

Good Food, Slightly Tainted

I have traveled several times to the Philippines, so while I am there, I am always very careful about what I eat and drink. The Pepsi is not what makes you sick; it may be the dirty bottle you put to your lips, or the knife that cut the mango you are eating, or perhaps the microscopic creatures in the water. Many unwelcome possibilities are seeking to introduce your body to the mission-trip flu that has afflicted a few of us over the years.

Every traveler in our group is careful. We all try to stay clean, use hand sanitizer, and carefully monitor what we eat and drink, but in the end, if we are bombarded with discomfort, the surest culprit was unseen. (We never saw what got us!)

I was told that a preacher friend attends many different conferences and pastors' sessions because he always finds some good. I have no doubt there is "good stuff" in any pastors' sessions. My brethren in the ministry are good men (all of them that I know anyway); they do what they do to help people. If I had a member move to that pastor's area, I might send my former member to their church. But, just because these pastors are decent men, I am still very careful about who influences me.

Haggai warned about the dirty defiling the clean, and how the clean could never clean up the dirty.

Haggai 2:12 "If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No."

vs. 13 "Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be unclean."

You and I are affected by what touches us, and it is always the unclean that defiles the clean. The defiling element could just be little, just as with food.

The word *touch* is used often in regards to keeping oneself clean.

“Touch not the unclean thing...”

The word *spot* is likewise used to urge us to take care when it comes to the possibility of being defiled.

“Hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” (Jude 23)

“... not having spot, or wrinkle...” (Ephesians 5:27)

The fact that one will find some “good stuff” at a meeting goes without saying, but that gauge is dangerous in making decisions.

Many years ago, a friend recommended a book on the home that was written by John McArthur; I declined the book. He urged me to take it saying, “There is much good in the book.” I admitted that there may be much good, but John McArthur is the one who said the blood had nothing to do with salvation, but only the death of Jesus. He taught that pastors are to preach the Gospel but not have invitations. He instead suggested that we end a service by urging anyone with questions to meet a counselor in a designated room at a certain time. I want no advice from someone who stands against the basic principles I believe! Many books on the home have been written by men who are not attacking my beliefs. I need not grab french fries from the trash just because they look untouched.

Brethren, I am no rookie. I have seen the slow decline of pastors over the years. I have watched nationally-known pastors give way to smooth-talking, intelligent men “who are not too different”; yet the end of following these men is always the same — destructive.

Isaiah warned of the temptation brought to Israel to give up and go to a land “like your own,” a land of plenty.

Isaiah 36:17 “Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards.”

Once I attended a good church for a preachers’ meeting; I enjoy preaching and fellowship. I sat through five or six sermons and never heard a preacher raise his voice, and I never heard a challenge to do something big for God. I never felt a kick in the pants or a tug in some area of drifting in my spiritual life. They showed me kindness,

comfort, and encouragement. I heard lessons and instruction from teachers; I never returned to that conference. I do not want to become a **teacher**.

I surrendered to the ministry with a burden of saving America, not for saving myself. I was challenged to burn out my life for souls and world missions, not to gain comfort and strength to face the day. I cut my spiritual teeth by listening to sermon after sermon on prayer, fasting, the Holy Spirit's power, and working hard. How can I forget the grave voice of Brother Hyles as he quoted this hymn:

*Must I be carried to the skies
On flowery beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Increase my courage, Lord.
I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
Supported by Thy Word.*

If eight out of ten subjects at a conference are good, I will be affected by the other two.

Another danger of hanging around a nice group of semi-fundamentalists is that they are good guys. They are nice; they are likable and easy to befriend. Once someone has become your friend, you are much more accepting of their weaknesses. (Accepting the quirks of those we love is natural.) A pastor cannot afford to become close to those who will slowly erode his convictions. That erosion will take place easily enough on its own; the pastor needs no help getting it started. A pastor needs people to help him stand strong, not grow soft.

On the mission field, children are more susceptible to danger; they do not understand the danger or where germs or bugs might be hiding. Our missionary friends who live and serve in third world countries face a unique world. Likewise, passionate, young preachers love to

be together; they love to share, talk, and enjoy the passion of the ministry; but not knowing which bugs that can hurt them, they need to listen to older preachers who have seen sickness level good men and bring them to their knees.

One year, I was preaching in a small village church and enjoying the fellowship of the people very much. After the preaching, I was getting ready to leave when the pastor asked us to stay to eat. Our driver (and guide/protector) looked at me. I was a guest and had these stupid American courtesies rattling around my head. I asked what he thought. We needed to go on to our next meeting. The village pastor explained that his wife had been preparing for hours and looked forward to a moment sharing their meal. We surrendered to kindness. I looked at the Filipino guide and he said, "I would suggest the fruit." Rather than the cooked fish and other things, I ate only fruit and then drank some Pepsi straight from the bottle. (Hindsight reminded me that I did not see the bottle opened; on many occasions, they refill the bottles locally, not at factories.) That afternoon, I was ill beyond words. The misery lasted about six hours and was sufficient to match any three-day-bug at home.

I have watched too many good men slip and slide away from the faith that they surrendered to uphold in their youth: the faith they fell in love with, the faith that drew them to the ministry. The very same faith which motivated those young men to leave home and drag their weary bodies through Bible college to learn has often been forsaken for a more comfortable path. The influence of "nice guys" who offered "help" drew them away.

We simply do not know what physical or spiritual influence has tainted our world. At sixty years of age, I am more careful now than ever of what I read, what I hear, and where I go. I plan on finishing my course straight in line with where I started. Finishing the way I started will be no accident, it will only be diligently and intentionally accomplished.