

# “How Do I Deal With Emotional Doubt?”

Hello Mr. Gleghorn,

I was reading your [web page about doubt](#) and agree with all of it. However, I noticed you didn't cover the topic of emotional doubt.

I have been a believer since 1994. If I examine any argument against God, I know the truth, yet I still get this nagging feeling that says, “Are you sure there is a God?” “What if all this is fairy tale?”... So I go to all the arguments and prove to myself the Bible is true and am comforted, but it doesn't last.. the same feelings come again and again... and I know they are just emotion and I can answer them with facts and yet the doubt feeling continues. . .

I just want that confidence I used to have. . . I am not living in sin (not that I know of) and I want to serve the Lord with all my heart. What do I do to stop this incessant doubt feeling???

Since you found my article, you are probably already familiar with the work of Dr. Gary Habermas. If not, he's probably the first person that I would direct you to for dealing with emotional doubt. Here's the link to his website: [www.garyhabermas.com](http://www.garyhabermas.com)

And here's a link to resources that came up from his website when I entered in the topic “emotional doubt” [here](#).

Finally, I also typed the topic into Google and some other resources featuring Habermas came up [here](#).

Now concerning your question, it may be the case that these “feelings” will plague you for years. Of course, the Lord

might suddenly deliver you from this, but it may also be part of His plan for you to struggle with these feelings for some time. If so, then it seems to me that some of the most important things that you can do (and you're already doing many of them) are the following:

1. Spend time with the Lord in His word and prayer, listening to music, praising and worshipping Him—or, if you're the more contemplative type, meditating on His attributes (particularly, His goodness and love).

2. Spend time with God's people. Be involved in a good, Bible-believing local church and get involved in at least one small group as well (maybe a men's group). You've already learned that God's people aren't perfect, so you won't have unrealistic expectations. Nevertheless, the people of God can be a great help to one another in mutual encouragement and support (which we all need) as we walk through the Christian life day by day. Ask these people to join you in praying about your doubts and discouragement.

3. Recognize that these feelings may, at least in part, be "spiritual warfare"—and be prepared to fight against them. In particular, "take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one" (Ephesians 6:16). Indeed, it might be good to memorize Ephesians 6:10-18. And remember, just because you raise the shield of faith one day, and block many of the evil one's flaming arrows, he may very well return the next day, and the next. So stay ready and be prepared for battle every single day regarding this issue.

4. Finally, you may also find it profitable to read biographies of some of the great men and women of God from church history. This will encourage you that God's saints have often faced great difficulties, challenges, and obstacles in their lives. Read John Bunyan's, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, or a biography on Martin Luther, for example. There are many good Christian biographies out there and these

stories will greatly strengthen and encourage you, I think.

One final thought, if you're not familiar with the apologetic work of William Lane Craig, you might also enjoy that. Here's a link to his site: [www.reasonablefaith.org](http://www.reasonablefaith.org)

I hope these thoughts are helpful, \_\_\_\_\_ as you continue to wrestle with these doubts. Since you may struggle with these doubts for years, I would encourage you to hunker down for the long haul. If God delivers you sooner, praise be to His mighty name. But if not, at least you're prepared for what could be a long, hard fight. And remember to seek God's help against the powers of darkness. We're sometimes tempted to discount spiritual warfare (and sometimes, of course, we maybe should). But if we always discount it, then something is wrong. For Paul tells us that we will experience such warfare as Christians. So at least some of the time, what we're experiencing does have a source in the evil one. And right now you may be a victim of his fiery darts. So put on the armor of God and recognize that you have a terrible enemy who wants to see you fail—and don't give him the pleasure!

May the Lord greatly help and encourage you in your struggles \_\_\_\_\_!

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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\_\_\_\_\_'

Michael's answer to your email was forwarded to me as the Probe webmistress because it's so good, and I keep thinking about your question.

You raise the point that biblical Christianity is supposed to

be a relationship with God, and it absolutely is. I think many people experience the same thing you do because instead of a real relationship, our Christianity is more like a cognitive acknowledgement of things that are true—and that tends to be one-way. And sterile.

