

Deep or Muddy?

Through the years there have been individuals, usually preachers, who feature themselves as being "free thinkers" who present "thought provoking" lessons that are usually attacks upon what they call the "traditionally held" views. The "in depth" lessons presented by these individuals usually leave many in the audience wondering just what they have said and thinking that the preacher is so "deep" in his thinking and presentation that they do not understand simply because they do not have the knowledge or ability the preacher has.

These men have at times caused confusion and strife by their preaching and when questioned about their teaching they usually reply, "*You just don't understand what I am saying.*" Again, the implication is that any problem that may exist is due to the lack of knowledge or ability on the part of the hearer to comprehend the "deep" things taught by the preacher.

I think it is time to start putting the blame where it belongs. Are these men the "deep" thinkers they want us to believe they are? I often think of a statement I once heard made by an old country fellow. He said, "*Just because you can't see the bottom of the river doesn't necessarily mean the water is deep, it may just be muddy.*" I am convinced that this is the case with some of these "deep" thinkers. They have the ability to present their thoughts in such a confusing manner that they just "muddy the water."

The apostle Paul said that he wrote the things revealed to him by the Holy Spirit so that "*when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ*" (Eph. 3:4). One of the characteristics of faithful gospel preachers through the years has been their ability to present the truth of the gospel in a way that made it easily understood by those who heard. If these men who fancy themselves as being such "in depth" students of the word really have the knowledge and ability they want us to believe they have then why don't they just teach what they believe to be the truth in a simple understandable manner. If we are misunderstanding what they are teaching then we plead with them to use their "superior" ability and present their teaching so that we "inferiors" can understand. The gospel of Christ remains the same today as when first preached on the day of Pentecost. When someone has to preach something that has never been preached before or preach it in a way no one else has ever preached it we had better beware.

I certainly do not want to discourage any study of God's word nor do I condone those who become satisfied with "*the way we have always done things*" and will not change even when change is necessary to conform to God's word. However, I do not approve of those who seem more concerned with impressing men with their ability to be "deep thinkers" rather than helping men understand the plain and simple teachings of God's word. All preachers need, from time to time, to ask themselves the same question Paul asked in his epistle to the Galatians; "*For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?*" (Gal. 1:10). Paul said, "*if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*"

I have often said that the two greatest compliments that could be paid to one preaching are: (1) "*He preaches the truth*" and (2) "*He presents it in such a way that all can understand.*" When we become more concerned with "making an impression" than we are with "preaching the word" we are making a grave mistake. Our concern must always be the salvation of souls and not self-glorification. If the gospel is preached souls will be saved and God will be glorified.

Don't be intimidated by those who try to make you feel inferior in your ability to understand truth. Their teaching may not be "deep," it may just be "muddy."

- by James Hahn

The Power Of Influence

Webster defines the word influence as "the power of persons or things to affect others, seen only in its effects." Though the word influence is only found one time in the King James Version, its meaning is on every page.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells his disciples that they are the "salt of the earth" (Matt. 5:13-16). There are many interesting things you can say about this figure of speech. Salt is totally worthless while sitting on a shelf, it has to be applied. Salt can also loose its "saltiness." When it looses its power to flavor, it is good for nothing and must be discarded.

Paul told the brethren at Corinth they were an "epistle of Christ known and read by all men" (2 Cor. 3:1-3). Whether we like it or not, every Christian is an advertisement for Christ. It is rather scary to think the honor of Christ is in the hands of his disciples. Men of the world will judge Christ by the character of his followers.

Have you ever considered what type of an advertisement you are? One of our songs suggests that "We are the only Bible the careless world will read, We are the sinners gospel, we are the scoffers creed, We are the Lord's last message, given in deed and word, What if the type is crooked? What if the print is blurred?"

Much of the book of Proverbs is devoted to warning young men about their choosing their companions. "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed" (Prov. 13:20).

The majority of worldly people will pay very little attention to what we say, but our actions will always be scrutinized. When they think of our character and reputation, our actions will speak louder than our words.

- by David Padfield

"Neither Cold Nor Hot"

It seems that every congregation struggles to achieve a 'happy medium' when it comes to the thermostat setting in the church auditorium. Some are perpetually cold, while others are simultaneously too hot. One will be shivering and wearing a heavy coat and lap blanket, while another sitting nearby will be employing one of those 'funeral home fans' that are invariably located in the pews.

What we hope to do is find a temperature setting that is acceptable to the majority of folks, resulting in worshippers that are "neither cold nor hot." But despite our best efforts, everyone must realize that those whose sensitivities are at the extremes of the hot and cold spectrum will still wish for higher or lower settings on the thermostat. We beg for patience and a longsuffering attitude on the part of everyone.

On the other hand, the spiritual temperature chart is completely different. We absolutely do not want to find Christians in the in-between, "lukewarm" range. Do you recall what the Lord said to the Laodiceans?: *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."* (Revelation 3:15-16)

We fear that there are too many of God's people today who would be described as "lukewarm." These are the ones who want a measure of religion, but not too much. They want an association with God's people, but they also want to be accepted by their friends in the world. They know they should be faithful in attendance, but their secular activities demand a lot of their time. In short, they want it both ways. God's Word says it can't be done: *"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (Matthew 6:24).

Christian, are you "neither cold nor hot"? Are you "lukewarm"? Think!

- by Greg Gwin