

Assurance and Doubt (2 Peter [2:4-9](#))

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If you return with me to 2nd Peter chapter 2, the passage that Steve read out, We've been dealing with this issue of assurance. Last week, we looked at assurance and peace. Today, I want to look at the issue of doubt in connection with our assurance.

And when we deal with doubt, we need to understand that there are different kinds of doubt. Most Christians, I believe. And this is a sermon for Christians, particularly, but if you have come, and you don't know Christ as your savior, then this will also help you to understand something of the Christian faith.

Doubt is not a stranger to any human being who has any kind of understanding of the world, who has experienced the ups and downs of life, who knows that nothing is guaranteed, as far as their perspective is concerned, as far as the future. And it's rolling out, is concerned. Doubt is something that we harbor some more than others, sometimes in our lives, more than at other times in our lives.

Because of our experiences. Because it's an imperfect world. Because all of us have been hit sideways by things that um, have come out of the blue.

And if they've happened once or happened twice or happened many times, then why wouldn't they? Perhaps happen in the future too. Doubt is something that occurs also because of the different vying perspectives, the different messages that we hear, the different things that claim to be truths.

One doesn't fit with another thing. One seems to contradict something else, some other truth claim. We, as Christians, have come to know him who is the truth, who stands for truth, who is the personal representation of truth.

And yet doubt enters in because other messages come in. There can be messages from the world. Maybe the so-called discoveries of science.

Some of that is somewhat passing now. We used to be in a phase, I think, in a world when scientism was reigning, that's a belief that science had the answer to everything, and that the, uh, you could trust anything that anybody said as long as they were wearing a white coat. Not so much in those days, although there's some of that still today.

But still, there are the claims of science. I mean, the word science broadly. Science means knowledge, science, but um, not all claims of science are claims of knowledge.

I hope that you understand that. Many of the things that science claims are impermanent opinions that will be changed in the next 5 to 10 years. Many of the dogmas of science have been overturned and will be overturned.

Many of the most Um, widely accepted claims of science are actually lies. Lies that spring more from not wanting to face the truth, that this is a God created world, and we are God's creatures made in his image. And rather the idea that we can forge onward defining ourselves without God. In other words, they are empty claims that come from false beliefs in the world and in ourselves.

There are all kinds of doubts. There are doubts that come from, quite honestly, from the spiritual forces of wickedness that are surrounding us, that we forget about. Sometimes we're driving along, we're thinking something, and some thought comes into our heads out of nowhere.

We're living in a world where there is demonic activity and we need to take it. Um, Seriously, and we also need to take it captive. As far as our thoughts are concerned.

All kinds of doubts come in. But the one that I'm concerned about here, which is why I've chosen the text that I did, is the doubt of whether, um, whether God likes me. Whether God accepts me for who I am.

The doubt about ourselves, which is projected onto God. We have experience with ourselves. If we're honest with ourselves, we know we're not up to much.

We have a long history of failure. Failure to be righteous, failure to be Christ-like, failure to live in the truth, to walk in the spirit. Of failure against the temptations of sin.

A failure to be, as it were, always alive to God, always right there, simmering as it were, in our spirituality, so that we're filled all the time, with this sense of God and a sense of his goodness and a sense of, of wanting to do his will in everything. Rather we're, you know, we're up and down in our experience. We're very variable when it comes to our zeal.

We're aware of that. And if we face it and we look at it, And we compare our spirituality with the spirituality of, say, the apostle Paul, Or with Jesus himself, We can only give ourselves an F. We're not doing very well. We don't really, um, we're not up to much when it comes to our Christian walk.

Yes, we've had moments of triumph. We've had moments of clarity when it seemed as though we could almost see heaven. We've had those moments, we've felt sometimes, once in a while, once in, uh, many years, we have felt the presence of God, in an overwhelming fashion.

Ways graciously moved close to us. But In the humdrum of life, we've often really felt nothing very much at all. We felt like, um, we had to completely stir ourselves into spirituality into consideration of the things that we know that God is concerned about.

We have felt sometimes that we're not very concerned about those things. At least, you know, we can't get very much enthusiasm going for those things. That's the human condition.

That's the Christian condition. If we're honest with ourselves, That happens quite a bit. And it introduces doubt.

Because we are not doing very well. God's, let's say he's got a scorecard. Percentage scorecard, you know?