What's missing is the love part, the foundation of what God wants in a relationship with Him (you know—Love God, love people? First and second commandments?) We love Him because He first loved us. . . but in our from-the-neck-up current experience of Christianity, we're missing the love part.

I want to suggest something to you that has really rocked my spiritual life. Dr. Baxter Kruger (who lives in Jackson, MS) is a Trinitarian theologian with all the intellectual chops to be deeply satisfying to my mind, but he is especially gifted at helping us see how very loved we are by the Father, Son and Spirit. He has a 5-part audio series called "You Are The Child Your Father Always Wanted" that I've listened to more times than I can count. I've never listened to ANYBODY'S messages multiple times like I do Baxter's. It's available free on iTunes here: [itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/perichoresis.org-podcast/id367278246](https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/perichoresis.org-podcast/id367278246)

Everyone that I've shared these messages with has been so thankful—and they, too, find themselves listening multiple times because he's offering such a major paradigm shift.

I have discovered over 40 years of walking with Jesus that the more I receive the many ways He loves me, the more I pay attention His "hugs and kisses," His ways of showing affection and care for me, the strength of my relationship with the Lord has a way of dissembling my emotional doubts. I pray the eyes of your heart will be open to see how you are immersed in a never-ending stream of divine love and honest affection for you, \_\_\_\_\_.

I truly hope this helps, as well as what Michael said.

Warmly,  
Sue Bohlin

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## **“If Jesus Was God, Why Did He Cry Out ‘My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me’?”**

If Jesus really claimed to be a god then why did he say on the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

*Response #1:*

Thanks for your letter. I find D. A. Carson’s comments on this passage helpful. Like him, I think that Jesus is conscious of having in some sense been abandoned by His Father. This would doubtless be related to the fact that, on the cross, he was bearing the sins of the world, thus causing God the Father to turn away from His Son.

His cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me,” addresses God the Father as “My God.” This is really not odd on the lips of Jesus, for we elsewhere read of Him referring to the Father in this way (see John 20:17). In addition, as the God-Man, Jesus was not only truly God (God the Son), but He was also truly man. It does not strike me as odd, therefore, that the man Jesus should refer to the Father as “My God”—indeed, it would not necessarily even be odd for the Son to address the Father in this way. For although God is one, the Father is a distinct person from the Son.

At any rate, this is essentially how I would understand Jesus' cry of dereliction.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

**Response #2:**

My colleague Michael forwarded his reply to me. I have recently come across an intriguing, very different paradigm for understanding why Jesus would say these words, that I find myself thinking about a lot.

It could be that Jesus *felt* that He was abandoned by His Father because at the point He became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), He fully descended into the darkness and blindness of fallen and judged humanity—and sin makes us blind and deaf to the reality of God. At that point, like astronauts on the dark side of the moon experiencing being completely cut off from Mission Control, perhaps He couldn't have sensed that His Father's love for Him never changed (because God does not change; that's one of His attributes). As Michael has remarked to me, Jesus, as our sin-bearer, experienced "God-forsakenness" on our behalf. In other words, He experienced in some sense the same sort of "God-forsakenness" that those in hell will experience. He experienced the horrible reality of the consequences (or wages) of sin (Rom. 6:23).

The Lord Jesus could have cried out, "why have You forsaken Me" because that is the *effect* of sin on humanity—it can *feel* like God has forsaken us—but it doesn't mean He has. He had promised, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (Deut. 31:6,8).

Secondly, there is a very compelling observation about what has been called "the cry of dereliction" that was a major light bulb moment for me when I heard it: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" is the opening line to Psalm 22. The Psalms are songs, so He wasn't just quoting scripture, He was

crying out the first line of a song very familiar to any Jews who were within earshot. And when we hear the first line of a familiar song, it's like hitting the "play" button, and the rest of the song continues to play in our heads.

I think that when Jesus called out the first line of Psalm 22, he was reminding those around Him of the rest of the song, which not only makes it clear He was the fulfillment of the prophecies of crucifixion, but it unfolds into a song of trust and praise in Yahweh.

