at perfection and superhuman performance."<sup>118</sup>

Now, it is fair to say (hat the application of R. E. T. in a Christian context is highly controversial--not the least problem of which stems from the fact that the founder confesses to be an avowed atheist.<sup>119</sup> However, moderates in the controversy churn (hat the helpful truths present, within R. E. T. can be therapeutic if they are carefully reinterpreted within the Christian context.<sup>120</sup> For instance, Lawrence and Huber report, that in one particular case scriptural truth could be intricately linked to R. E. T.'s intentional approach of realistic thinking:

**Jane was encouraged to memorize the Bible verses and use them as "instant disputations" when she found herself resorting to her old irrational beliefs about her self. She also incorporated them into her use of the disputation procedure she learned, something which she practiced at least 10 minutes per day in order to maintain and improve her emotional well-being.<sup>121</sup>**

Perhaps one of the clearest demonstrations of the integration between Christian counsel and a modified version of R. E. T. was published in the best seller *Telling Yourself the Truth*, by William Backus and Marie Chapian (Bethany Fellowship, 1980).

## CHECK AUTHORITARIANISM

Whether in the home or in the church, authoritarian leadership inherently dominates its followers, partially causing the "noetic perversions of faith" that Creel describes. As was shown, coercive techniques were not popular with Jesus, nor are they shown to be productive for healthy human development. Piaget, for example, lashes out at such forms of manipulation because of particular research findings:

**It is . . . absurd and even immoral to wish to impose upon the child a fully worked-out system of discipline when the social life of children themselves is sufficiently developed to give; rise to a discipline infinitely nearer to the inner submission which is the model of adult morality. It is idle ... to try to transform the child's mind from outside, when his own taste for active research and his desire for cooperation suffice to ensure a normal intellectual development. The adult must therefore be a collaborator and not a master.<sup>122</sup>**

Wadsworth updates Piaget's discoveries and offers summary advice for parents and teachers who desire to work with--not against--the God-given nature and pal-terns of a child's growth.

**If the goals of education (at home and in school) include the development of sound moral reasoning, cooperation, and autonomy, and if we agree with Piaget's views, we can conclude that the authoritarian model for the relationship between children and adults is a poor one. If children develop moral judgment, cooperation, and self-discipline in an authoritarian environment, it is in spite of, not as a result of, their authoritarian relationship with adults.<sup>123</sup>**

Of course, these insights must not be confined to parent-child or teacher-child relationships. Adult ties (such as those between pastor and parishioner) yield the same payoffs. Consequently, all coercive forms of leadership must be rethought and recast into enabling, collaborative ministries.

## ENCOURAGE SCRUTINY OF FAITH

A twenty-year-old student I know had this to say about using doubt productively: "Use the time of doubts to explore your faith. [Use it] as a time for growing stronger in your faith and knowing what you believe, and why."

Contrary to what might be expected, personal beliefs need to be reassessed from time to time. Only a fairy tale view of faith claims that doubts will not surface if--like a hornet's nest--faith remains undisturbed. Based upon earlier statements of faith and doubt, it is not so much whether faith will be scrutinized (for it will) but how faith will be critiqued. Nurturing leaders of the faith, then, must provide a supportive atmosphere where beliefs can be examined. To this end, Allport offers timely insight to the Christian community. Referring to children who suffer from inadequate guidance during periods of faith questioning, he states:

**Only a child who is assisted in revising his imagery and his theology to accommodate the day-by-day increase in experience could escape the surge of doubt. Conceivably the parent and the church school might do a better job than they do in assisting the child over the successive collisions of belief and experience, and in helping him identify religion with a positive attitude toward life**

**rather than with immature images and interests.**<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, McKenzie calls attention to a trio of specific tasks that perpetuate a careful scrutiny of faith. First, religious roots must be explored to enable the individual to appreciate his heritage and provide a framework for his beliefs. Next, religious tradition must be expanded by adapting it to personal life experiences. Without accomplishing this task, heritage becomes irrelevant. Finally--and most important in McKenzie's mind--believers need assistance in the faith-critique process. The author reasons, "If the unexamined life is not worth living, neither is the unexamined faith. ... It is only by means of critical reflection on and evaluation of one's religious commitment that faith becomes truly personal and more than a mere submission to religious convention."<sup>125</sup>

