

## Understanding and Addressing Doubt

By [C. Michael Patton](#)

Doubt is a natural part of the Christian life. It is something nearly all believers face at one time or another. Whether it is emotional, intellectual, or a combination of both, identifying the source of your doubt is the first step toward finding peace. Below are key questions to help you process your doubt and work toward clarity.

### 1. What Are You Doubting?

There are three primary things people tend to doubt:

- Their salvation
- God's love for them
- Fundamental issues of the faith

Included with the doubt of salvation is a common sub-category: the belief that you have committed the unforgivable sin. This is an especially prevalent fear among those with scrupulosity, a form of OCD that can make such doubts feel all-consuming.

If you are doubting a fundamental issue of faith, it is helpful to specify which one. For example, do you doubt:

- The reliability of Scripture?
- The reality of Hell?
- The exclusivity of Christ?
- The existence of God?

Many times, these doubts are not based on intellectual arguments but arise from emotional discomfort. For example, people often struggle with Hell or Christ's exclusivity because it feels harsh or incompatible with their understanding of fairness. While this doesn't invalidate the doubt, it does help pinpoint its origin and inform how to address it.

### 2. Why Are You Doubting?

It's okay not to know why you're doubting—most people don't. Doubt is often emotional, much like sadness during depression, and its causes may be unclear or even misdiagnosed. Still, identifying patterns or triggers can be helpful.

### Others' Impact

- Is there anyone in your life—perhaps a Christian friend, parent, child, pastor, or spiritual mentor—who has recently stumbled or lost their faith?
- Can you trace the beginnings of your doubt to this timeframe?

We often underestimate how much our faith is influenced by the people around us. When someone we respect falters, it can shake our own beliefs. This isn't a sign of weak faith but a reminder that we are deeply interconnected as a community of believers.

### **Struggles or Loss**

- Have you experienced significant tragedies in your life?
- What credit do you give God for these events, and what blame do you assign to Him?

Even if a tragedy isn't recent, it could still be affecting your current state of doubt. Sometimes unresolved pain from years past builds up until it feels overwhelming, causing us to question God's goodness or presence in our lives.

### **Domestic Changes or Struggles**

- Have there been any major life changes recently? For instance:
  - A new job or financial struggles?
  - Problems in your marriage or a recent divorce?
  - An overwhelming workload or responsibilities?

Stressful circumstances can create a perfect emotional storm, spilling into every area of life, including your spiritual health.

## **3. Personality: Are You Naturally Inclined to Doubt?**

Our personalities play a significant role in how we process doubt. Some people are naturally more laid-back and patient, while others tend to be intense and compulsive. To illustrate:

*“How many licks does it take for you to get to the center of a Tootsie Pop?”*

If you're familiar with the old commercial, you'll remember that the owl couldn't resist biting into the Tootsie Pop after just three licks. Or, I suppose a more modern example might be:

*“How long does it take you to binge-watch a season of your favorite show?”*

If you're the kind of person who finishes an entire season in one sitting, you might lean toward an intense, driven personality type. On the other hand, if you

space out episodes over a week or more, you may have a more laid-back and patient approach to things.

This difference in personality traits can influence how we handle uncertainty and unresolved questions in our faith. Intense individuals may struggle more with unanswered doubts, feeling an *urgent* need to resolve them immediately, while laid-back individuals might find it easier to live with uncertainty for longer periods. Recognizing these tendencies in yourself can help you better understand how you process doubt and develop strategies to manage it effectively.

#### **4. Could It Be Scrupulosity?**

It's important to consider whether your doubt might be linked to a mental health condition called **scrupulosity**, a form of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) that focuses on religious or moral concerns. Scrupulosity can make it difficult to differentiate between genuine doubt and obsessive thoughts.

Signs of scrupulosity include:

- Intense, intrusive thoughts or feelings that you have committed the unforgivable sin, even when there is no clear evidence of wrongdoing.
- A compulsive need for certainty about salvation, faith, or forgiveness.
- Repeatedly asking the same questions or performing rituals to “feel right” with God (e.g., constant prayers for salvation or excessive Bible reading for reassurance).
- Persistent feelings of guilt or fear that you've unknowingly sinned.

A hallmark of scrupulosity is that any relief you find from addressing these fears is temporary. The doubt or fear inevitably returns, often stronger than before. This cycle can become exhausting and make it difficult to focus on anything else. If your doubt feels like a relentless mental loop, it may be more about managing OCD than resolving a spiritual crisis. Professional therapy, particularly Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) with Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), can be extremely helpful in these cases.

#### **5. Are You Doubting for the First Time?**

It's also helpful to ask whether this is your first experience with doubt or part of a recurring pattern.

- If this is a new experience, it may be tied to a specific life event or a period of spiritual growth that has forced you to wrestle with new questions.
- If it's a recurring issue, you may want to explore whether your doubt tends to arise during times of stress, change, or emotional struggle.

#### **Conclusion: Doubt as an Opportunity**

Doubt is not inherently bad. It can serve as an opportunity for growth, prompting us to wrestle with our faith and ultimately emerge stronger. However, understanding the root of your doubt—whether it's emotional, intellectual, circumstantial, or related to scrupulosity—is essential to addressing it effectively.

Remember, you don't have to navigate doubt alone. Seek support from trusted spiritual mentors, community members, or professionals who can help you process these feelings in a healthy and constructive way.

If scrupulosity is part of your struggle, know that this is not a sign of weak faith but a condition that requires specific tools and care. With proper treatment and spiritual guidance, you can learn to break free from the relentless cycle of fear and move toward a faith rooted in God's love and grace.

*C. Michael Patton (Th.M. Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001) started the Credo House (formally, Reclaiming the Mind Ministries) in 2006.*

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill). If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

#### **Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine***

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).