

Topwater Fishing- for *Fish and Men*

Anyone who knows me at all knows I like to fish. I fished as kid in East Texas for generally anything that lived and would bite bait in creeks and ponds. When we lived and I preached on the South East Texas Coast, I fished in rivers, creeks, bays, beaches, jetties, and even out 30 or 40 miles out into the Gulf of Mexico. Now we live in Indiana and I fish almost exclusively in a neighborhood retention pond that backs up to our house. Though it's probably around 2.5 to 3.0 acres in size, it's not very deep- only about 3.5 to 4.0 feet. But late in the summer, when dry weather begins to take its toll (it's down about 2 feet now!), it gets shallow... really shallow, and obviously smaller as well. Although the bass can still be caught- and at certain times, even in more abundance, the tactics utilized to do so must necessarily be adapted.

Since the water is so shallow, and because of this the bottom is covered in slimy moss (since the sunlight penetrates all the way down), "topwater" lures become the primary weapon of choice. They float on the surface and wobble, plop, buzz, and or rattle to attract the fish's attention and hopefully induce a strike. But diving baits, or those that swim through the water column are extremely difficult to keep off the bottom, and generally produce what fisherman call "salad"- moss, grass, or other vegetation. So the choice of lure is reduced from many (ok, probably a 100 or so!), to just a few that will still "fish" given the circumstances. Otherwise, though I may make a lot of casts, I mostly just spend my time cleaning the "salad" off my lure(s).

But it strikes me that "fishing for men" is also somewhat like this. In certain conditions, when the spiritual weather is hot and dry and the water is uncommonly shallow, "topwater" preaching and teaching is probably the only effective method. Please understand, I don't particularly like "topwater" fishing for fish or for men, but preaching and teaching "deep" lessons for those living and swimming in shallow waters of thought and habitude will likely only produce spiritual "salad/junk"... and no "fish/men."

Do me a favor, please- stop here and read [Hebrews 5:11 – 6:3](#) before proceeding. I would present to you that we're living in a spiritual hot/dry spell wherein people are definitely thinking and living in shallow spiritual waters. Basic knowledge of God (even His existence), His ways, and His word have been bred out, neglected out, or educated out of the "school" (*i.e.* general population). Thus, deep-diving discussions of the "*weightier provisions of the law*" ([cf. Matt.23:23](#)) just aren't going to be as effective as "topwater" (shallow) teaching of "*the elementary principles of the oracles of God,*" [5:12](#).

Certainly there is a time and place for providing spiritual "*solid food/meat*" for the spiritually "*mature,*" as [6:1-3](#) indicates. But for those who are spiritually "*dull of hearing*" and "*not accustomed to the word of righteousness,*" the "*elementary principles,*" and thus "*milk*" (or for our metaphoric purposes, "topwater"), is not only needed, it is the only way forward. So, if we're "casting" (preaching/teaching) into a deep pool of spiritual understanding and maturity, the deep-diving approach is best as those in that "school" are *mature*, and "*because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil*" already, [5:14](#). But if we're attempting to entice those living in the shallow water of spiritually *immature* thinking/understanding to come to and ingest a knowledge of God that leads to obedience, we better stick to the "*first principles of the oracles of God*"- the "topwater" stuff. In fishing for fish or men, the approach needs to match the conditions to be productive. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)