

Can You Be Certain? – Part One

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." Romans 8:24-25

The Oxford English Dictionary defines certain as: "Determined, fixed, settled; not variable or fluctuating; unailing." The second meaning: "Sure, unerring, not liable to fail; to be depended upon; wholly trustworthy or reliable; sure to come or follow; always produces the expected effect." The fourth meaning: "Fully confident upon the ground of knowledge, or other evidence believed to be infallible; having no doubt; assured."

Another meaning: "A definite quantity or amount." As you know, many English words have more than one meaning. Illustrations abound: "Be fair with me and allow me to go to the fair." "Do not be cross with me as I pick up my cross and cross the street." So also with certain: "The lady went to the post office on a certain day, certain that the package would be there." The context tells you the meaning of the word.

Hope is anticipated future gain. If we define certain as determined, fixed, unailing, then we cannot be certain that when we die we will go to heaven. I may be certain in the fourth meaning of the word; I am fully confident, having no doubt. When you allow the surgeon to perform an operation on you, you may be fully confident all will be well, but you cannot be certain until after the fact. If I ask, "Do you think you will someday have cancer?" You would probably answer, "I hope not," which means that you cannot be certain.

Can You Be Certain? – Part Two

"...I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me." II Timothy 1:12

Do you think that everyone who is certain that he is going to heaven when he dies actually goes to heaven? If you are thinking biblically, you answer "no." At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus cautions the hearers that many people, confident they are going to heaven, will be rejected by the Savior.¹

From this perspective, certain in the sense of "determined, fixed, settled" is the enemy of certain in the sense of "having no doubt; assured;" I can have no doubt and be fully assured that the surgeon will be successful in his operation on my heart, but I will not be certain until I awake from the surgery. Assurance is a narcotic. It has its place, but if it is misused, it can kill you. All assurance is designed to do is make you feel good; it guarantees you nothing. More important is the question, "What evidence do you have that you should be assured?"

The Apostle John asks and answered this question: "And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."² How do you know that you know God? The only biblically legitimate reason for being assured of your salvation is a heart for obedience.

¹ Cf. Matthew 7:21-23. ² I John 2:3-4