

Beyond a Reasonable Doubt

We have a more sure word of prophecy

2 Peter 1:19

I'll admit that cooking isn't one of my strengths. Still, I have enjoyed cooking in the past; in fact as a kid I loved to prepare meals for my family. But with adolescence came the obsession with my weight and I realized the obvious, that cooking and eating, like other things, went together like a horse and carriage. Therefore, as a casualty of the desire to be thin, my budding culinary development became stifled. Later on, the time constraints of college and subsequently work did nothing to resuscitate this interest. Consequently, once on my own, I usually ate out, brought home take-out or else threw together something easy like Top Ramen noodles stashed in the pantry.

Then in due time I met John and, having noticed that his contribution to a church potluck was a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken, bemused that it must be a sign that he was the right man for me. Regardless, once married we needed to establish a normal routine for meals. Regularly eating out at restaurants was expensive and fattening; moreover it got old pretty fast. Therefore, the most realistic option meant using the kitchen stocked with some barely-used pots, pans and appliances. Including a crock-pot someone gave us as a wedding present.

Once I grasped the concept of the crock-pot, it almost seemed too good to be true. All I had to do was to combine some ingredients in the morning, head off to work and return hours later to find dinner ready to go. I felt as if a cook worked at home in my absence and once I became hooked, it's probably safe to say that our simple, low-end crock-pot has been worth its weight in gold.

Recently, it was my emotional bond to the crock-pot coupled with my penchant for shortcuts that prompted me to buy, "The 4 Ingredient Crock Pot Cookbook." In my opinion, if there's anything better than a good meal, it's a good and easy meal. This little paperback was packed with easy recipes, including "So-Good Chicken" made with chicken breasts, cream-of mushroom soup, sour cream and cooking wine. That was it, plus the time required to slow-cook it.

Now this easy dish was a winner, even though I substituted fat-free sour cream and low fat cream of mushroom soup for the higher-calorie options. Furthermore, there were leftovers to cover at least one more dinner, maybe two. So after the first meal I transferred the remaining chicken from the crock-pot into a bowl, covered it with plastic wrap and set it on the counter to cool a bit before it went in the refrigerator.

The next morning, to my horror I came down to the kitchen and saw the bowl of food sitting right out there on the counter where I'd left it the night before. What followed the initial sinking feeling was an inner debate about whether or not I could salvage the mountain of improperly stored food sitting before me. After all, since it was covered by plastic wrap, maybe it was still okay. But how could I know for sure? Racked with uncertainty, I put the bowl in the refrigerator pending a final decision.

Now it's probably apparent that I've never had food poisoning, because anyone who has ever spent those wretched hours riding the porcelain chariot wouldn't take the risk I was contemplating. But John has known the miserable experience, and when presented with the issue "to toss or not to toss," it was a no-brainer to be safe than sorry. So before I could waste any more energy in turmoil over the matter, I proceeded to feed all that chicken to something that couldn't possibly get sick from it—the garbage disposal.

Although it seemed a shame to throw out so much food, John brought up a great point that resolved the issue in my mind. He said, "Even if the food is fine, we wouldn't be able to enjoy it not knowing whether or not it was okay."

Wow, how true was that? So even if microorganisms didn't spoil the leftovers, they were nonetheless spoiled for us by something else, our doubt. In other words, doubt kept us from enjoying our food.

To be fair, doubt can be good or bad, depending on the situation. To question the leftover chicken was probably wise, for had we ignored the red flags of uncertainty we might have experienced some nasty consequences. Similarly, I should doubt certain things with reason before going forward. Is some action safe? Is some professional competent? Is some politician trustworthy? What's unreasonable to me is not to ask such questions.

On the other hand, doubt can keep us from enjoying life if allowed to run rampant without cause or resolution. Having suffered with anxiety in my youth I know firsthand how unreasonable uncertainty can spread like wildfire while ravaging peace and joy. Plagued by germ-phobia, for example, I constantly washed my hands, always doubting their freedom from contamination by who knows what. In reality it was my doubt-infested imagination that proved much more harmful to me than any germs I might have encountered with unwashed hands.

Obsessively irrational doubts can happen, but spiritual doubts are more common to the human condition. God is perfect, His is Word flawless (Psalm 18:30) and we're endowed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Ephesians 1:3) through faith in Him. Yet doubts can keep perfectly sanctified, imperfect souls from enjoying our faith about a spiritual reality we can't see, touch, taste, hear or smell. Particularly amidst trials we don't understand.

But God is patient with doubters (Jude 1:22); moreover, in spite of besetting spiritual doubts, we're sovereign whether or not to be honest dealing with them. The honest doubter searches for reasons to trust, while the dishonest searches for excuses not to. And though it may not come swiftly or easily, honestly working through doubt may result in deeper faith.

Without faith it's impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6); furthermore, perpetual doubters are unstable like waves tossed about in the sea by the wind (James 1:6). Yet those who trust God, anchored with His prophetic Word made sure, are stable and therefore enjoy their faith knowing it rests in something more secure than anything in this world. Moreover, walking by faith isn't the practice of a head-in-the-sand ostrich oblivious to circumstances; rather, faith reckons Him real and therefore more trustworthy amidst them. Only through such belief could Job affirm amidst great anguish, "Though He slay me yet will I trust Him (Job 13:15)."

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed (John 20:29)." These are the ones persuaded that believing is seeing rather than seeing believing. So unlike choosing whether to taste crock-pot leftovers not knowing if they're good, the faithful ones have tasted and seen, without a doubt, that Jehovah is good (Psalm 34:8).