100% is Jesus. Where would you put yourself? Below 50, probably.

And so this brings in a lot of room for doubt. How can God accept me? Yes, I know that I know Jesus as my savior, and I know my sins have been forgiven.

Praise God for that. But in my day-to-day relationship with God. Because it's supposed to be a relationship.

In my day-to-day relationship with God, how can I even lift my head and acknowledge God? Because he can see right into my heart. He can see into my vein thoughts.

I'm not very impressed with me. What? Never mind God.

So that's the kind of doubt that I'm concerned about today, the doubt that really God really wants much to do with you that you need to sort yourself out before, uh, you can really fellowship with God, Before you can approach God, before you can feel that God is okay with the way that you're doing today. Do you know what I'm talking about here? I hope you do.

I hope that you're not blind to your own failures. And so this is what I want to deal with. And so my mind turned to a number of scriptures, you know, the uh, the Romans, the, sorry, the, uh, Roman who came and uh, to Jesus and wanted help for his son.

I think he's a Roman, maybe he wasn't a Roman. But he would need help for his son. He was sick.

And Jesus said to him, all things are possible, you know, all you have to do is believe. But there was his 6th son, or at least his son was at home and he had experience and seen the deterioration in his son. He knew that this was something that we could kill him.

This was something that was real and it was serious. And you don't take it lightly because it does take lives and it does devastate. And so he goes to Jesus and he wants, he wants, his child to be healed and he sees Jesus doing all of these things.

But he doesn't want to take it for granted. And so he asked for help for his son, and Jesus says, all things are possible to him that believes, and he looks into his own heart, and his own motives, and his experiences in life. And he just can't get there.

He can't get there to full belief. I believe, Lord, but help my unbelief. Because unbelief is present too.

And we all resonate with that, don't we? See? We all resonate with that because that's our lives.

That's our experiences with God. Yes, we trust God, and we believe God, but there's always something hanging around more or less. In our professions of faith, and that is this issue of, but what if?

Doubt. I want to, uh, suggest to you, doubt is a natural accompaniment of faith. It is.

Yes, we can say we can maybe record that sometimes I, you know, I just trusted God. I just believed him completely and I had no doubts about it at all. And that's great.

I can also say there were times when I did that. But I can't say that that is the general pattern of my faith, life, my walk with God. Often there's doubt too.

And doubt comes in because of the world that we live in. Doubt comes in because of real experiences that we've gone through. Doubt comes in because the answer might be no.

Doubt comes in because we know we've prayed and prayed and prayed for something and or someone, and it didn't work out. We're not living in heaven. This is not the kingdom of God.

This is the kingdom of evil. This is a kingdom of the devil. And things go wrong here and we go wrong here.

We are still assaulted by our own sins, by our own failures, every day. By our own lack of sight, if we could just see Jesus more clearly, if we could just grasp the promises of God more firmly. But sometimes, you know, we're just hanging on.

And in that context, We have Lot. Lot's the example I'm going to bring to you today. Not going to bring Moses up.

He failed. But not very much, it seemed. It seems he did pretty well most of the time.

Or David, I mean, he failed spectacularly. On a couple of occasions, that we're told, I'm sure, on many other occasions that were not told. But I'm not going to bring him up because, you know, he's a man after God's own heart, and he really did trust God, and he did do well in the life of faith.

So I'm not going to bring people like that up because that's not going to help us today. I'm going to bring up Lot. Because he's a failure.

So let's have a Lot. I mean, Lot gives us hope. Doesn't he?

Just listen to this. He talks about, uh, God delivering people, talks about, you know, Noah, and it talks about Sodom and Gomorrah, and it says, in verse 7, and delivered, righteous, Lot. Yeah, I'll read that again for you.

Righteous Lot. Who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked. For that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day-to-day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds.

Then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly. Out of temptations. And it's like, really?

Do I need to take a double take there? He's calling Lot righteous and just and godly. What is Peter on here?

What is going on? Does he know read the story of Lot in the Old Testament? There's nothing good about Lot in the Old Testament, okay?

He doesn't come across as being a righteous man. Let's have a look at him. Genesis chapter 13.

We know that um, there came a time, Abraham, by the way, was called to the, uh, the promised land. Lot wasn't. Lot didn't get the invitation from God, but is there anyway?

