

A Certain Uncertainty

by [Clark Cowden](#)

The cover story of last month's Scientific American magazine was "The Future of Physics". A review of the article reports how scientists can measure what happens when they smash these teeny tiny objects together, hurling around at practically the speed of light. They are too small and move too fast to be seen by the naked eye. They were previously invisible to us, but now we see what they are doing and what happens. Scientists are not positive that they know how everything works. Instead, the opposite is true. The deeper they look at the infinitesimal details, the more they discover how much they don't know. The more certainty they gain, the more uncertainty they have. It's a paradox.

One writer contrasts this attitude of physics with the attitude towards politics in America. While physicists can count the number of quarks in a given space with mind-boggling accuracy, the very best political minds in the land, with all the resources they need at their disposal, can barely manage to get a working head count of how many delegates the American Democratic presidential candidates have or don't have. As it turns out, the political hacks are more prone to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle than gluons and quarks are. No wonder Einstein said physics is easy but politics is hard.

Some of the political insiders are going crazy with the level of uncertainty present at this stage in the American process. Many of them are looking for closure. They are wanting to end the process as quickly as possible, so that a nominee can be named. There's only one problem. The voters are not cooperating. The voters still haven't picked a Democratic nominee, and it's causing many to speculate that we will be living in the land of uncertainty for another five months. That's an eternity in politics.

One writer was so bold as to suggest that maybe uncertainty is a good thing. Maybe uncertainty will create more conversation. Maybe it will drive the debate to deeper levels on the issues. Maybe it will push the candidates to address the issues the people care most about.

Does this apply to the church as well? Could uncertainty be a good thing for us? I get the impression that many in the church are not comfortable with uncertainty. I sense that people often are looking for premature closure. What do we do with programs that promise spectacular results for the church, but which have no space for uncertainty within them? What do we do with people who guarantee outcomes if we only buy their slick, new church product? How can they predict the future and have so much certainty in such an uncertain world? Do they really know what they are talking about? Do they think that my people are just robots that I can program and control? Do they think that I can control what God will do? If their program requires no element of faith, why would I consider using it?

Hebrews 11:1 says that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. It describes faith as a paradox. The paradox brings together the now and the not yet, the assurance of today with the unrealized hope for tomorrow. The paradox of faith brings together

the conviction of the orthodox, historic faith with what remains unseen. I don't know if church product marketers don't believe in paradox or if they just believe that paradox doesn't sell. Certainty sells. So, how do you market in a world that seems to be growing more uncertain all the time?

Maybe you don't. I don't want to be marketed. I don't want to listen to a sales pitch. I want someone who will sit down and listen to me and the struggles in my ministry, and help me figure out just a couple of next steps that will help me lead my people to a better place. If people don't acknowledge the uncertainty in our world, then I don't they understand the world I live in. I don't want to listen to someone who thinks they have all the answers. I want to listen to someone who is asking the right questions.

I want to talk to people who understand the paradox of a certain uncertainty.