Anyone who knew Psalm 22 could have been struck by the fact that Jesus was a living picture, the very fulfillment, of the words of that song running through their heads:

6 But I am a worm and not a man.  
I am scorned and despised by all!  
7 Everyone who sees me mocks me.  
They sneer and shake their heads, saying,  
8 "Is this the one who relies on the Lord?  
Then let the Lord save him!  
If the Lord loves him so much,  
let the Lord rescue him!"

11 Do not stay so far from me,  
for trouble is near,  
and no one else can help me.  
12 My enemies surround me like a herd of bulls;  
fierce bulls of Bashan have hemmed me in!  
13 Like lions they open their jaws against me,  
roaring and tearing into their prey.  
14 My life is poured out like water,  
and all my bones are out of joint.  
My heart is like wax,  
melting within me.  
15 My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay.  
My tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.  
You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead.

16 My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs;  
an evil gang closes in on me.  
They have pierced my hands and feet.  
17 I can count all my bones.  
My enemies stare at me and gloat.  
18 They divide my garments among themselves  
and throw dice for my clothing.

And yet there is a faith-filled insistence on praising the Father despite what the Son was feeling:

22 I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.  
I will praise you among your assembled people.  
23 Praise the Lord, all you who fear him!  
Honor him, all you descendants of Jacob!  
Show him reverence, all you descendants of Israel!

Verse 24 is especially powerful, since it would indicate that Jesus knew His Father had not abandoned Him even if He couldn't see or sense His presence:

24 For he has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy.  
He has not turned his back on them,  
but has listened to their cries for help.

I think it's very interesting that there is a completely different way of interpreting the Lord Jesus' plaintive cry on the cross. Compelling, even. I hope you find it helpful.

Sue Bohlin

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# “Salvation Is By Grace, But We Have to Do Our Part”

Sue,

Thank you for being one who stands up for the principles that our Savior Jesus Christ taught. I applaud your efforts. I have a couple of questions from your article:

I read your [“A Short Look at Six World Religions”](#) and it said that many of Joseph Smith’s prophecies never came true. Which prophecies are those?

I also read, “Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God’s grace.” I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace of God. However, salvation is not free. For example, if one chooses to not live the commandments that God has given, then how can he be worthy to live in the presence of God? Here is a quote from the Book of Mormon: “For we know that it is by grace that we are saved after all that we can do.” (page 99-100). Jesus Christ paid the price for our sins, but we must do our part to accept his atonement and live his commandments. Accepting his atonement is not enough. Through the grace of our loving Savior we can be redeemed from our sins and return to the presence of our Heavenly Father clean from all sin, again if we keep his commandments the best we know how. God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ are the perfect examples of mercy.

Have a good day and thank you for teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ, who is my best friend.

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

Jesus is my best friend too! <smile>

*I read your article "A Short Look at Six World Religions" and it said that many of Joseph Smith's prophecies never came true. Which prophecies are those?*

I cited a few of them in another response to an e-mail about my article. Your question prompted me to add a link to that article at the end of the one you read, but here's a [direct link](#) for you..

*I also read, "Both of these religions teach salvation by works, not God's grace." I have been a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 8 years of age, and I have always been taught that we are saved by the grace of God. However, salvation is not free.*

I would agree that salvation was not free for God, for whom it cost Him EVERYTHING. But it is a free gift for us. Please note Ephesians 2:8,9:

*"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast."*

This scripture is diametrically opposed to Mormon doctrine. We cannot do anything to contribute to our salvation. Isaiah 64:6 says that all our righteousness is as filthy rags; what can we possibly give to God that will overcome the heinous sin of requiring the death of His Son to be reconciled to Him? If someone came in here and murdered one of my sons and then said, "Hey, I don't want you to be mad at me. . . let me do something to help me get myself in your good graces. Here's a nickel. . ." –Well, guess what? That wouldn't work! And it doesn't work with God either.

