

“...CONSIDER CAREFULLY HOW YOU LISTEN...”

Jerry W. Carmichael

The words *“preach, preacher and preached”* appear at least 117 times in the Bible. We are told **what** to preach (the word or gospel 2Timothy 4:2; Mark 16:15); **where** to preach (all the world (Mark 16:15) and **to whom** we are to preach (all nations, every creature Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16)! Preachers spend years learning to effectively share the gospel with others. **But one aspect of preaching that is often overlooked is the responsibility of the listeners!**

The most finely crafted sermon and a flawless delivery are of very little consequence if no one is present to hear! **Of almost equal irrelevance is a sermon preached to people who are ineffective listeners!** God chose to communicate His message through the written word delivered, explained and expounded upon by preachers! *“...It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe”* (1Corinthians 1:21).

Good listening is essential to effective preaching! So how can we as listeners better improve this aspect of our worship to God? **Jesus warned His hearers to “... consider carefully how you listen...” (Luke 8:18 NIV).**

In our day of cell phones, emails, Face book, Twitter, and the like, it seems as if everyone is speaking, few are listening, and even fewer are listening attentively and well. Yet here Jesus does not tell us to improve our communication skills, but instead to hone our listening skills so that we might better hear God through those who teach us.

While thinking about and studying this subject, I found the following exhortations from one of the most famous preachers of the 18th century regarding how to listen to a sermon.

George Whitefield (1714–1770), “*was a British Methodist evangelist whose powerful sermons fanned the flames of the First Great Awakening in the American colonies.*” * One of his most popular sermons was entitled “**How to Listen to a Sermon**”. Though it was preached in the 1700’s the principles for getting the most out of the sermon are still basically the same.

(NOTE: I have adapted the language some for the modern audience, so these are not all direct quotes, but the intended thoughts are the same JWC).

Keys for getting the most out of what the preacher says:

1. Come to hear the sermon, not just out of curiosity, but from a sincere desire to know and act upon what is being said. One of the purposes of worship, including the sermon, is to encourage a change of heart, leading to a change of action in the hearer. It is not spiritually profitable to simply be entertained. We must put forth a conscientious effort to learn!

2. Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God. “If an earthly King was to issue a royal proclamation, and the life or death of his subjects entirely depended on performing or not performing its conditions, how eager they would be to hear what those conditions were! And shall we not pay the same respect to the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and lend an attentive ear to His ministers, when they are declaring, in His name, how our pardon, peace, and happiness may be secured?”

3. Do not entertain even the least prejudice against the minister. That was the reason Jesus Christ Himself could not do many mighty works, nor preach to any great effect among those of His own country; for they harbored preconceived prejudices toward Him. We must keep in mind the fact that the preachers are men and just like other men and women they possess various personality traits, some of which appeal to our personal liking and some that don’t! A particular dislike for the preacher as a person, if he is teaching the truth, is not a legitimate reason for rejecting or refusing to listen to his teaching!

4. Be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or to think more highly of him than you ought to think. Preferring one teacher over another has often been of ill consequence to the church. If a man is preaching the truth, we are to be attentive, not because of whom the speaker is, but because of who Jesus is!

5. As much as possible attempt to apply everything that is said, to your own situation in life. When Jesus was speaking at the last supper He foretold that one of the apostles would betray Him. When they heard this each of them immediately applied it to his own heart and said, ‘*Lord, is it I?*’ (Matthew 26:22). **This is exactly what God and the preachers, who share His message, want from those who hear!** Instead of automatically thinking, “He’s talking about brother so and so” we should turn our thoughts inwardly, and say, ‘*Lord, is it I?*’ The lessons will be far more beneficial when we do this!

5. Pray to the Lord, before, during, and after every sermon. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray: “*for me also, that I may open my mouth with boldness, to make known the mysteries of the gospel*” (Ephesians 6:19–20). The desire of Paul as a preacher was to speak with boldness and in a way so that his hearers would understand the mysteries of which he spoke. If the apostle Paul needed the prayers of the people to accomplish this, there is no doubt that other ministers need them as well!

*“If only all who hear me this day would seriously apply their hearts to practice what has now been told them! How ministers would see Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven, and people find the Word preached sharper than a two-edged sword and mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the devil’s strongholds!” **

* (These excerpts were adapted from Sermon 28 from The Works of George Whitefield. Published by E. and C. Dilly, 1771–1772, London.)

