

TAKE HEED HOW YOU HEAR!

Joe Slater

OK, I confess, I'm guilty! I am not the world's greatest listener. (Members of my family are forbidden to add their comments here.) It's more than likely that all of us would do well to sharpen our listening skills. Nowhere is that more needed than in listening to the word of God. "Hearing" God's word involves far more than getting your eardrums vibrated; it includes your response to the message.

Jesus said, *"Therefore take heed how you hear"* (Luke 8:18). Just before giving His disciples this exhortation, our Lord explained His parable of the sower. The four soils, He said, were four kinds of hearers (8:12-15). Each verse talks about how those who heard God's word responded to it. Sadly, in three of the four cases, the response was not what God desired.

"Take heed how you hear!" Why, Lord? Why must we take heed? Look at the latter part of v. 10 – *"seeing, they may not see, and hearing, they may not understand."* When a person doesn't care what God has to say, he doesn't listen. He doesn't put much effort into trying to understand, and certainly doesn't respond with submission and obedience.

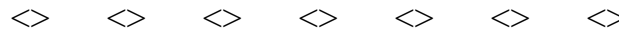
The one who sincerely desires to know God's will, however, will thrive and grow. Thus the Lord said, *"For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him"* (8:18b).

This ought to scare the socks off of people who find Bible study and worship "boring." Is it possible for teachers and preachers to be monotonous and dull? Yes, and shame on us when we are! But at least equal shame applies to those who turn glassy-eyed the moment someone begins to read or talk about the Sacred Text!

Here's another confession: I have been sorely tempted on occasion – usually right in the middle of a sermon – to say something totally irrelevant and ridiculous, just to see how many are actually listening. Fortunately, I'm too chicken to actually do it!

It's bad enough to zone out when a family member is asking you to pass the potatoes. May God help us never to treat His word with disinterest.

"Take heed how you hear!"



That No One Should Boast

The difference between salvation by works and salvation by grace is the difference between "Hey, look what I've done!" and "Look what God has done for me!"

We are saved by grace through faith. There are works that demonstrate the reality of our faith (James 2:21-24), but no works have merit to cancel sins or earn salvation. If they did, we could boast in them. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9). "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God" (Romans 4:2).

I will not boast in anything

No gifts, no power, no wisdom.

But I will boast in Jesus Christ

His death and resurrection.

Why should I gain from His reward?

I cannot give an answer.

But this I know with all my heart:

His wounds have paid my ransom.

"But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Galatians 6:14).

--Cecil May, Jr. (Montgomery, AL) via Preacher Talk

An All-Seeing Eye

"The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God" (Psalm 14:2).

When I was much younger, we sang a song titled "There's An All-Seeing Eye Watching You." The words of the song frightened me. I thought God was watching me every second, ready to punish me if I did anything amiss. I should have thought that maybe God was watching to see if I did anything good or if I needed help.

Scripture teaches that God does watch us, and that He knows when we do wrong or good. The Psalmist says, *"For he knows the secrets of the heart"* (44:21b). However, we shouldn't always think God is there just waiting to punish us. Jesus told the story of the Prodigal Son. The father in this story saw his wayward son coming home *"while he was yet afar off, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"* (Luke 15:20).

The God who loved us so much that He gave his beloved Son for us is not quick to hand us to Satan. Our Father is *"long-suffering to us, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (II Peter 3:9). He longs for us to come home, and He is watching to see if we will call on Him for help.

It is true. God is not some big, ugly, mean ogre sitting high above us waiting for us to sin so He can zap us. He is a loving, compassionate Father. He knows we will sin. He also says, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (I John 1:9). Let us come to Him now.

--Donna Richmond Wittlif (Denver, CO)