

Back to Basics: Hearing the Word of Christ

Hearing is truly the first step in God's plan for our soul's salvation. In our study of the greatest question of the ages – what must I do to be saved? – let us not be in too great of a hurry and overlook some critical principles and important considerations. For, if we do not begin right, how can we end right? A wrong first step and a misunderstanding of such basic Bible teachings will surely result in spiritual disaster.

On the Mount of Transfiguration, Matthew records the voice of God declaring, ***"This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear Him."*** (Matthew 17:5)

In effect, God was telling Peter who had wanted to build three tabernacles, one for Jesus, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah, "It is time to turn from Moses and the prophets, just as I had said would happen. Listen to My Son, for He is the One Who has the words of eternal life."

The Hebrews writer states in Hebrews 1:1-2,

"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by diverse portions and in diverse manners, has at the end of these days spoken unto us in His Son, Whom He appointed heir of all things, through Whom also He made the worlds;"

Jesus said in John 14:23-27,

"If a man loves Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. He that loves Me not keeps not My words: and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's Who sent Me. These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you. Peace I leave with you; My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be fearful."

So when the Holy Spirit came with power just as Jesus said He would on the Day of Pentecost, the apostles were inspired to remember all that Jesus had taught them, as well as being given new revelation. It is in this manner that Jesus speaks to us in this age as the Hebrews writer said.

God now speaks to us through His written word that was left to us from the hands of the apostles and the other authors of the New Testament. His will for us has been totally and completely revealed. Today, we have the complete written word so we can know His will. In fact, the Apostle Peter tells us that we lack nothing

we need to know: “ . . . **seeing that His divine power has granted unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that called us by His own glory and virtue; whereby He has granted unto us His precious and exceeding great promises; that through these you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world by lust.**” (2 Peter 1:3-4) Since the Lord now speaks to us through His word, we should hear Him by studying His word and listening to what He has to say.

Indeed, at various times and in many ways, God had spoken “ . . . **unto the fathers by the prophets . . .** ” (Hebrews 1:1). Now, though, God is saying, “I am speaking to you, not through the prophets, but through My Son. You need to listen to Him!”

We all know this, but what does it mean? What are the consequences to us of the command to hear the word of Christ?

First of all, it means that we no longer turn to the Old Testament as our guide. As Paul said, it was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24). The New Testament is the constitution, per se, of the kingdom of Christ (Acts 3:22, 23; Hebrews 12:25).

Secondly, we may not hear and heed another. As Jesus said in John 10:5 regarding His sheep, “**And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.**” We are to hear the Lord Jesus, which means we will reject any others who teach contrary to His word, such as Mohammed and the Koran, or Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. We will not turn to councils, catechisms, conclaves and creeds of men as expressed in denominationalism. In short, “ . . . **hear Him,**” and Him only shall you hear (John 12:48).

Third of all, all of us are equally amenable and accountable to hear. None of us is exempt (Mark 16:15). Just because my wife or my parents have heard benefits me not in the least. I must hear and obey, and so must you.

Fourth, to hear in this sense means to comprehend, not merely to register sounds on auditory faculties. In other words, one needs to listen to and obey. “**And why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord’, and do not the things which I say?”** asks Jesus in Luke 6:46. And as James, the Lord’s brother, says, “**But be you doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves**” (James 1:22).

Finally, one may devoutly hear and devotedly heed all the best and noblest sentiments of mankind, but if he hears them and ignores that one singular, spiritual voice speaking to us from His word, then that individual is stone deaf to all that matters or has meaning. “**The words that I speak unto you, they are**

spirit, and they are life," said Jesus in John. 6:63. We then have Peter's great confession recorded a few verses later when he says in John 6:68, ***"You have the words of eternal life."*** One may know every subtle nuance of Shakespeare or Tolstoy, one may weep at the quaint poignancy of Abraham Lincoln's speeches, or one may soar on the eloquence of Churchill's histories, but if he misses the sweet syllables of the Savior's breath, he may as well have been born without sense or senses. In view, therefore, of all that is high, holy, and heavenly, ***" . . . hear Him."***

The Apostle Paul traces the pattern of salvation in his letter to the church at Rome. He does so with a bit of flair, and yet with marvelous simplicity and in reverse order. What Paul does is he argues from the effect to the cause and from the last to the first.

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on Him in Whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of Whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the Gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things'" (Romans 10:13-15)

The importance of hearing the word of God is clearly emphasized in Romans 10. Paul declared that he preached ***" . . . the word of faith . . . "*** in verse 8. The sense in which one hears the word is that one is devoutly ***receiving*** of the will of God. Hearing here, therefore, means any receiving of the word of God whether it be communicated to us by preaching or reading the word of God, and accepting by faith that what God has said in His word is true, and then obediently acting upon that faith.

Paul tells us in verses 9-10 of Romans 10 that the divine message, received and believed, brings faith to the heart of the glad hearer and leads him to make confession in his faith in the Lord Jesus, which leads unto salvation (verses 9~10). Whether one is a Jew or Gentile makes no difference (verse 12), the one Lord has but one plan to save the sinner. As Paul says in Romans 1:16-17,

"For I am not ashamed of the Gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, 'But the righteous shall live by faith.'"