What is required demands more than mere lecturing about religious catechism. Far beyond prescribed religious instruction, careful scrutiny involves instructional movement over and above formal sets of questions put to growing believers. Rather, honest dialogue with learners meets the challenge of relevant, sometimes impromptu, concerns. Also, unlike most catechetical instruction, the careful scrutiny of faith must involve adults as well as children. Again, McKenzie provides meaningful suggestions concerning such an adult ministry. Along with his contemporary assessment, he offers a word of caution to the church:

**It should not be forgotten, however, that the critical appraisal of meaning structures is a process that is an integral part of many adult lives. We cannot effectively forbid adults to be critical. . . . Critical inquiry need not be adversarial, mean-spirited, or filled with the hubris that characterizes contemporary agnostic scientism. Critical inquiry can be undertaken constructively or destructively. It is the task of the religious educator to help adults understand this difference.**<sup>126</sup>

Perry Downs of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School echoes the sentiments of McKenzie. Specifically addressing his insights to ministry with adolescents, Downs suggests that the church can serve its doubting youth in three ways. First, a nurturing "context" must be established, or young people might, seek alternate avenues to express their faith questions. "The provision of this context is not as much a matter of program as it is one of attitude"<sup>127</sup>--an emphatic "I've been there before, myself" attitude. The attitude demonstrates that raising faith questions is not atypical. ,

Second, concrete answers must be given to at least some of the questions of doubt that are raised. Downs calls for youth staff to have a working knowledge of apologetics (a rational defense of Christianity) geared to the level of adolescent development. Youth need not only "the security of knowing that others have raised these questions" but the assurance "that satisfactory answers are available."<sup>128</sup>

Finally, Downs stresses the point that those who deal with adolescents

**must provide for [them] a true Christian experience. ... If the youth group is a place . . . where the presence of God is felt, the teenager has a basis beyond the intellectual to believe. This would not be very helpful to the doubting adult, but it is quite powerful for the adolescent.**<sup>129</sup>

Indeed, the strongest statement that Downs makes to this end of assisting youth through their doubts comes as he concludes that "each of the major theorists who deal with the ministry questions that are related to faith development support these strategies."<sup>130</sup> (Among the theorists which Downs had earlier critiqued included James Fowler and John Westerhoff.)

Reinforcing several of these factors pertinent to faith scrutiny comes a vibrant personal testimony by one of the daughters of the late Francis Schaeffer. When Susan Schaeffer Macauley was eleven years old, she experienced a run-in with doubt that she never forgot. (Remember Fowler's "eleven-year-old atheism"?) More significantly, she had a subsequent run-in with her father even more unforgettable.

Picking weeds one day in the family garden with her two sisters, Debby and Priscilla, Susan started thinking aloud concerning her faith. In their hot, tired, and crabby condition, tempers flared over theological themes. Finally, one of the sisters challenged Susan, saying that her faith questioning illustrated a poor Christian testimony to villagers passing by.

"Well, I'm not a Christian anymore!" Susan retorted. "I don't believe any of it!"

Needless to say, the dramatic reaction of shocked silence was even more than the preteen intended or imagined.

That momentous scene repeated itself inside Susan's young head all afternoon, like a videotape set on automatic rewind and playback. Following the initial shock to even her own system, the questions just would not cease. What did she really believe?



Susan was convinced that her public denial would soon be raised again by her sisters. It was just a matter of time and place. Suspense was short-lived.

**At the supper table, Priscilla announced, "Susan says she isn't a Christian."**

**By then I didn't feel like denying her words, even though I could see that my mother looked sad. I was sad, too, for I felt as if I had lost God and His love. I wasn't sure that there even was a God.**

**But I was also determined. I couldn't believe in fairy tales! I had to grow up.**

**That easily could have been my last day of knowing God was there, and that I was safe in the order He had provided. It could have been the death of my faith.**

**Or it could have been the end of my progress into thinking as an adult. All it would have taken was a comment like, "Of course you're a Christian, Susan," or, "You're only eleven; you don't know what you're saying," or, "Don't be foolish--it's obvious that the Bible is true."**

**But something else happened instead. That night when I was ready for bed, alone and quiet in my room, my father came in.**

**"Let's talk, Susan," he said seriously. "Tell me why you said you are no longer a Christian."**

**I confessed that I'd first said the words because I was mad. "But as soon as I said it, I was scared." I explained. "I can't call myself a Christian! All this time, I've only believed it because you and mother told me about it. Now I'll have to wait and see if it's true or not. Maybe the other religions are true. Or maybe there isn't even a God at all!"**

