



1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

[Play audio clip](#)
of this song

Who is like unto the Lord our God
Who dwelleth on high, Who dwelleth on high

You dwell in glory
The heavens are Your home
You began the story
And made Your beauty known

But You created nothing
That gives me more pleasure than You
And You won't give me something
That gives me more pleasure than You¹ (2003)

This used to be one of my favorite songs. In the early 2000's I had a friend who was going through a painful divorce after his wife cheated on him. This was one of the songs I sent him to try to bring him some encouragement. I liked this song because it is a simple song about our identity on Christ and his sufficiency in all things. Whatever is happening in life, whatever our heart thinks that it needs, what it needs the most and what is most satisfying is just Jesus. You created nothing that gives me more pleasure than You. Great song.

Now compare this song to the [one he wrote in 2017](#).

So either you aren't real
or I am just not chosen
maybe I'll never know

Either way my heart is broken.

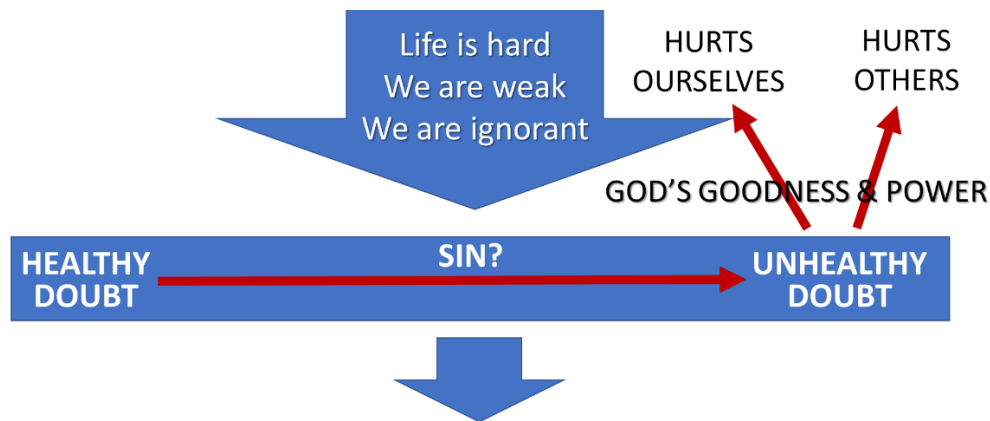
That is such a sad song, both lyrically and musically. His personal brokenness just drips out of his voice. How does a person go from such a powerful song about the sufficiency of Christ to atheism? The answer is unhealthy doubt that slowly chipped away at his faith.

In January of this year, he wrote this on this facebook page.

“If I’m honest, most of the time, I don’t believe the words in my songs. I have a hard time believing in a God that could make, let alone love a man who could do such things. So I’ll go on reciting and adding to my liturgy in hopes of believing the words, because I wish to. More than ever, I wish to.” (January 2018)

Then two months ago, he was on podcast with this title. How Christianity Made Me A Better Atheist² (Sept 2018).

Sadly, Derek Webb is a perfect example of what can happen when doubt is allowed to grow in your heart and mind without any resolution. A few weeks ago, I showed you this diagram about the spectrum between healthy doubt and unhealthy doubt.



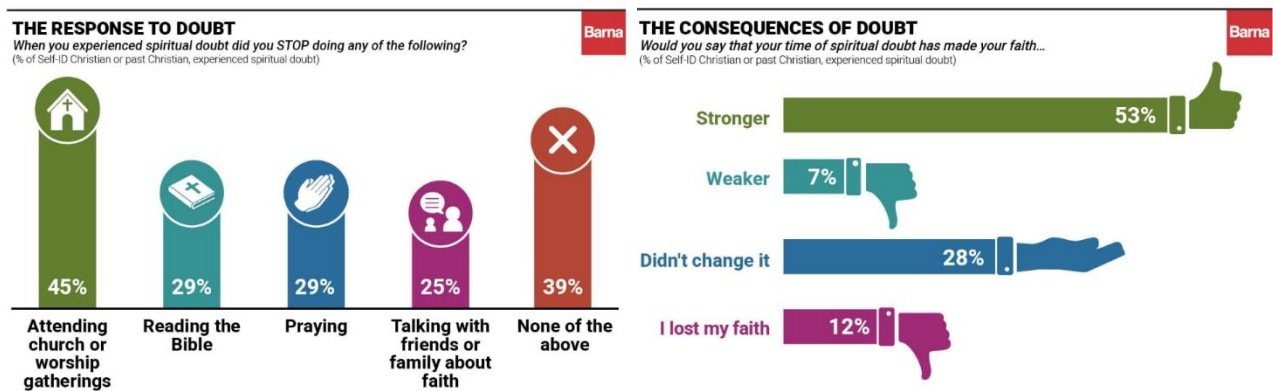
But when I thought how to understand this,
it seemed to me a wearisome task,
until I went into the sanctuary of God.