The question of obeying His commandments is a separate issue. Obedience for the person who has put his trust in Christ is a matter of bearing fruit and walking out the new kind of life (new heart, new motivation, new source of power) that Christ brings at the point of salvation. Obedience for the person who

has NOT put his trust in Christ, but is trusting in himself to earn heaven on his own merit, counts for nothing because Jesus said, "Apart from Me, no one comes to the Father" (John 14:6). It would be like that person who murdered my sons saying, "But I'm keeping all the Bohlin family rules! I'm respectful to the parents, I take out the garbage on garbage day, I put my dishes in the dishwasher, I don't let the dog sleep on the bed! I deserve to be a member of your family!" See how that doesn't work either?

\_\_\_\_\_, I pray the Lord will open your eyes to see that trying to earn salvation with our paltry efforts—even WITH His grace—is a slap in the face of our God. He wants us to come to Him with empty hands and the realization that we do not deserve and cannot earn the gift of eternal life that comes ONLY through trusting in the Lord Jesus.

Warmly,

Sue Bohlin

**It occurred to me as I read your response that we aren't exactly talking about the same definition of "salvation." How exactly do you define it, in the strict sense? By that I mean, tell me what salvation is and what it is not, as you perceive it.**

I am really impressed that you realize we're defining our terms differently. I want to make sure you get the best possible answer, so I'm going to ask my Probe colleague Michael Gleghorn, who has formal theological training, to answer that question, OK?

*Michael Gleghorn's answer:*

Hello \_\_\_\_\_,

Thanks for your e-mail. You ask a very important question. Indeed, entire books have been written on the subject. I will

simply offer a broad sketch of some of the fundamentals of this important biblical doctrine.

In its broadest sense, the biblical doctrine of salvation is concerned with the idea of God's deliverance of His people from harm or danger. In the Old Testament, God's greatest saving act occurred when He delivered (or saved) His people Israel from their slavery in Egypt. This event is known as the Exodus. Thus, the biblical doctrine of salvation includes more than just "spiritual" deliverance, it can incorporate physical deliverance as well. The important point is that salvation, in the biblical sense, is ALWAYS THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Just listen to God's word to the prophet Isaiah: "I, even I, am the Lord; and there is no savior besides Me." (43:11).

This point cannot be emphasized enough—God is the One who saves. Even in the book of Judges, when Israel has many human "deliverers," it is God who appoints them and raises them up for their specific task. Thus, we repeatedly read statements such as the following in the book of Judges: "And when the sons of Israel cried to the Lord, THE LORD RAISED UP A DELIVERER for the sons of Israel TO DELIVER THEM" (3:9; emphasis mine).

And the psalmist also wrote: "Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burden, the God who is our salvation. God is to us a God of deliverances; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death" (68:19-20). You get the idea.

The Old Testament Scriptures provide much of the "theological context" for the New Testament doctrine of God and salvation. While some things are certainly "new" and different (see John 1:17, etc.), much remains the same. In particular, salvation is still viewed as THE WORK OF GOD—NOT MAN. Think back to the end of Psalm 68:20: "to God the Lord belong escapes from death." Now listen to Paul in Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, BUT THE FREE GIFT OF GOD IS ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST JESUS OUR LORD" (emphasis mine).

In the New Testament, as in the Old, God is the only true savior of man. This salvation has been made available through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for our sins. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3: "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS according to the Scriptures" (emphasis mine). Furthermore, Christ is the ONLY way of salvation. As Peter said in Acts 4:12: "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is NO OTHER NAME under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (emphasis mine).

Of course, if God is the ONLY savior and, as Jesus Himself said, "No one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6), clearly Jesus must be God. This is the teaching of the New Testament (see John 1:1-3, 14). It's important to point out, however, that Jesus is NOT God the Father; He is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. Of course Jesus is also a Man. (Although I cannot get into it right now, Mormons and Christians not only have a different understanding of the doctrine of salvation, we also have radically different conceptions of God. Pat Zukeran, a colleague of mine at Probe, has recently written an article on ["The Mormon Doctrine of God."](#))

The Bible claims that Jesus is the only savior, who died on the cross for our sins. But Christ's death is not merely a means of salvation from sin (as great as that would be in itself), it also makes available to man the perfect righteousness of God! Thus we read in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "He [God] made Him [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." Salvation not only includes the forgiveness of our debt of sin, it also includes the crediting of Christ's righteousness to our account! In other words, Christ washes away the stain of our sin and clothes us in His perfect righteousness. Luther called this "The Great Exchange."