Contrary to what many teach that the Holy Spirit acts to make a person have faith, Paul says that the way to faith is through the hearing of the Gospel!

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

It must be pointed out that much of the religious world has a mistaken notion and woeful misconception of this simple step. Many have imagined that the saving instructions of the Lord are received in a miraculous and immediate manner. They have been taught erroneously that one need not actively and persistently give heed to reading, studying and listening to the Gospel message, for God, in some secret and mysterious way, will directly touch the sinner's heart in his own good time. It is urged by some that faith is a supernatural gift, a blessing to be gained independent of one's hearing and ready reception of the Gospel message. All such theories bear the mark of a Calvinist influence and are without Scriptural warrant.

Jesus preached the importance of hearing God's word in His familiar *Parable of the Sower and the Seed* in Luke 8:4-15. The Gospel, when planted in good and honest hearts, yields the fruit of faith (verse 15). **"The seed is the word of God"** Jesus tells us in verse 11. There can be no harvest where no seed is sown! Just so, there will be a failure of faith when the Gospel is not preached and received.

Let us give brief notice to these particulars of hearing the word of Christ.

We should always be careful in how you hear. In Luke 8:18 Jesus observed that the word falls upon the hearts of different types of hearers, just as seed planted by a farmer falls upon different types of soil. He likened the hearer who deliberately rejects and fails to understand the message as **"way side"** dirt, hardened and stubbornly resisting the penetration of the life-giving seed (Luke 8:12; cf. Matthew 13:19). Those weak in faith – believing for a while, only to fall away in times of temptation – are compared to stony and rocky soil (Luke 8:13). The hearer of the word, preoccupied and choked by the cares and pursuits of the world, is identified as ground given over to thorns and weeds (Luke 8:14). The Gospel yields fruit only when one willingly receives and keeps it, much like good ground being planted with seed (Luke 8:15).

Other kinds of hearers are pictured in the Scriptures. James tells us of the forgetful hearer in James 1:22-25. This would probably be a reference to one who does not study for oneself. Paul predicted a time would come when men with **"itching ears"** would **"turn away their ears from the truth"** and hear only those teachers who tickled their fancy in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. Stephen's enemies literally **"stopped their ears"** in a stubborn refusal to hear the truth about Jesus in Acts 7:57.

We need to hear the Gospel and imitate the worthy example of the Bereans, those noble men and women in Acts 17:10-12 who **". . . received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so"** (verse 11). Not surprisingly, the next verse declares quite pointedly, **". . . therefore many of them believed!"** The Corinthians also listened to the preaching of Paul with an open mind and the same willingness to

be reached with convincing evidence; "**. . . and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized**" in Acts 18:8.

We should also be careful of who we hear. In 1 John 4:1 the aged Apostle John warned his beloved children in the faith to "**. . . believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.**" Not every teacher who claims to speak in the name of Jesus is true to the faith. Paul pointed out that some religious leaders are in fact "**. . . false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ**" in 2 Corinthians 11:13. How tragic it is that so many sincere, yet gullible, religious people willingly follow after blind leaders, not realizing their destiny is only a ditch, as Jesus said in Matthew 15:14:

"Let them alone: they are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, both shall fall into a pit."

"So great salvation" was first preached by Jesus and was "**. . . confirmed unto us by them that heard Him**" (Hebrews 2:3). Jesus of Nazareth was the prophet Moses declared God would raise up from among His people; **"Him shall you hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you,"** as quoted by the Apostle Peter in Acts 3:22. Only Jesus can speak the words of spirit and eternal life (John 6:63, 68). Only Jesus has received the ringing endorsement from On High: "**. . . and behold a voice out of the cloud, Which said, 'This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear Him'**" (Matthew 17:5).

We should also take care in what we hear. Jesus said in Mark 4:24,

"Take heed what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and still more will be given you."

Our Lord's illustration of the seed in Luke 8 underscores the extreme care one must take in what one hears and receives. Although the word of God – the Gospel – is the pure seed, and when planted in good and honest hearts will bear the fruit of obedience unto salvation, it is also true that any other seed will grow where it is planted. There is no guarantee that even a perverted Gospel as described by Paul in Galatians 1:7 will not grow and produce a deadly harvest in the heart of a believer, his sincerity and honesty notwithstanding.

Paul spoke of some who would "**. . . believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth. . . .**" in 2 Thessalonians 2:11-12. Just as weeds will grow in a garden as well as flowers, if not better, so, too, will a false gospel sprout and take root.

Each hearer must, therefore, be cautious and critical in his examination of every idea and doctrine urged upon him. Jesus admonished His listeners to "**. . . beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees**" in Matthew

16:6. Let us subject all religious leaders and their words to the same scrutiny today.

All who stand in need of salvation today are just as Cornelius of old was while he stood before Peter in Acts 10. Although he was warned by an angel of his need for instruction and conversion, he still needed to send for Peter to "**. . . hear words . . . whereby you and all your house shall be saved**" (Acts 10:22; Acts 11:14). Cornelius gave certain evidence of a ready heart when he told Peter, "**Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded you of God**" (Acts 10:33).

May God help us to have more of the attitude of the boy Samuel, who said: "**Speak, Lord; for Your servant hears**" (1 Samuel 3:10).