

What I Don't Understand Is...

A lot, actually. But let me narrow the scope considerably- specifically to one point we'll get to in a bit. Let me explain.

For probably about two decades now, and I don't really even remember the impetus for formulating what follows- it may have been a question by a younger man who was contemplating preaching as a vocation or something like that, I've been saying (and believing!) that **"There are primarily three things that a preacher has to know:**

1. **The Book-** for that is his text;
2. **People-** for they are his target; and,
3. **Himself-** for his own strengths/weaknesses determine his capabilities/limitations in proclaiming the gospel (meeting the objective).

So, with this philosophical mantra, I've devoted considerable *diligence* to the task of making myself *"approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed"* able to *"handle(ing) accurately the word of truth," 2Tim.2:15*. But, I've also *exerted myself* to know **people** (how/why they *think, feel, and act* as they do) and **myself** (introspection with regard to particular strengths and weakness in order to maximize my *seed sowing* capabilities and limit my liabilities). In the 20-25 years since formulating and seeking to follow this philosophy, here's my conclusion- and you're perfectly free to agree or disagree, but please give it some thought before making up your mind: Of these three entities that need to be at least basically understood to be effective at this work of preaching, **understanding People is the hardest**. Please hear me out:

1. The Book is written by our Creator for us as His creation to *read and understand*, Eph.3:3-4; He knew/knows not only man's *needs* but also his *wants* as well as his *capabilities* and *limitations*- therefore He provided the "information" that man not only needed, but could understand with basic cognitive skills coupled with honest intellectual motivations, 2Pet.1:3.
2. And any individual can understand *himself/herself* with the same modicum of cognitive skills if he/she focuses them honestly and objectively inward, cf. Jas.1:22-25.
3. But understanding "people" in general or specific, to me at least, seems to be a much more difficult task. If I'm honestly objective about myself, I can discern that I have reasons for what I think, how I feel, and what I do/don't do- they may not be "good" reasons, but I have and can identify them, and then either correct or excuse/justify them.

So, with a fundamental knowledge/understanding of God's word as a guide, honestly-motivated objective introspection will allow me to "know" rather *"deceive"* or *"delude"* myself about "me" (1Cor.3:18; Jas.1:16,22). But neither you nor I can really do more than observe the "fruits" or actions of others, and postulate thus what *might* be in their hearts. As God Himself so succinctly stated to Samuel, *"God sees not as a man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart," 1Sam.16:7*.

All of which brings us to what is to me an inescapable conclusion: **It is much easier for a person to know the basics of God's word and his/herself than it is to**

comprehend other humans. Please think about the following to illustrate why “man” is such a conundrum...

For the sake of our premise, let’s grant some things that may or may not be entirely true universally, but certainly are so for at least a good portion of the populace:

1. People “believe in” God;
2. They believe the Bible to be “His Word;”
3. They believe the Bible’s main objective is to instruct man how to please God, and thus be enabled to live forever with Him in heaven after death;
4. They have easy access to His Word, the Bible, as well as ample opportunities for assistance/guidance to understand it; and yet,
5. **Most do not read it for themselves; seek no assistance or guidance to understand it, and thus have next to no real idea what the Bible says, means, and requires.**

This I cannot understand. It is irrational, and borderline insanity. Numbers 1 through 4 do not and cannot logically lead to number 5... and yet it is, for many, **absolutely true.**

For those “lost” on the Day of Judgment, the overwhelming reason will not be lack of opportunity, but lack of initiative- *“for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of truth so as to be saved,”* 2Thess.2:10. Please, read your Bible and avail yourself of ample opportunities and assistance to understand what it says and means. Eternity depends on it. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)