

THE CHRISTIAN MIND

LESSON 7:

Why Do You Doubt?

MEN OF THE WORD

November 10, 2021



doubt

Merriam-Webster:

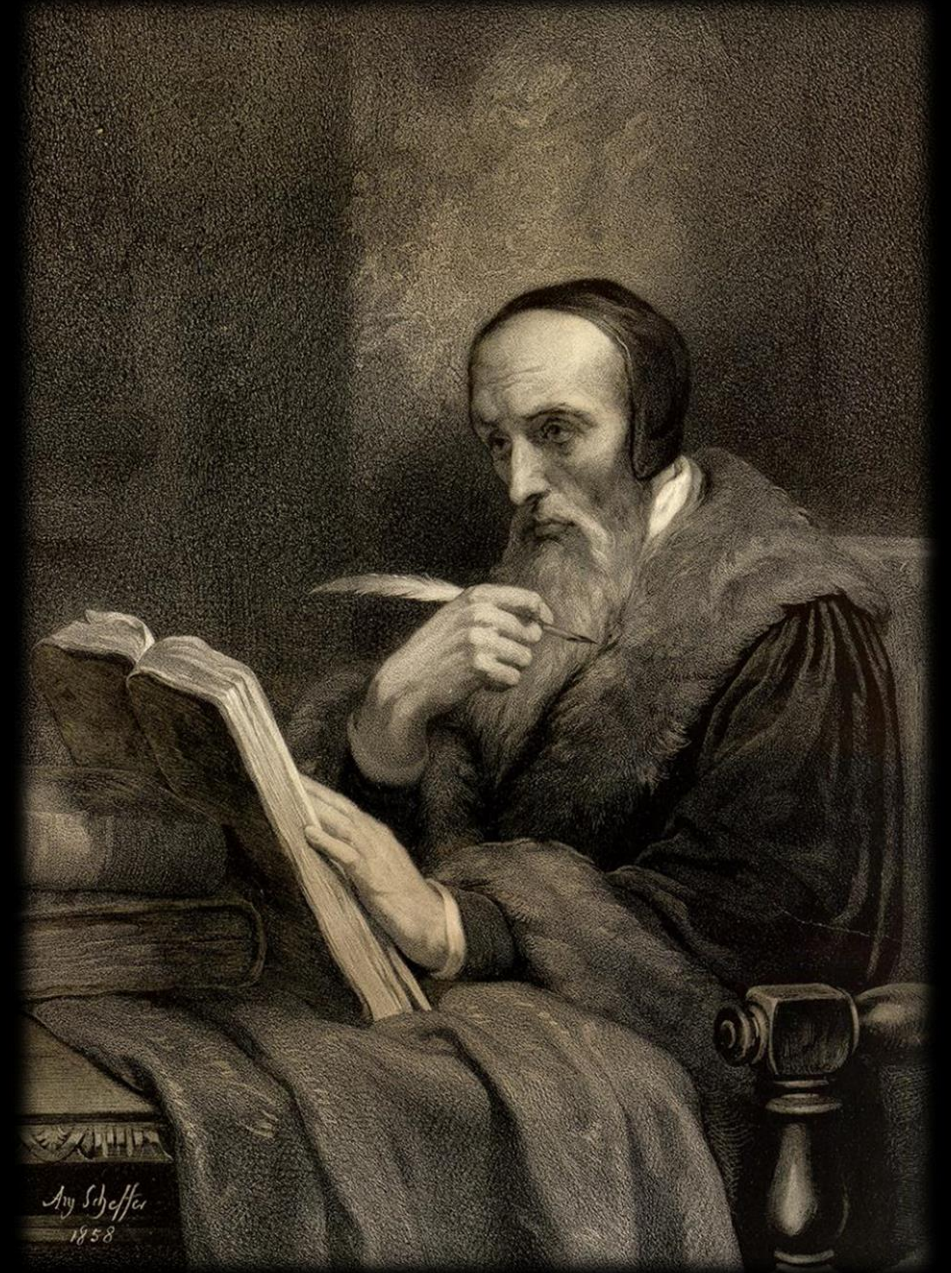
- (1) “to be uncertain about (something): to believe that (something) may not be true or is unlikely”
- (2) “to have no confidence in (someone or something)”

Simple Summary:

“the absence of certainty”

“Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety.”

—Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.17





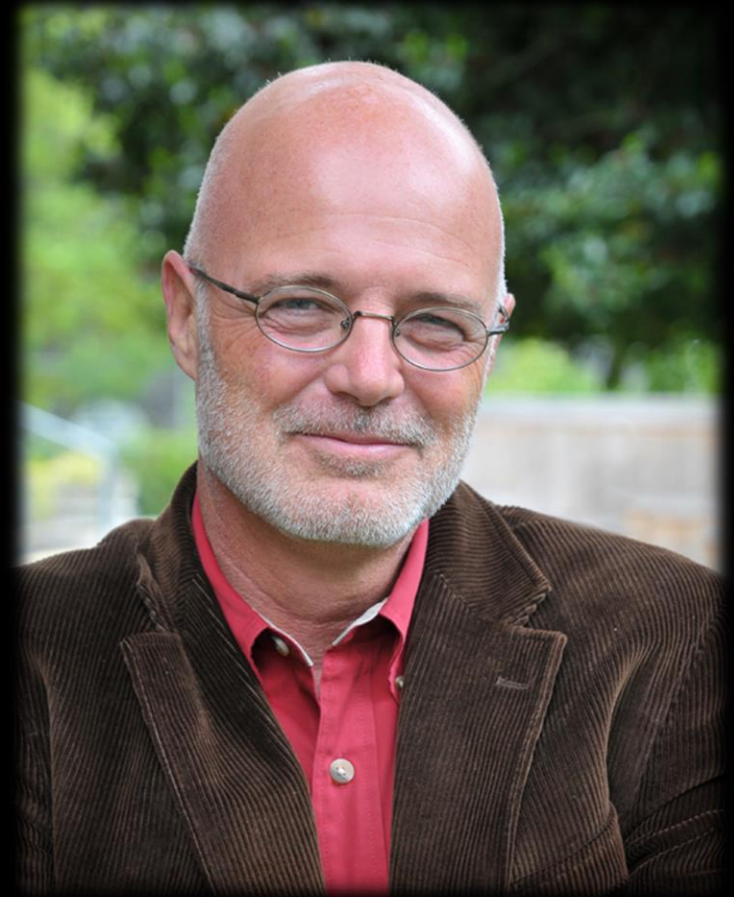
“I must confess here, with sorrow, that I have seasons of despondency and depression of spirit, which I trust none of you are called to suffer, and at such times I have doubted my interest in Christ, my calling, my election, my perseverance, my Savior’s blood, and my Father’s love. . . . The fact is, the children of God do doubt and fear, I am sorry to say . . . but when we doubt it is sin. . . .

“Oh, cursed sin of unbelief! Most damnable of sins, because it so stains God’s honor, and so makes the enemy to blaspheme. ‘There,’ say they, ‘there is a man who cannot trust his God; a minister who cannot trust his God; a Christian that cannot repose upon the promise of the Almighty.’”

—Spurgeon, “The Glorious Right Hand of the Lord,” Feb 24, 1861

“Doubt need not be the death of faith.
It can be, instead, the birth of a new
kind of faith, a faith beyond beliefs, a
faith that expresses itself in love, a
deepening and expanding faith that
can save your life and save the world.”

—Brian McLaren, *Faith after Doubt*, 212



- A correct understanding of *doubt* cannot be forged upon the anvil of human experience, logic, or intuition.
- Our personal experience with doubt has spawned all kinds of assumptions and self-justifications.
- A correct understanding of *doubt* must be developed from the teaching of God's word, and when look to Scripture, we find a predominantly *negative view* of doubt.

1. Doubt as the Foe of Faith

- **Matthew 14:28–33 (esp. v. 31)** – “Peter said to Him, ‘Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.’ And He said, ‘Come!’ And Peter got out of the boat, and walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But seeing the wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ Immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, ‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ When they got into the boat, the wind stopped. And those who were in the boat worshiped Him, saying, ‘You are certainly God’s Son!’”

- **Romans 4:18–22 (esp. v. 20)** – “In hope against hope he [Abraham] believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, ‘SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.’ Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver [lit. doubt] in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

- **James 1:5–8 (esp. v. 6)** – “But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, *being* a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

- **John 20:25–29** – “So the other disciples were saying to him, ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.’ After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, ‘Peace *be* with you.’ Then He said to Thomas, ‘Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to Him, ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed *are* they who did not see, and *yet* believed.’”

- These texts lead to several summary observations:
 - Indeed, doubt is a common experience, even among close followers of Christ (Peter, Thomas).
 - However, doubt as a response to God's word or His ability is the antithesis of biblical faith.
 - Such doubt sets man's senses, reason, or intuition in opposition to the authority of divine revelation.



“The Bible presents doubt largely in negative terms. It is a spiritual impediment, an obstacle to doing God’s work

In Matthew 14:31 and Romans 14:23 it is the opposite of faith and therefore is a sin. Of course, this sin, like other sins, may remain with us through our earthly lives. But we should not be complacent about it. Just as the ideal for the Christian life is perfect holiness, the idea for the Christian mind is absolute certainty about God’s revelation.”

—Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 217

2. Doubt as the Servant of Faith

- Is there any room for uncertainty, for asking hard questions and the posture of suspicion?
- Yes, but it is doubt aimed at a particular target—*self*.
- **Proverbs 3:5–7** – “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil.”



- **Romans 12:16b** – “Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”
- **James 4:13–17** – “Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit.’ Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. Instead, *you ought* to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and also do this or that.’ But as it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Therefore, to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.”

- **Job 42:1–6** – “Then Job answered the LORD and said, ‘I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted. “Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?” Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. “Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask You, and You instruct me.” I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, and I repent in dust and ashes.’”
- **Psalms 139:23–24** – “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”

- These texts lead to several additional observations:
 - Doubt is beneficial when it reflects a lack of certainty (an awareness of inadequacy) in *oneself*.
 - Doubt is virtue when it moves the doubter in the right direction—to a greater hunger for God's truth and not to a deeper despair of life.



“We should not conclude, however, that doubt is *always* sinful. . . . To doubt what God has clearly spoken to us is wrong. But in other cases, in fact, it is wrong for us to claim knowledge, much less certainty. Indeed, often the best course is to admit our ignorance.”

—Frame, *Salvation Belongs to the Lord*, 217

3. Doubt as the Expression of Faith

- Not only are we to refuse putting certainty in our own flesh (reason, intuition, senses), we are called upon to scrutinize all that is *less* than God's word.
- Any claim to truth, any proposed narrative of reality, or any assertion about right or wrong, should be scrutinized by a *sanctified* critical judgment.
- Such judgment views all of life through the lens of God's word, presupposing it as ultimate authoritative truth. It takes the lordship of Christ in all things *seriously*.

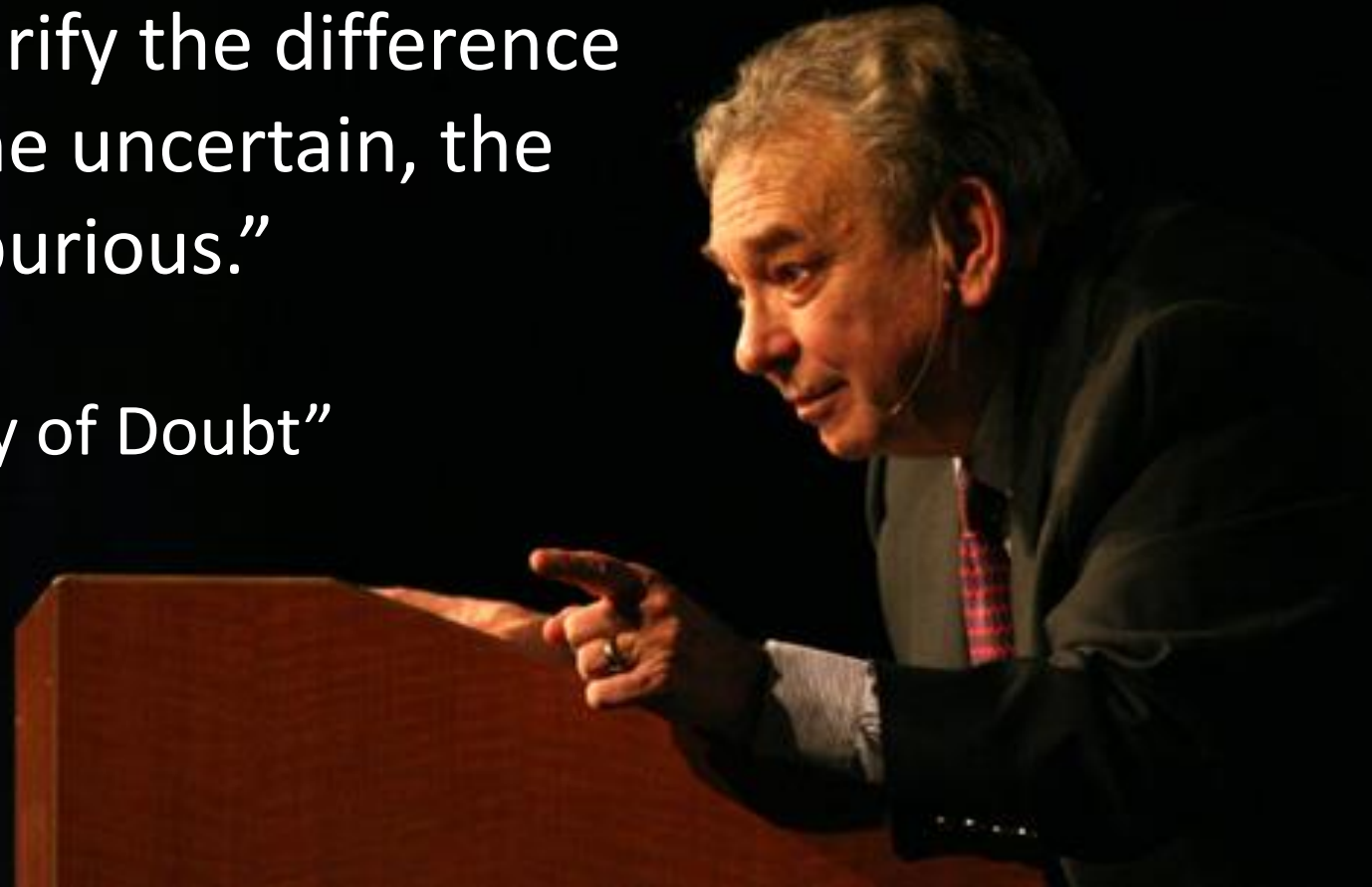
- **2 Corinthians 10:5** – “*We are* destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and *we are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”
- **Colossians 2:8** – “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.”
- **1 John 4:1** – “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but **test** the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