And it comes to time that their flocks are getting too big and they need to part and go separate ways. And so Abraham says to Lot, in Genesis [13](#), you know, you choose, which would you want? You go that way and I'll go this way, but you have a choice.

So Lot had a look around. And he saw that there were great, you know, tremendous opportunities and fields and advantages to going towards the cities of the plain. Namely, Sodom and Gomorrah.

And so he chose Sodom and Gomorrah. He chose them. He chose the rich fertile fields that were around that area.

And Abraham may do with what was left. When we come to chapter 19 of Genesis, we find Lot, he's not living outside town with the flocks. He's living in town.

He's living in Sodom. Righteous man, godly man? Choosing to live in this ungodly, this wicked town.

Yeah. That's a contradiction. And we're told by Peter that he vexed his righteous soul or tormented his righteous soul.

That he brought it on himself. That's what the text is saying to you. He vexed his soul by his choices.

By his own decisions. Righteous decisions, godly decisions, just decisions, Absolutely not. There's no way that you could say, oh, a decision.

Where am I going to go? Oh, let me go move into Sodom. There's a there's a decision made on faith.

Guaranteed to please God. Absolutely not. But that's what he did.

That's the unvarnished truth about it. What about you and me? Well, not about you.

I'm not picking on me today. What about you? What about decisions you've made?

I mean, they may not be, you know, massive, huge decisions like that, you know, moving into Sodom, but there may be, I don't know. I'm not really interested, honestly, and what particular things you've decided to do against the will of God. I'm just concerned with the fact that you have, and I have, made decisions that were foolish.

They were against God's will. That we have maybe had a conscience about, but we've ignored our conscience, our conscience has just been, you know, an annoying, like bell ringing in our ears, and we've, we've just shut it out, you know, like we can do, and we've justified to ourselves, a certain decision, a certain way forward. And then we've just pursued it.

And then, you know, because of the deceitfulness of our own hearts, we've persuaded ourselves that God can kind of baptize our wicked decision, even though we knew it wasn't God's will. So we've all played Lot before. We have.

So the text tells us, Peter, the apostle, who, of course, you know, made a few dumb decisions himself, tells us that God delivered righteous Lot. Now, of course, you're supposed to know the backdrop of this, which is Abraham's prayer, after realizing that the Lord was actually there, at his tent. He said, uh, he prayed for the 5 cities of the play, he says, well, you know, if there's a 100 righteous, are you going to destroy it?

No, I won't destroy it, if there's a 100 righteous there. Yeah, but what if there's not a hundred? What if there's 50?

What if there's 20? And I'm sure that Abraham is thinking about who? What?

Of course he is. No, I won't destroy it even if it was 20 righteous there. Well, he ends up destroying it.

So there aren't 20 righteous there. But God knows that Abraham is concerned about Lot and his family, and so because he's a gracious God, God delivers a Lot. And what we should read from Peter, you know, if we were writing, Peter, You know, if we, we, we know about this story of Lot.

If we were writing this, we would say, and delivered, you know, worldly locked. That's what I would have written. Ungodly Lot.

Because he's gracious. It doesn't say that. It says it delivered a righteous Lot.

Oh, dear. He said that here that, uh, Lot's decision to live in Sodom tormented his righteous soul daily. But God, through the apostle calls him righteous.

Just in other translations. Godly, because God knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and so on. So righteous, just godly.

Hardly these are epithets that you would uh, pin to such a character, knowing these stories about him. But, There must have been something about Lot, there must have been something real. As far as his spirituality and his understanding of God, it was concerned, that God saw, that God recognizes being authentic as being that which characterizes Lot as being one of his, not one of the opposition.

And this is the thing that gives us hope. This is the thing that helps us with doubt. Because we see ourselves reflected perhaps more than we would like in someone like Lot.

Or maybe someone like Jacob. In Hebrews chapter 11, you have that list of the, you know, the supposed great people of faith. And, you know, we got you got Noah there.

Okay, you've got Cain. Sorry, you've got Abel, righteous Abel. You've got, uh, you've got Noah, you've got Abraham, you've got some all stars in there.

And the list starts doing, you know, starts well and, you know, we can't hold a candle to these people, but then later on in that list. You got Samson in there. What's he doing in there?

You know his story: womanizer, show off. I mean, he seems to be completely concerned with himself.