**There was a moment of silence. I still remember the quiet, friendly companionship in the atmosphere when my dad finally answered me. "Susan," he said, "those are good questions. I'm glad you've asked them."**

**What a relief! That dizzy, lonely feeling left me. It was OK to ask questions! It was important for me to find out for myself if what I'd believed was true.**

**As we talked that night, I discovered that my dad had asked these same questions about God in his own search for answers. Dad opened the door for me into a new adventure. He said that I didn't have to go through life with a blindfold on my mind to believe in God, merely clinging to hopes and feelings. Neither did I have to throw my beliefs out the window.**

**If something is true, he explained, you can look at it hard, and think about it, and compare it with other beliefs, and it will stand. It will be reliable.**

**I decided to do just that.<sup>131</sup>**

#### RESPECT CHOICE AND OWNERSHIP

Closely affiliated with the subject of scrutiny is freedom of choice. As individuals investigate what it is that they believe (as opposed to what they are told to believe), caring leadership would do well to value and encourage personal faith ownership. Substantial research indicates that the twin process of self-evaluation and individual affirmation not only possess inherent and immediate virtue but provide necessary innovation for the perseverance of future faith. To this end, respected psychologist David Elkind, elaborating on Piaget's theory, suggests that "it is the child who must, at any given point in time, choose the method of learning and materials that are reinforcing to him."<sup>132</sup> Addressing the negative dimension of this educational premise, Elkind continues, "Without the opportunity for student choice and the provision of large blocks of time, in which the child can totally engross himself in an activity, the values of intrinsic motivation will not be realized."<sup>133</sup>

Wadsworth refers to this matter of choice and selection as "spontaneous interest"--unique reflections of individual preference, often accompanying signs of personal disequilibrium.<sup>134</sup> It simply boils down to the fact that everybody prizes participation in areas of personal choice. And faith is no exception. When we "buy into" the ownership of our faith, it is immensely stronger than an inherited--or surrogate--faith.

The apostle Paul speaks of the value of faith ownership, using such synonyms as personal conscience and conviction. In Romans 14, rather than winning popularity votes by judging certain cultural controversies as

either good or bad, Paul prefers to lay down principles whereby believers can "agree to disagree" with one another. The most prominent principle to surface from this approach is the imperative of personal faith ownership. The apostle challenges individual members of his mature Roman congregation to continually ask themselves, "What is it that I really believe?" and then to live by those heartfelt convictions. Three principles stand out: (1) "Each man should be fully convinced in his own mind" (v. 5); (2) "I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself. But if anyone regards something as unclean, then for him it is unclean" (v. 14); and (3) "But the man who has doubts [i.e., who does not have the personal conviction] is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith [or conviction]; and everything that does not come from faith [or conviction] is sin" (v. 23).<sup>135</sup>

#### UTILIZE SOURCES OF SUPPORT

Analogous to the planned rehearsal of fire drill procedures in a public facility, research shows that most people tend to have a game plan when private faith is questioned. Doubt "escape exits"--so to speak--include a combination of personal, interpersonal, and supernatural sources. The 1985 Gallup survey uncovers various forms of those game plans as interviewers raised the question, "When you are faced with a problem or crisis, like those in the previous question [i.e., the "life events" noted earlier], to which of the following kinds of support would you likely turn for help?" The question was then supplemented by nine suggestions from the research staff.<sup>136</sup> Though limited by the convergent-type format of those nine areas of support, the answers of the respondents were balanced. Most people chose interpersonal forms of support: 87 percent, say they would seek refuge for their faith struggles within their family, and 73 percent state they would share their problem with close friends. A far lower number claim they would go to a religious counselor (40 percent), see another type of professional counselor (31 percent), or discuss the matter with a support group (26 percent) or a religious class (23 percent).

One young man recently told me how an assistant dean at his college inadvertently dropped in to see him only minutes before he intentionally planned to commit suicide by drug overdose. This is how he told his story:

**God intervened [and] brought my Assistant. Dean into my room to just say "Hi" and give me a hug. That was all it took to make me realize that God wanted me to stay alive and that. He really would help me with the pain and confusion [of doubt] inside. ... A big factor a listening ear, empathy, comfort and acceptance of me and my feelings.**

Many students have communicated with me how invaluable the interpersonal form of support really is--a nonnegotiable factor for most who mention this theme. On the negative side, one middle-aged woman recalled her doubting experience from eleven years ago. She confided, "No one helped. I quit church for a couple of years."