Let me say again that there has to be such a category as healthy doubt. If a church or a denomination did not allow for healthy doubt, you would, by definition, be a cult. We have to allow plenty of room for healthy doubt. This is a great way to learn. Think about it. Pretty much all scientific discovery began with a doubt. Someone doubted the status quo which led them to break free of their intellectual restraints and find new answers to old problems. If the group you are in doesn't allow doubts and questions, you are almost certainly in a cult. Cults don't like tough questions, but a genuine believer should not be afraid of them. Just as a lack of doubts and questions can keep you in a cult, healthy doubts and questions can lead you out of a cult or out of false teaching. This was how the Protestant reformation was born. Luther began to doubt the

wisdom of indulgences which opened the door to questioning other things within the church which eventually led to a rediscovery of the gospel.

So healthy doubts can be a really good thing—as long as you are genuinely seeking a Biblical resolution to your questions. If healthy doubts lead you to more truth, then that is a great thing. Now I am not saying that we should try to have doubts or that we should doubt just for the sake of doubting. That is just dangerous. But when genuine doubts do arise, we must steward them well. We must manage and care for them. Here’s what I mean.

A recent Barna study showed that a great many believers do not steward their doubts well. Many stop attending church or cease basic spiritual disciplines or don’t talk to trusted people to help them. Of course all of these are the very things you don’t want to do. I’ll address those in more depth later. The result of all of this doubting is that many weaken their faith and some lose it altogether.



Honestly, I think the actual results are even worse than this because this survey does not break down the type of doubts nor the intensity of the doubts. You could have a “spiritual doubt” about a relatively unimportant topic and not feel it very intensely but it would still be listed as a doubt in this survey. The good news is that the majority had the experience that their doubting made their faith stronger. This is healthy doubt and exactly what God intends. Any trial can give you pause and might even bring about some doubt. But when you steward your doubts—you understand what I mean by that phrase, right? Stewardship is taking good care of something entrusted to you. Like it or not, any doubt is yours to deal with and to take care—to steward it well. First and foremost, that means to not stopping doing these things in this survey.

Karen found a really helpful article from the Gospel Coalition with this title: Three Beliefs Some Progressive Christians and Atheists Share.³ Here are the three beliefs.

1. They may adopt a belief that the Bible is unreliable
2. They may have an unresolved answer to the problem of evil.
3. They may affirm a culture-adapting morality.

You may not even know what a progressive Christian is but from these questions alone, you will get a sense of what that term means. But don’t get stuck on the term. The author says that some

progressive Christians hold these beliefs, but I want to address these three beliefs in terms of doubts. For example, long before you adopt the belief that the Bible is unreliable, you would have had doubts about the reliability of the Bible. Right? They may have even started with small doubts that grew larger and larger until a doubt about the Bible's reliability became a belief that the Bible is unreliable. The same could be said of the other two beliefs. Before they arrived at firm beliefs they all started as doubts. Therefore, I want to change these beliefs into doubts because that is more relevant for all of us.

1. Doubting the reliability of the Bible.
2. Doubting God's goodness or God's power.
3. Doubting God's holiness and the Bible's moral standards.

