

## The “What” and the “How” of Gospel Listening

### Introduction:

1. Refer to the sermon by bro. Everett Harden, entitled “The ‘What’ and the ‘How’ of Gospel Preaching.” In that sermon he:
  - a. Discussed the qualifications of an evangelist
  - b. Dealt with the question, “what kind of preaching does God want.”
  - c. Talked about the manner (how) of Gospel preaching.
  - d. Stressed the need for balanced preaching.
  - e. Emphasized that “we must preach with courage.”
2. I greatly appreciated that sermon, and could say a hearty “amen” to each point made. But as I listened to the sermon, it occurred to me that this “coin” has two sides. Yes, a preacher must take heed to his life and to the doctrine, I Tim. 4:16; yes, he must “*preach the word*,” 2 Tim. 4:2; yes, he must speak “*the truth in love*,” Eph. 4:15, and, yes, he must proclaim the “*whole counsel of God*,” Acts 20:27, etc. But what about the person in the pew?
3. Why is it that two people can sit side by side on the same pew, and one can walk away with a greater understanding of the Bible and more motivated to faithfully serve God, and the other can walk away murmuring under his breath, saying, “that was a dull sermon; I didn’t get a thing out of it!”
  - a. Could it be that these two people represent different kinds of **hearers**?
  - b. Could it be that whereas preachers must take heed to their lives and to the sermons they preach, the persons in the pew must also take heed to how they listen to a sermon?
4. My immediate reply to that question is to cite:
  - a. Mark 4:24, “Take heed **what** ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given.”
  - b. Luke 8:18, “Take heed therefore **how** ye hear: for whosoever hath, to him shall be given; and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.”
    - (1) These verses are parallel verses, in that they state the comments of our Lord after He had explained the parable of the sower, perhaps more accurately described as “the parable of the soils.” In each case the **sower** was the same and the **seed** was the same, but the **soil** (the hearer) was different.

### Discussion:

#### I. Much is said in the Bible about the importance of Hearing (or Listening) to the Word of God.

- A. In the Old Testament.
  1. Deut. 18:15, “unto Him ye shall hearken” (“hear,” NKJV).
  2. Isa. 28:23, “Give ye ear, and hear my voice; hearken, and hear my speech.”
  3. Ps. 50:7, “Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God.”
  4. Mal. 2:2, “If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you...”
- B. In the New Testament.
  1. Matt. 11:15, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
  2. Matt. 13:9, “Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. Note also verses 13-15.
  3. Mark 4:23, “If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.”
  4. Luke 8:8, “...He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”
  5. Heb. 3:7,15; 4:7; “...today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” Cf. Ps. 95:7-8.
  6. Rev. 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches..”
- C. **Note:** According to one source the verb “Listen” is found 331 times in the Bible, and the verb “hear” is found 347 times in the Bible; many of them refer to hearing God’s word.

#### II. However, there are different Kinds of Hearers,

- A. Those who hear with an “*Honest and good heart*,” Luke 8:15.
  1. Contextually, Jesus was explaining the parable of the Sower, and He was contrasting the seed which fell by the wayside (v. 5), and the seed which fell “*upon a rock*,” v. 6, and the seed which “*fell among thorns*,” v. 7, with the seed which fell “*on the good ground*.” These:
    - a. “*Hear the word*,”
    - b. “*keep it*,”
    - c. “*and bring forth fruit with patience*.”
- B. Those who are “*Dull of hearing*,” Heb. 5:11.

1. The problem in this case is not with the one presenting the material, nor with the complexity of the material presented, but with the hearer.
2. Both Jesus and Isaiah referred to such hearers, Matt. 13:14-15; cf. Isa. 6:9-10.
- C. Those who have “*itching Ears*,” 2 Tim. 4:3-4.
  1. Such people refuse to “*endure sound doctrine*,” 2 Tim. 4:3, and thus will be “*turned unto fables*,” v. 4.
- D. Those who are Distracted, Luke 12:13.
  1. Jesus was preaching, but all this man could think about was his not getting his fair share of “*the inheritance*.”

### III. What We must Hear

- A. The word of God!
  1. Mark 16:15-16.
  2. 2 Tim. 4:2.
  3. Acts 20:32.
- B. The word of God is:
  1. Inspired of God, 2 Tim. 3:16.
  2. Truth, John 17:17. Cf. Titus 1:2.
  3. Living and active, Heb. 4:12.
  4. “*Able to save your souls*,” Jas. 1:21.
  5. The standard by which we will be judged in that last day, John 12:48.

### IV. Why we must Hear God’s Word.

- A. It produces faith, Rom. 10:17; Acts 15:7.
- B. It purifies our lives, John 15:3; Ps. 119:11.
- C. It helps prevent apostasy, Heb. 2:1-2; I Tim. 4:1-3.
- D. It helps us bear fruit unto God, Luke 8:15; Col. 1:6.
- E. It helps us to avoid being rejected, Matt. 10:14-15; Acts 13:46.

### V. How We should Listen to the Word of God.

**Note:** Being present is important, Acts 2:42; Heb. 10:25, but real listening involves more than just being present!

- A. Negatively. Do not:
  1. Allow the Preacher to do your thinking for you! Acts 17:11; I John 4:1; I Cor. 4:6
  2. Be prejudiced for, or against, the speaker. Matt. 23:2-3; John 1:45-46; John 7:48,51; I Sam. 16:7.
  3. Be prejudiced against the message. John 6:60,66.
    - a. There are some “*hard*” sayings in the Bible, which many refuse to hear because they are “*hard*.” But does that change the nature of the sayings? It is a “*hard*” for a doctor to tell a patient, “you have stage four cancer,” but the fact that the saying is “*hard*” does not change the nature of the saying.
- B. Positively. When you listen to the word, you should:
  1. Have a focused mind, Luke 8:14.
  2. Have an honest mind, Luke 8:15.
  3. Have an open Bible, Acts 17:11; I John 4:1.
    - a. With an open Bible, you can read along with the speaker, both hearing him, and reading from your own Bible. This way, you are utilizing two senses instead of one; the sense of hearing, and the sense of sight.
    - b. At the same time, you can take notes – either on a separate piece of paper, or on the margins of your Bible. Now you are adding the sense of touch to that of hearing and of sight!
  4. Have an humble mind, I Sam. 3:10; Isa. 66:2.
  5. Have an investigative mind, Acts 17:11; I Thess. 5:21.
  6. Make a personal application of the things you hear. Matt. 26:22.
  7. Sit where you can hear! I Cor. 14:16.
  8. Have an obedient mind, Matt. 7:24-27; Ezek 33:30-32.

### Conclusion:

1. Because of the rebellion, idolatry, and apostasy of the Northern Kingdom, Israel, the time came when there was a “*famine*” of hearing God’s word, Amos 8:11-12.
  - a. Amazingly, we live in a land filled with Bibles, but to a great extent we are witnessing a “*famine*” of hearing the word of God!
2. You and I need to be both hearers and doers of the word, James 1:22.

--Bobby Witherington, Sept. 4, 2016