

Of Fish... and People (or vice versa)

Part 1

It's no "fish story" that I like to fish. And those who know me at all know that I love to preach and teach God's word. So to me, one of the most endearing compliments I've ever received was from an avid fisherman who was also a long-time elder in the church. He described me as "a pretty good fisherman, and even better fisher of men." Whether actually true or not, in either case, his sentiment meant a lot to me. I've been "fishing" for men for about 35 years, but I've fished for "fish" for around 50, plus or minus a couple of years in both cases. So, trust me when I say that the parallels and comparisons between the objects of my avocation and my vocation continue to both enlighten and astonish me.

- **Some fish will bite and swallow anything that even vaguely resembles something that they would normally consume.** While still a youngster, I was catching perch and a few small bass from a pond near my home with grasshoppers as fast as I could catch one, put it on a hook, and get it back in the water. After a while, I got tired of chasing grasshoppers. So, I folded up a blade of green grass and put it on the hook.... I caught three more fish before they wised up! Though I've never deliberately "hooked" anyone with "fake" spiritual food, **some people seem to be no smarter than a foolish fish in these regards nonetheless.** How else could so many be fooled by such pseudo-enlightenment as, "It doesn't really matter what you believe as long as you're honest and sincere"? Then why oh why did the Lord and so many NT writers warn of the dangers and destruction derived from believing *false prophets* and *false words*, cf. Matthew 7:13-27; 2Peter 2:1-3, e.g.? Don't get "caught" spiritually by a folded-up blade of grass just because it resembles a grasshopper of Truth- read the Book and get the real thing! Please remember the wise words of Proverbs 23:23, "*Buy truth, and do not sell it, get wisdom and instruction, and understanding.*"
- **Fish sometimes just want something "different."** They get "tired" of the same old lures being thrown their way time after time regardless of how "realistic" they are, or how "life-like" they are made to swim, crawl, jiggle, or jerk. They are then susceptible to anything "different." It doesn't have to look like, be the right color of, move like, or even taste like anything that would normally be good "food" for a fish to eat. If it's "different," they just might "swallow" it anyway. **People can be like that-wanting or thinking we need a "different" gospel, worship, or mission.** But if so, we forget that God has invested His *power to save us* in the gospel He gave us, Romans 1:16. Why would we want anything "different" than it, Galatians 1:6-8? We also forget that God desires worship that is "*in spirit and truth*" as He has revealed it, John 4:23-24. Why would we possibly prefer "different" worship from "*the doctrines and precepts of men*" instead of that which He has declared, Matthew 15:6-9? And likewise, why would we possibly shun the prescribed glorious mission to "*seek and save that which is lost*" (Luke 19:10) and to be "*the pillar and ground of truth*" (1Timothy 3:15) for the "different" purposes of providing day care, secular education, and recreation and entertainment for our children and ourselves? Please remember that "*the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit,*" Romans 14:17. Don't "swallow" a gospel, worship practice, or mission just because it's "different"- better smarter than a fish!
- **Some fish, even after biting a fake bait, are not smart enough to just spit it out.** I "caught" a fish once that was so intent on eating, that he refused to just "let go" of the lure while I reeled him in and even lifted him up onto the dock, despite the fact

that he didn't have a single hook in him! He only had the tail end of the lure in his mouth, yet stubbornly refused to let go. We can be like that- continuing to "sink our teeth into" a false premise, a bad interpretation, or a wrong application even after it's obvious that it is just plain wrong and leading us into sure destruction. Perhaps pride is the problem. We just don't want to admit that we were "lured" into taking fake bait, so we hang onto it no matter how ridiculous we become. Some of the Corinthians were, at least for a time, like that. They had apparently "swallowed" an absurdly false conclusion "hook, line, and sinker"- that there was *"no resurrection of the dead,"* 1Corinthians 15:12. But Paul demonstrated that such a doctrine was: contrary to revealed truth, vv.12,20-28; resulted only in a spiritual death-sentence for adherents, vv.13-19; and, was even inconsistent with their own practice, v.29. Hopefully, they had sense enough to just give up and just "spit it out" before they wound up with a "hook in them" from which they could not free themselves. So, if or when you find yourself on the "wrong side of the water" of a doctrine, interpretation, or application, please be smarter than that fish and just "let go"!

Hear Genesis 1:27, *"And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them."* What a glorious privilege the Creator of the Universe and all things therein bestowed upon us to be imprinted with His image! But please realize that He did not bequeath the same honor upon animals- including fish. Therefore, Genesis 1:28 continues, *"And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" As humans, our Creator has endowed us with both the capacity and the prerogative to "rule over" every other living thing, including but certainly not limited to, fish. But to "rule over" them, **we first need to be smart than a fish.** Be smarter than a fish, please! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)*