Again, these are very common doubts. I am almost certain that all of us have had some level of doubting about one or more of these topics. And they tend to stand or fall together. Once serious doubts begin to erode one of these areas, the other two are soon to fall. And as we look at them, we will address them by looking at 1 Thessalonians. Remarkably, each of these doubts are covered in this text. So, let me read it again and we'll start in on these questions.

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

*To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace.*

² We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, ³ remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. ⁶ And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸ For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

Let me say one more general thing about doubt before we address this specific doubt. If you have doubts in any of these areas, these two sermons will hopefully bring some help to you. I am praying that they could even resolve your doubts, but I want to be careful with using the word resolve. Absolute, radical faith in Christ alone is always the end goal. As Jesus said, even the faith the size of a mustard seed is enough to move mountains. Our goal should always be to be increasing our faith and lessening our doubts, but I never want to give the impression that doubts can always be resolved in a single sermon or one conversation. Sometimes that happens but generally speaking, it takes a little time to work toward a resolution. That's another part of what it means to steward your doubts. You address them, you work on resolving them but you don't want to nonchalantly dismiss them. If you do that, you might just repress them which could have the effect of driving them deeper into your heart and mind. So there's a balance here and

everyone will approach this a little differently. Sometimes, all we need is a quick reminder and other times we need a lot more.

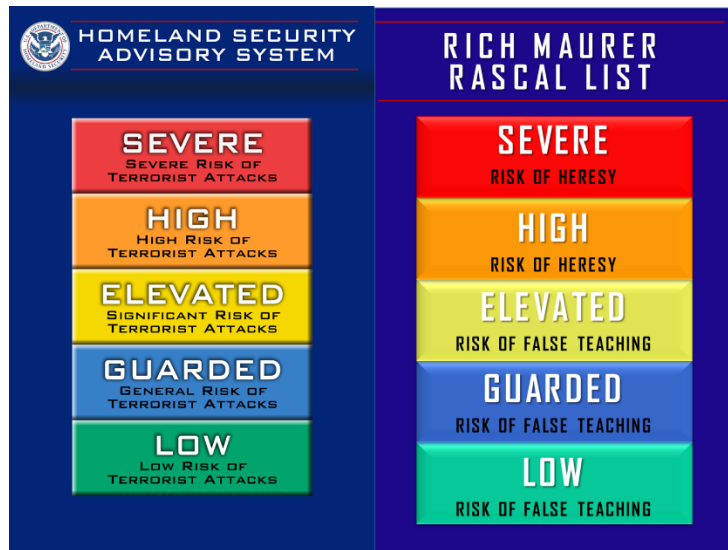
And for those of you who are not doubting any of these things, this is still good to address. First of all, doubts might just creep in later, but if not, looking at the Biblical solutions will only serve to increase the faith you already have.

With all of that in mind, let's try to tackle the first one this morning.

1. Doubting the reliability of the Bible.

Believing in the reliability of the Bible is so absolutely crucial, isn't it? If we can trust the Bible, then we can't be sure of any of our beliefs. This is a belief which is a foundation for our other beliefs. Because this is so important, I was disappointed to have to add Andy Stanley to my "rascal list." What is a rascal list? Do you recall the now outdated Homeland Security Advisory System to warn of various levels of terrorist threats? Well you could say that I have a Rascal List to warn of various levels of false teaching.

For example, When the book *The Shack* by William Young came out, I would have put it in the yellow category. I know many people have found the book helpful, but it is filled with highly questionable descriptions of the Trinity. I would never say not to read a book. Unless you are my young child, I can't censor a book. If I were to say, "Don't you ever read this book," some of you will read simply because I said not to read it.



But then the heresy alert when to code red with his book, *Lies We Believe About God*, where he writes, "Are you suggesting that everyone is saved? That you believe in universal salvation? That is exactly what I am saying!"⁴ and, "Every human being you meet . . . is a child of God."⁵ Then of course you have to overlay these heretical statements from his non-fiction book onto the fictional *The Shack*.