But how does this Great Exchange take place? By what means

does it occur? What must one do to be saved? That was the question asked of Paul and Silas by the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:30. Paul and Silas responded by saying, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved" (16:31). In other words, the jailer was told to BELIEVE (i.e. put his faith or trust) in the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The gift of salvation, like all gifts, must be received. It is received by faith alone. It is with this understanding that we must read Ephesians 2:8-9: "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that NOT OF YOURSELVES, it is the gift of God; NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, that no one should boast" (emphasis mine). And again, in Titus 3:4-7 we read: "But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, NOT ON THE BASIS OF DEEDS WHICH WE HAVE DONE IN RIGHTEOUSNESS, BUT ACCORDING TO HIS MERCY, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that being justified by His grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (emphasis mine). Other aspects of salvation include, BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO, justification (i.e. being declared righteous by God), adoption into God's family as His beloved children (Galatians 4:4-7), the gift of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13-14), and the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23). Man receives all that is included in God's gift of salvation BY FAITH ALONE—PLUS NOTHING!

But do works play no role at all in the doctrine of salvation? Actually, they do! HOWEVER, WORKS ARE NOT A MEANS OF SALVATION! Rather, good works are a RESULT of salvation. Salvation is a gift of God, received by faith alone—plus nothing! But one of the RESULTS of a genuine salvation experience is that the believer engages in good works. We recently looked at Ephesians 2:8-9 and Titus 3:4-7. But what comes after these verses? In Ephesians 2:10 we read: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

Notice the progression of ideas in Ephesians 2:8-10. We are saved by grace through faith and not by our works. However, we were saved, in part, FOR good works! I'll let you look at Titus 3:8 on your own, but the same order of ideas is present there as well.

By the way, this is James' point as well in James 2:14-26. Some people think that this passage in James contradicts Paul's doctrine of salvation by grace, through faith—plus nothing. But if we read this passage carefully, it is clear that James is not arguing that we are saved by works. Rather, he is making the very important point that GENUINE faith produces good works. Thus, if no good works are evident, it may be because the alleged faith is not genuine. And of course no one is claiming that a “pseudo-faith” can save; the faith that saves is GENUINE faith—and such faith leads inevitably to good works.

Two final points. First, we are not capable of judging the thoughts and intentions of others. Only God can do that. If someone does not appear TO ME to be engaging in good works, this is no proof that they are not truly saved. Only God knows their heart. However, it might be appropriate to ask that person to examine himself to see whether his faith is really genuine or not (see 2 Corinthians 13:5 for instance). Second, even the good works resulting from the genuine faith of a true believer are not really his own (in the sense that they originate and are carried out solely in his own strength). They also are the gift of God and can only be properly carried out in the power of God's Spirit—NOT in the strength of the believer's flesh! Although many verses could be quoted to this effect, I will mention only two, Romans 8:3-4: “For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, GOD DID: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit”

(emphasis mine).

Please allow me to summarize the main points:

- Salvation is the work of God—not man.
- God offers man salvation as a free gift, based on the substitutionary death of His Son for our sins.
- Salvation includes, but is not limited to, such things as the forgiveness of sins, the crediting of Christ's righteousness to our account, justification (being declared righteous by God), adoption into God's family as His beloved children, the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of eternal life.
- Man receives God's salvation by faith alone—plus nothing.
- The object of our faith is the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Good works do not merit salvation, but genuine salvation results in good works.
- Good works are only “good” to the extent that they are done in faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, God Himself is ultimately the Author even of the good works which follow a genuine salvation experience.

I hope this helps. I also hope it makes sense. These ideas are some of the most essential elements of the biblical doctrine of salvation; they do not, of course, exhaust the subject. If the Bible is the word of God, we must pay very careful attention to the means by which God has made His salvation available to us—neither adding to it, nor subtracting from it, but teaching it just as God revealed it to us.

Shalom,

Michael Gleghorn



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