And yet he's listed in, uh, this, um, this list of great men of faith. Because if you read, um, the life of Samson, even though he didn't exactly acquit himself, uh, very well, as a man of God, as a spiritual exemplar, what he did do is always acknowledge God, always acknowledge God. And this tells us, that perhaps one of the key things, the key thing, that we need to look for in ourselves, is whether we acknowledge God, whether we truly acknowledge God for who he is.

Whether we're taking advantage of God or whether uh, God is Someone we know, is the boss. We know who God is. We're very clear on that.

And if we do, If we're like that, and we have already this knowledge, this absolute knowledge that we have come to Jesus Christ, we understand what was going on at the cross. And we've come to Jesus, and we've understood that the cross is a place where our sins. We're born by the sinless son of God.

And we have said that it is in him, the one on the cross. The Son of God, who took my place. And died there for my sin.

If we know that and we have accepted the salvation. That is proffered to us in the gospel. In one place and that is Jesus.

We know that, then we can say, No matter what our performances, and don't take me wrong here, okay? I'm not saying it's okay to be like Lot or Samson. And we can lose rewards and we can lose all kinds of things.

Um because we're living an ungodly life. But if we've accepted Christ, and we acknowledge God, even though our performance in life is not that great. We know that we are accepted by the Father.

And you say, well, that just sounds back to front. That sounds wrong. Because we should be able, it should be those people that perform really well.

Those are the ones that God embraces. Those are the ones that God's accept, and these backsliders here, you know, they don't deserve to have a relationship with God. They don't deserve to be accepted by God.

Well, Depends which group you think you're in. And I, you know, in my own personal life, my own personal devotions and my personal reflections and the way that I try to live, uh, with a clear conscience, I try to do my best to live, uh, unto God, as a believer, as a Christian. And I do.

And yet I'm aware of the fact that I'm not in the A-list. And I'm not in the B-list. I don't know what list I'm on, but I'm down the alphabet somewhere.

And probably so are you. But Hear this, hear this. I'm righteous.

I'm just, I'm godly. Not because of me. But because I'm accepted in he who is righteous, so I have his righteousness.

And I have his godliness. And that is the perspective. That's the lens that I have to look through, and once I look through that lens, I can tell myself that I am accepted by God, and I don't need to doubt, If I'm accepted or if I'm loved by God.

I don't need to constantly, um, refrain from praying because I feel that God knows, you know, that I'm not doing very well as a spiritual person, that I could do a lot better. You know, so, you know, there's this temptation, devil whispers into our ears saying, if we could just do a bit better. Okay, just do better before you start praying, you hypocrite.

Just do better. Sort yourself out. Then you can pray to God.

Then you can worship God. But here's the reality, the reality is just like Lot. God sees me as righteous.

I'm justified in his sight. So what's the basis of Peter's verdict here? He's not lost his marbles.

He really understands that Lot is a righteous man and a godly man. He's just made some really dumb decisions. And these decisions are really dumb.

I mean, dumber than probably any decisions we've made here in our lives. Well, Peter understands that Lot's righteousness comes through his faith in God. It's an imperfect faith, but it is directed to the right source, to the right object.

And that faith, that fearing of God, that understanding of who God is, brings justification through Christ's imputed merits. Christ, of course, was going to be crucified many, many, many centuries after this, but it's the merits of Christ that were imputed to Lot in the same way that the merits of Christ were imputed to able, and to Noah, and to Abraham. The same way.

And so the Lord delivered Lot, not just because Abraham had prayed for him, But because he saw, amazingly enough, he saw that Lot was a righteous man. So here we are. Let's kind of bring this together.

Lot is not exactly the paragon of Christian virtue, is he? He's not an example for us to follow. You know, rather the reverse.

He's somebody that we note and say, well, don't be like him. And yet, in his heart, in his mind, though he had failures, though he was weak, though he uh, his values and priorities were all wrong, yet he still acknowledged God, we have to say that because the Bible wouldn't call him righteous unless he was like that. And so we can look at Lot and we can look then at ourselves and our own imperfections and our own disqualifications, as it were.

And we can bring into perspective the fact that I am accepted by God, the Father because I am in union with Jesus Christ. He that was dead has risen again. I'm accepted in the beloved.

I am considered righteous. Even though I'm not righteous in myself, I'm considered righteous because I have the righteousness of Christ imputed to me, given to me as a free gift that I have accepted. I know there's no other place for forgiveness.