On a more positive note, a younger woman offered this testimony: "During my mother's illness and death, family struggles, and breakup of a personal friendship, the family that I lived with just listened to me, loved me, and continually affirmed that 'God is good find what Ho does is good.'"

A twenty-nine-year-old man chimed in: "I saw someone loved me, just as I am--someone showed that he saw some value in me."

Just to keep us "church professionals" humble, another young man spoke of his salvation six years ago, with ensuing doubts: "[In looking back] I was amazed to see how little influence counselors, pastors, and leaders seemed to have had in my life regarding major decisions. ... I never met a 'professional Christian.'"

A high percentage responded that they would opt for supernatural assistance: 80 percent testified that they would pray about their faith struggle, and 64 percent said that they would read the Bible or other inspirational literature. (Comparing subgroups, it was found that 87 percent of nonwhite respondents as opposed to 61 percent of white respondents made the latter choice.)

Also, as much as 80 percent admitted to valuing a personal form of support, for example, to working out the problem on their own.<sup>137</sup>

#### Summary

Numerous statements have been offered concerning the nature of faith and doubt. Some of the more salient conclusions of this particular overview have been the following: Questioning faith is a worldwide human phenomenon; it is not restricted to religious or nonreligious persons. Doubt should be viewed from the larger perspective of holistic development; cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual growth all play a part in the complete picture of maturation. There are different types of doubt, some forms of which may be highly beneficial for faith formation. Because of its genetic (and generic) nature, doubt surfaces within people of all age groups; however, because of its multifaceted nature, it must be addressed as a unique, case-specific

activity. Also, the Christian home, church, and school need to produce more knowledgeable and sensitive leaders who will ably assist its membership during difficult times of doubt.

In conclusion, Leon McKenzie's earlier quotation deserves reconsideration, for it succinctly capsulates the truth-kernel of Christian doubt and what can be done about it:

**We come into the world with question marks in our heads. . . . The question marks in our heads are never fully erased. The religious educator, particularly the religious educator of adults, can help learners in the quest that is mandated by a seeking faith. . . . We cannot effectively forbid adults to be critical. Willy-nilly, many adults will subject their childhood beliefs to critical analysis in spite of exhortations to the contrary. Further, it is better to help adults appraise religious tradition from within the confines of the church than to fail by default and allow them to critique religious teachings outside the context of the church.**<sup>138</sup>

#### Endnotes--Appendix

1. G. W. Allport. *The Individual and His Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 113.
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3. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
4. *Ibid.* p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
8. *Early Latin Theology*, vol. 5 of *Library of Christian Classics*, trans. and ed. S. L. Greenslade (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1956). p. 38.
9. Leon McKenzie, "The Purpose and Scope of Adult Religious Education," in *Handbook of Adult Religious Education*, ed. Nancy Foltz. (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education, 1986). p. 11.
10. Michael Chandler, "The Othello Effect: Essay on the Emergence and Eclipse of Skeptical Doubt," in *Human Development* 30 (1987): 138.
11. Philip M. Helfaer, *The Psychology of Religious Doubt* (Boston: Beacon, 1972), p. 11.
12. Allport, p. 83.
13. Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963). p. 131.
14. Hugh D. Alien, "Doubt as Discontinuity in Religious Life," M.A. thesis, Vanderbilt, Nashville, 1968, p. 1.
15. Elmer L. Towns, "The Ministry of Doubt," *The Evangelical Beacon*, September 28, 1965, p. 6.
16. Barth, p. 123.
17. Allport, p. 114.
18. Towns, p. 6.
19. Philip Phenix, "Transcendence and the Curriculum," in *Curriculum Theorizing*, ed. William Pinar (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 1975), p. 331.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. Alien, p. 40.
23. M. Jamie Ferreira, *Doubt and Religious Commitment* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1980), p. 3.
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26. Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press. 1957), 2:73.116.
27. Roger Trigg, *Reason and Commitment* (Cambridge. England: Cambridge U. Press. 1973), p. 46.
28. See Richard E. Creel, *Religion and Doubt* (Englewood Cliffs. N. .1.: Prentice-Hall. 1977). p. 82.
29. Towns, p. 7.
30. Creel, p. 70.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Faith Development and Your Ministry*, p. 23.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
37. See James E. Marcia's "Identity in Adolescence," in J. Adelson, ed., *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 1980).
38. James E. Marcia, "Development and Validation of Ego-Identity Status," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 3, no. 5 (1966):551 -58.
39. Allport, p. 120.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 122-23.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
45. *Ibid.*, p. 135.
46. See Jean Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children* (New York: International Universities, 1963).
47. Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget for the Classroom Teacher* (New York: Longmans, 1978), p. 146. See also Leon Festinger's complementary view of disequilibrium in his *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford U. Press, 1962), especially his summary on p. 260.

