

How To Listen To A Sermon

I hope the series of sermons I have been doing on worship has been helpful to you. The remainder of lessons in this series will deal with the expressions of worship: preaching, giving, prayer, the Lord's Supper, and singing. This coming Sunday, Lord willing, I will be speaking on the subject, "*Preaching The Word Of God.*"

How true is the statement that we hear only what we want to hear. Jesus said as much: "*He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God*" (John 8:47). Is anything more demonstrative of our love for God than our willingness to hear His words? If you are willing to discern the Word of God when it is being faithfully proclaimed, then you are of God. Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica (1 Thess.2:13): "*For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.*"

Understanding the importance of hearing well when God's Word is being presented consists of the following. First, as a listener, you are responsible for understanding the aim of preaching? Why come to a church building week after week to hear someone preach? The aim of preaching is to proclaim and promote the faith that saves souls (Eph.3:7-8; 2 Tim.4:1-5).

Second, you need to think of the sermon itself as an act of worship. Its purpose is to speak of God and persuade men and women to respond obediently to Him. This response involves the listener in such activities as adoration and praise for who God is and what He has done in all of His works. Thus, the sermon is an opportunity to hear and be responsive to God in humility and resolve.

Third, be careful to examine your own heart before you censor or criticize a sermon. Sometimes sermons deserve criticism (when the preacher is unprepared, when its content is un-Biblical or a-Biblical, etc.). But do not be critical of a sermon when it challenges or disturbs. You should come to each worship service expecting the sermon to awaken your spirit. There are times when sermons should comfort and heal broken hearts, but there are other times when sin should be denounced and indifference challenged (2 Tim.4:2).

Fourth, you must listen to preaching in view of eternity. Jesus warned that the Word of God would play a large role at the judgment of all men (Mark 8:38; John 12:48). Your eternal destiny depends on what you do with what you hear. The preacher will render an account to God for what he preaches (James 3:1), and the listener will give an account of how well he heard and obeyed.

Cornelius said to Peter (after being instructed by an angel to send for Peter): "*Now therefore, we are all present before God, to hear all the things commanded you by God*" (Acts 10:33). This should be our attitude when we come to worship God. Paul wrote: "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Rom.10:17).

May God bless the preaching and hearing of His Word! May it find entrance into your heart because of your determination to hear it!

Brian