

You want an answer. You want to know what to do. Living is a 'chancy' enterprise. You never know what tomorrow may bring. There are many things that you desire. But the one thing that everyone wants, the one thing for which we would make almost any sacrifice, is: Certainty.

Variety may be the spice of life, but things can get too spicy. Too much uncertainty looks like chaos, and human beings cannot thrive in a world with too many unanswered questions. And, we want definite answers to our questions. We want certainty.

We will believe almost anything that is presented to us as a sure thing. Generally, the simpler the answer, the better we like it. Too many 'ifs', 'ands' or 'buts' just complicate matters and raise the level of uncertainty. Life is complicated enough, so we are more than willing to believe anything that is presented to us as simple and certain.

For many people, the Church is the place to go for the answers to their questions. Since we are willing to pattern our life on the answers we are given by our Church, we expect a high level of certainty for these answers. Ultimately, a church can be judged by the level of certainty in its answers. The scale is this: The higher the level of certainty the further that church is from the truth.

The Christian answer to your questions about life is not a formula with a written, double-your-money-back, ironclad guarantee. The Church is not here to offer you guarantees. We are here to support you in your faith. We can give witness and testimony to what God has

done for those who have faith. The Church does not offer proof. We offer the means for Grace. The true Church offers the promise of God for all those who walk by faith. We do not offer foolproof schemes. The level of certainty any church gives to any question is in inverse proportion to its level of faith.

The minute, the second you declare an article of faith a matter of certainty, in that instant you have made salvation by grace through faith null and void. No one, no religion, no church can tell you that if you do thus-and-so you will be saved 100%, absolutely, unequivocally, certain.

Biblical and religious history is filled with stories of how God has mocked human certainty. You can do nothing to guarantee your salvation. Your salvation is wholly dependent on what Jesus did and what Jesus promised. You can stake your life on that promise. You can have an abundance of certitude. But certitude is not certainty.

I know some of you feel that this is an unsatisfactory answer. And I know that the world, and even some churches, will offer something more certain. Surely, one would think that there is something that we can do to make salvation more of a certainty?

Take for instance, the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. What could be more certain than the law handed down by God Almighty? Surely, one would think that right performance of the law would guarantee salvation? Not so. As St. Paul so eloquently explains in his Epistle to the Romans, the Law, which was good became sinful beyond measure. Those who rigidly performed the letter of the

Law became self-righteous. They forgot the Spirit that makes the Law live. They divorced themselves from faith in God. They exchanged their faith in the promise of the living God for the false certainty of their own works. They embraced the law instead of relying on faith with its uncertainty, instead of believing and working out salvation in fear and trembling, List of rules, to do this and don't do that, is more certain than faith. It is easier and more certain to be obedient than it is to be faithful. Even when the rules are rigorous, they are more comfortable because they are more sure, more certain.

The final salvation of all of us was not had by a better set of rules. Our salvation came in the Word made flesh. Jesus calls us to follow him and promises that he will save us – has already saved us. We can say, “Lord, I have kept all the Commandments, since my youth.” To this Jesus will reply, “One thing you lack - follow me.”

You want answers that are certain. You want to know what you can do. It's not that you lack faith. It's just that by now your faith is exhausted. In trying to find answers, you have believed in many things. You believed in political candidates, people who promised moral leadership. You saw them sink in ignominy because of their own moral lapses. You believed in the power of the financial system, only to see it suddenly collapse. You even believed in the personal charisma of religious leaders only to see them, one by one, become willing participants in the sins they preached against. You believed in politicians and financiers and preachers who seemed to have all the answers. You were repeatedly disappointed. You despair of believing. You want certainty so you come to church looking for that certainty. For that ironclad, verifiable answer.

My friends, certainty is the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil. As much as you desire it, you cannot have it. You have all the possibilities of this world but eat of the fruit of that one tree and you will surely die. Certainty denies faith. It kills it. Without faith in God we are dead.

If you believe that anything can save you other than faith in God's salvation, in the Cross of Christ – if you believe that rituals or tithing or keeping commandments or anything that you do has the power to save you, then be certain of this: you will be lost. Only Jesus saves.

We have the promise of salvation by grace through faith. You want certainty. You've been given a promise. It has always seemed to be foolishness to stake so much on a promise.

The Apostle Paul knew this when he wrote to the Corinthians:

“For since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe.”

Only faith believes in Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit in the Glory of God the Father.

Amen.

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