48. See Russell M. Grieger and John D. Boyd, "Childhood Anxieties, Fears, and Phobias," in *Rational-Emotive Approaches to the Problems of Childhood*, ed. Albert Ellis and Michael E. Bernard (New York: Plenum, 1983).
49. *Ibid.*, p. 222.
50. See pp. 223-27 in Grieger and Boyd.
51. Helfaer, p. 163.
52. See Lawrence Kohlberg, "The Cognitive-Developmental Approach to Moral Education," in *Moral Development. ... It Comes with the Territory*, ed. David Purpel and Kevin Ryan (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan, 1976), pp. 215-16. Later revisions of Kohlberg's research tend to modify Stage 6 or delete it altogether.
53. See Fowler's *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981). Especially note chap. 13. "Structural-Developmental Theories and Faith." This chapter is designed to summarize contributions Fowler has gleaned from other theories, but it also—in Fowler's own words—points out "some of the limitations of their approaches for our project and says some things about how we are trying to correct or go beyond these limits" (p. 98).
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55. *Ibid.*
56. *Ibid.*
57. Helfaer, p. 126.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
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60. Mark O. Webb, "Religious Experience as Doubt Resolution." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 18 (1985): 83.
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62. See Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).
63. Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968). p. 110.
64. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
66. Barry J. Wadsworth, *Piaget's Theory of Cognitive and Affective Development*, 3d ed. (New York: Longmans, 1984), p. 116.
67. Chandler, p. 150.
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71. Chandler, p. 150.
72. See B. Inhelder and J. Piaget. *The Growth of Logical Thinking* (London: Routledge & Kegan, 1958).
73. Chandler, p. 146.
74. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
75. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, p. 112.
76. Helfaer, p. 8.
77. See Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (New York: Norton. 1958).
78. Helfaer. pp. 125-26.
79. *Ibid.*, pp. 106-7.
80. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17; 24-25; 52-56.
82. To state this same category in a positive manner, Jeffrey Hadden and Robert Evans have demonstrated that students who come from more religiously active homes tend to continue that religious activity in college. See their article "Some Correlates of Religious Participation Among College Freshmen," *Religious Education* 60 (July-August 1965): p. 284. Also, Joseph Havens found that students with stronger religious backgrounds tend to have fewer severe conflicts in their Faith. See his article "The Changing Climate of Research on the College Student and His Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 3 (Fall 1963): 59.
83. Helfaer, p. 118.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 126, 220-21.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 109.
87. Albert Ellis and Michael E. Bernard, "An Overview of Rational Emotive Approaches to the Problems of Childhood," in *Rational-Emotive Approaches to the Problems of Childhood*, ed. Albert Ellis and Michael E. Bernard (New York: Plenum, 1983), p. 23.
88. Grieger and Boyd, pp. 220-22.
89. See G. W. Allport and J. Ross, "Personal Orientation and Prejudice," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967): 432-43. Also see J. Feagin, "Prejudice and Religious Types: A Focused Study of Southern Fundamentalism," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 4 (1964): 3-13.
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106. Webb, p. 81.
107. Ibid., p. 84.
108. Faith Development and Your Ministry, p. 27.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid., p. 39.
111. Ibid., p. 27.
112. Towns, p.6.
113. Creel, p. 86.
114. Towns, p. 6.
115. Creel, p. 86.
116. Ibid., p. 87.
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120. See "Comparisons: Christianity and Rationality," by Paul A. Hauck and F. Grau. Rational Living 3, no. 2: 30-37.
121. Lawrence and Huber, p. 212.
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133. Ibid.
134. See Wadsworth's Piaget for the Classroom Teacher.
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136. Faith Development and Your Ministry, p. 29.
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138. McKenzie, pp. 11-12.