I WILL LAY MY HAND UPON MY MOUTH by Leslie Diestelkamp

Job said it (Job 40:4). God had just finished asking Job a lot of hard questions. As far as God was concerned, the questions were simple; but Job could not answer one of them. The questions were obviously intended to humble Job, and the result was exactly what God intended. Previously Job had been “righteous in his own eyes” (32:1). He had “justified himself rather than God” (32:2). Indeed, Job was a great man of patience, but he lacked humility. But after God asked many hard questions, Job said, “I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay my hand upon my mouth.”

Christians today are told to “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet. 3:15). Indeed, Christians must know that they are saved (Heb. 8:11), and they must know how this is accomplished. But we must answer with meekness, not arrogance.

Perhaps most of us have heard preachers declare that they would give an answer “without fear of contradiction by any man here or anywhere else!” The statement had a confident ring to it. We were supposed to relax and say to ourselves, “This man really knows his lesson. He is a real defender of the truth. He will put the enemy down.” Really? No, it never did have that effect upon me. It seems to me that one who has such superior knowledge would not need to tell us that he had it. I wondered if he should not put a hand upon his mouth—before somebody else did it for him!

A long, long time ago when I was a young preacher, sweet old ladies would ask me, “What will our bodies be like after the resurrection?” Or, “What is ‘the day’ in ‘when you see the day approaching’ in Hebrews 10:25?” Or, “What is the baptism for the dead in 1 Corinthians 15:29?” I felt that I had to answer. Failure to answer would mean that I didn’t know very much! (And I didn’t know much but didn’t want them to think I didn’t). Perhaps most preachers have had similar experiences.

Yes, it is now easier for me to answer. That doesn’t mean that I can solve all the hard questions—not at all. But it is quite easy for me to say, “I don’t know the answer for sure, but let us study it together.”

The apparent arrogance that seems to be manifested by some preachers may be the fault of those who ask the questions. If an experienced preacher fails to assert a dogmatic answer, people may say he is just being humble about it. If an old preacher fails, they may say he has just forgotten! But if a young preacher fails, they may say he is ignorant.

But we must not be evasive. We must not vacillate (waver). We must know the truth that will then make us free (Jn. 8:32). But we also need to “be swift to hear, slow to speak” (Jas. 1:19). And we must remember that unrevealed things belong to the Lord (Deut. 29:29) and content ourselves with those things that are revealed. Even regarding revealed things, no man can answer every question and, sometimes, each of us should *put his hand upon his mouth.*

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This article first appeared in *Think*, Vol. 12, No. 1. Dated Jan-Feb-Mar, 1981