



The Hazards of Being Certain Rather Than Faithful

No matter how much certainty is in our hearts we human beings cannot know for sure which “truths” are really true, and believing that we can leads us down a terrible path. John Locke 1670

After spending a number of years in the Seminary where I was taught what my Church holds as truth, followed by a number of years doing graduate study in Biblical Theology I was *certain* that I could answer any question pertaining to God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, heaven, hell, and any religious question that could be raised. It is embarrassing to confess to that degree of outright arrogance and sheer ignorance. At this later point in time I am thankful that I have learned the folly of that attitude of certainty although at times it still raises its ugly head.

The truth is that the more we learn the more we become aware of how little we can know with any degree of

certainty. As I continue to acquire knowledge as well as grow in faith—two very different experiences—the more I question everything I have learned and continue to learn. I have discovered that absolute truth is unbelievably slippery.

At first this discovery was a severe challenge to my faith and to the knowledge I had acquired through my education. It was a serious threat and quite unsettling. Everything that I had believed to be valuable and true with certainty was not without flaw or beyond questioning. Even that which I thought the Bible set forth as truth is often skewed and misinterpreted. In my case all certainty gave way to questioning. The few minor doubts I had held for years—and was fraught with guilt for holding them—mushroomed into mountain size questions about the accuracy of many religious beliefs I had been taught and for so long clutched tightly for personal security.

How true it is that we tend to believe what we want to believe and use the Bible to prove it.

My imagined dilemma: If I allowed so much as one chink in my religious armor as a pastor, what would that do to the people I was leading? It turned out to be a non-issue.

It has been solely by the working of the Holy Spirit that I now am freed from believing that I have to hold certain beliefs with acuity and unswerving commitment or else be in serious trouble with God. Such is not the case at all.

In this gift of freedom I can now question, examine, doubt or even not believe some things and it is not ultimately consequential. It isn't *certainty* that is important. We can be absolutely certain in our minds that something is true and be totally wrong. History is filled with examples of this frozen mentality of certainty. Ex: The earth is flat. The

earth is the center of the universe. Being certain that something is true does not make it so.

That which is essential, implacable and cannot be compromised is *faith* in a loving and forgiving God who loves and cares for all of His people on earth regardless of the system of beliefs they hold to be true. All belief systems, while helpful, are inadequate and only approximate at best. Being of human origin such beliefs simply cannot capture and encapsulate the grandeur of the Holy One.



Faith, that amazing spiritual connection with God, is the way to go, and that is God's mysterious gift to us.