

Learning by Listening

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

Introduction:

- A. Listening is both, the easiest thing we can do, and the hardest
 - 1. Listening doesn't demand the initiative and energy required in speaking.
 - 2. That's why faith comes by hearing - Rom. 10:17; Gal. 3:2, 5
- B. However, listening requires a great deal of moral effort
 - 1. We are tempted to trust ourselves and what we know rather than others and what they try to teach us
 - 2. We often prefer to express ourselves rather than listen to others
 - 3. We believe in our own righteousness and dismiss words that require us to look at our true moral condition
 - 4. Listening, therefore, is an act of faith - James 1:19-21

I. HOW TO BECOME A FAITHFUL LISTENER

- A. Be patient
 - 1. We often half listen presuming that we already know what the other person has to say, and are formulating our response, or looking for a way to end the discussion and move on to something else.
 - 2. Many people are too preoccupied with themselves when they listen. Instead of concentrating on what is being said, they are mentally rejecting the other person's point of view.
 - 3. We need patience to be good hearers - Psalm 81:8-14; Luke 8:18
- B. Love the speaker
 - 1. Poor listening rejects; good listening embraces. Poor listening diminishes the speaker; good listening makes them matter.
 - 2. "Just as love to God begins with listening to his Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them." (Bonhoeffer)
 - 3. Phil. 2:2-5; 1Cor. 13:4
- C. Ask good questions
 - 1. Rather than assuming we know what we know, ask questions desire to increase what we know, not questions designed to silence the speaker
 - 2. Prov. 18:2, 13, 20:5
- D. Serve the speaker
 - 1. Good listening is a form of ministry.
 - 2. "Good listening often defuses the emotions that are a part of the problem being discussed. Sometimes releasing these emotions is all that is needed to solve the problem. The speaker may neither want nor expect us to say anything in response." (Dunn, Echos)
 - 3. "Often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to him seriously. At times what our neighbor needs most is for someone else to know." (Bonhoeffer)
 - 4. Mark 4:24; Deut. 32:1-2
- E. Respond well
 - 1. We need to listen with the ears of God in order to be able to speak the word of God.

2. A wise person resists defensiveness and listens with the intent to hear what God says in the words of the speaker, so that he may respond with more words that reflect God - Prov. 2:1-5; Eph. 4:29; Isa. 50:4-5
- F. Reflect your relationship with God
1. Isa. 55:2-3; Heb. 2:1; Prov. 8:32-34
 2. One who has no time to listen to the children of God created in His Image, cannot honestly profess to listen to God Who created them

II. HOW TO FAITHFULLY LISTEN TO A SERMON (Even when it is bad)

- A. A good sermon requires good listeners
1. A good sermon at Thessalonica - Acts 17:2-5
 2. The same sermon at Berea - Acts 17:10-12
 3. The only difference was in the character of the hearers
- B. Hearers must listen for the scripture in the speaker's words to come to a common understanding of truth, not to find differences for disagreement
1. Poor listeners hear with an ear to argue rather than to grow.
 2. Tragic listeners hear only what they already know and agree with.
 3. Good listeners don't mindlessly listen to anyone who wears a suit, steps into a pulpit, and opens a Bible. They don't accept the preachers word based on their reputation. They listen and then look in the scriptures themselves to see if what was said is true, not to argue but to grow.
 4. A good listener can grow even when he listens to a bad sermon, because he filters it through the word of God. Even the process of determining from the scriptures that the sermon is bad, one grows from the exercise.
 5. As a 20 year old preacher teaching the book of Revelation in the adult Bible class at Castle Heights in Tampa, FL, I asked Florida College Bible professor Almon Williams what he could possibly get out of one of my classes; he replied, "I sit and wrestle with the word and come away from every class having learned something."
- C. Listen to grow - 1Thes. 2:13
1. Before you come to hear the sermon, prepare your heart to learn and grow. Listen for the word of God in the voice of the speaker
 2. Mal. 2:7; 2Cor. 5:18-20

Conclusion:

- A. "We have two ears and only one tongue in order that we may hear more and speak less." (Diogenes Laërtius)
- B. "Spend your leisure time in cultivating an ear attentive to discourse, for in this way you will find that you learn with ease what others have found out with difficulty." (Isocrates)
- C. "It takes two to speak the truth: one to speak and another to hear." (Henry David Thoreau)
- D. We cannot be saved without first being good listeners - Rom. 10:17