I acknowledge God. In my failure. In my, you know, We might say that with the Holy Spirit within us, and with the accessibility that we have to the scriptures and the accessibility that we have to brothers and sisters in the Lord, we should be running this motor should be running it 100%.

But it's not, we're ticking around alone around 50%, okay? We're not putting out very much. We're not doing very much.

We're not what we ought to be, and yet we are loved by God, and we should not doubt that. If you doubt that you're loved by God, that you're accepted by God and you've trusted in Jesus as your personal savior, you know that he's died for your sins. You've received him, you've accepted him.

God is your father. If you know that that transaction has happened, Then tell yourself the truth, and don't allow doubt in. Okay?

And there's a very practical reason for this. I'm bringing this together. I mean, the conclusion part, this sermon here.

So don't worry. But it's something very important that we have to understand, and that is that that doubt doesn't stop, it doesn't obstruct, it doesn't take away, it doesn't dissolve. God's love towards us.

God is utterly committed to us. He loves us. He sees us as righteous in his sight.

And what that means in a practical day-to-day, uh, scenario is that we don't have to try and brush ourselves off to approach God. In fact, we shouldn't. We shouldn't.

We should not bring works in to our understanding of salvation. This could be another sermon, but uh, It's really, really important that we get this. Okay?

Yes, we are supposed to do good works. Ephesians [2:10](#). With God's workmanship, we're supposed to be doing that. But even when we don't do that, or we haven't done that for a while.

The way back, to, um, release from, uh, our failure. The way back is to approach God, not run from him is to understand that God is the God of the prodigal son. He comes running when he sees.

The prodigal coming home. The prodigal not feeling good about himself, God's feeling really good about it. And so when we understand that a little change, turning towards God, praying to God, thanking God, a return, turning towards the light, as it were, towards the sun.

And eventually we feel the warmth and we feel we see the light and, you know, things that were unclear are cleared up. That's what we should be like. And so we should say to doubt, Flee.

Go. I'm moving towards my father who loves me and accepts me. Doubt is not, you know what a portcullis is? You guys.

Have you done any history? A portcullis, you know, in a castle. A portcullis was raised or dropped actually to stop invading armies coming into the castle.

Okay? So doubt can be something like field, as though it's a port color, so not allowing the blessings of God or the truth of God coming into your life, but it's not actually. It's not.

It is an obstacle, but it's an obstacle to be overcome. It's an obstacle that can be overcome. And it can be moved by our faith in the fact that God accepts us as we are in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, pray. Pray in your backslidden state. Pray in your worldliness.

Pray in your imperfection. Open the Bible and read the promises of God to you. And then simply do what you're supposed to do.

Repent. Change your mind. Understand that God has loved you and loves you in Christ, and will always love you in Christ, and therefore there's no barrier between you and God.

Devil wants you to think there's all kinds of things you have to do in order to get right with God and then God will accept you. That's a big lie. Grace accepts you for who you are.

Yes, thank you for that. And because of that, I've chosen Lot as an example. If he was a righteous man.

Good grief. There's hope for all of us, isn't there? Let's pray.

Dear Heavenly Father, I pray that we would understand what this message is trying to convey. It's not saying it's okay to be backslidden or to be worldly. But if we do find ourselves in a backslidden or worldly frame of mind.

Lord, the way to get out of that is not to stall. Until somehow by our own abilities, we improve ourselves. It is to acknowledge that you love us, to acknowledge that we are righteous in Christ, and that, Thaws the ice that the may have built up, that is, uh, frozen as, as it were, in our spiritual lives, is to understand, Lord, that you are committed to us. And so realizing that and accepting that and then turning towards you, Lord, not with a boatload of guilt and a boatload of shame, that stops us from seeing you the way we ought to see you, but we turn towards you in hope.

In expectation that you would help us. Lords, many, many times that in scripture, we are surprised by the way that you accept sinners, that you accept those that we've read about, who haven't done too well. But Lord, that's because we've misread you.

We've thought that our works somehow give us merit, some kind of value in your sight. But Lord, it's not that. It is that we've been forgiven.

We've accepted the terms of salvation, and we are now counted righteous in Christ. To whatever we are, Lord, wherever we are in our Christian lives. Help us to realize that we, like Lot, are righteous.

In Jesus' name. Amen.