- These texts lead to additional observations:
 - Scrutiny is the necessary first response to any human assertion about reality, morality, or beauty.
 - God has given us His word and the power of critical reasoning in order to resist being taken captive to the false narratives and fanciful lies of this world.



“Doubt can appear as a servant of truth. Indeed, it is the champion of truth when it wields its sword against what is properly dubious. It is a citadel against credulity. Authentic doubt has the power to sort out and clarify the difference between the certain and the uncertain, the genuine and the spurious.”

—Sproul, “The Anatomy of Doubt”



How do I determine the benefit/validity of my doubt?

Consider its object. *What is it that is doubted?*

Consider its direction. *Toward what is it moving?*

Consider its foundation. *Upon what authority is it operating?*

Consider its motivation. *What is providing its energy?*

How then shall we respond?

1. Doubt the Right Things

- There is an enormous need for critical thinking today, especially as the culture heads into totalitarianism.
- The power of others to influence your thinking has never been greater.
- But healthy skepticism should not only be our response to those who control the narrative; it should be our response to our own feelings.

2. Submit to the Right Authority

- When we doubt, we look for the right authority to validate or invalidate a claim to truth.
- For critical thinking to be healthy and helpful, it must appeal to and embrace the right authority—an unassailable authority that cannot be judged or questioned.
- That authority is God's word—not intuition, reason, feelings, traditions, or _____.

“A true disciple inquires not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason, but whether it is in the book. His pride has yielded to the Divine testimony. Teacher, your pride is still unbroken. Break down your pride, and yield to the word of God.”

—Adoniram Judson, 19th century missionary to Burma



3. Affirm the Right Faith

- Faith is the embrace of God's promises on the simple basis that *He* has made them, not on the basis of subjective verification.
- **Hebrews 11:1** – “Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”
- **Romans 4:18–22** – Abraham looked at himself and Sarah, then looked at God's promise of a son, and believed God's promise—despite the rational, intuitive, and rational reasons not to.

“Faith is not a blind thing; for faith begins with knowledge. It is not a speculative thing; for faith believes facts of which it is sure. It is not an unpractical, dreamy thing; for faith trusts, and stakes its destiny upon the truth of revelation.”

—Charles Spurgeon



4. Appeal to the Right Help

- Address your struggle with doubt to the only One who can give true certainty: God!
- **Mark 9:20-24** – “. . . But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!’ And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’” All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’”
- **1 Peter 5:6–7** – “Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”



“Doubting does not prove that a man has no faith, but only that his faith is small. And even when our faith is small, the Lord is ready to help us.”

—J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospel of Matthew*, 170

5. Provide the Right Ministry

- Those who struggle with certainty—not as it relates to the trustworthiness of Scripture but to the trustworthiness of their own profession—must be the objects of our merciful concern.
- **Jude 20-23 (v. 22)** – “But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh.”

He Will Hold Me Fast

When I fear my faith will fail,
Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail,
He will hold me fast.
I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold;
He must hold me fast.

He will hold me fast,
He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so,
He will hold me fast.

MEN OF THE WORD

Wednesdays 7:00-9:00 PM

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Use the QR code below to submit a question pertaining to this MotW session. We will use these questions to produce additional resources to help provide you with the answers you need.



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