So that is my rascal list. And it's not like I actually have a list with everyone categorized like this. But in the pursuit of Biblical discernment, many speakers and authors end up somewhere on this continuum. And as I said, Andy Stanley, who technically would have already been on the list, just raised his threat level. The concerns started with his book, *Irresistible*, where he wrote, "The Ten Commandments have no authority over you. None. To be clear: Thou shalt not obey the Ten Commandments."⁶ Some of these next quotes are from the book and some are from a sermon series from this past Spring.

- “Paul never leverages the old covenant as a basis for Christian behavior.”⁷
- “(First Century) Church leaders unhitched the church from the worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish scriptures.”⁸
- “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.”⁹

Stanley is literally telling evangelicals to ignore the Old Testament. He claims that it contains too many difficult things and that unbelievers will just stumble over it, so it’s better to let it go altogether. Here is a chart of some of his comparisons.

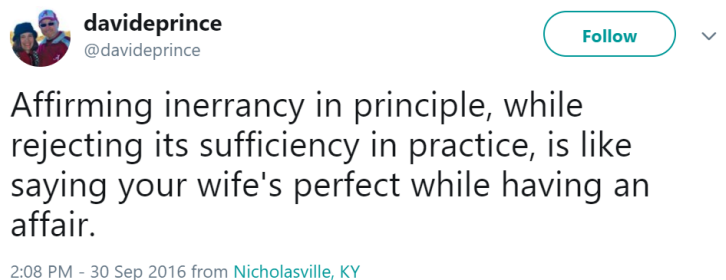
Old Covenant	New Covenant
Hating enemies	Loving enemies
Women are commodities	Women are partners
God is holy	God is love
God is angry	God is brokenhearted
Rely on the Bible	Just love others

This is one of the most alarming things he wrote. “The good news is even if none of those [Old Testament] things actually happened it does nothing to undermine the credibility of our new covenant faith.”¹⁰ Do you see what he is saying here? Even if the entire Old Testament is not true! Wow, absolutely shocking. There are so many things wrong with his viewpoint I don’t possibly have time to address them all. Stanley is causing people to doubt the reliability of the Bible. The NT is 100% built on the OT so if you get rid of one, the other will eventually fall as well. This is extra discouraging to me because such a clear attack on the Scriptures is not coming skeptics and atheists but from an evangelical pastor—and a very influential one at that.

I think this person’s comment is extremely helpful. “While a person doesn’t have to believe the Bible is true to be saved, the Bible has to be true for them to be saved.”¹¹ In other words, just because you have some doubts about the reliability of the Bible does not mean you are not saved. You could adopt Stanley’s view and reject the Old Testament and still be saved but you have a very chance of rejecting the entire Bible at some point.

David Prince nails the issue in this tweet. Stanley would not deny inerrancy, in theory. But in practice, he has rejected 3/4^{ths} of the Bible. It’s double speak.

As promised, the first chapter of Paul’s letter to Thessalonica addresses this topic.



(Audio message has much more detail from this point forward...)

1. The Word is never alone—the Holy Spirit empowers His Word.
 5—because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction

2. The Word is very effective in the midst of suffering.

6,7—for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit,⁷ so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.

3. The Word is God's Word.

2:13—And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

And he said to them, “O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?” And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (Luke 24:25-27).

But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:29-31)

Can't eliminate all doubts in a single sermon...

Ex. My seminary paper on Jesus' view of the OT

[“Christ's View of the Authority of Scripture: An Inductive Study of the Four Gospels”](#)

Rich Maurer

December 2, 2018

¹ <https://genius.com/Caedmons-call-you-created-lyrics>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-W8whLus684>

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/3-beliefs-progressive-christians-atheists-share/>

⁴ William Paul Young, *Lies We Believe About God*, Atria Books, © 2017, p. 118.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 206.

⁶ Andy Stanley, *Irresistible: Reclaiming the New that Jesus Unleashed for the World*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids, © 2018, p. 136.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 209.

⁸ <https://www.christianpost.com/news/andy-stanley-responds-to-concerns-over-unhitch-comments-says-critics-need-to-understand-context-224060/>

⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pShxFTNRCWI>

¹⁰ *Irresistible*, p. 306.

¹¹ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/reviews/irresistible-andy-stanley/>