

Examine Your Ears!

Joe Slater

You won't need a mirror for this exercise. Our concern is not for the physical appearance of your ears, or even the level of hearing you enjoy. Important as those might be, they pale in comparison to your interest in God's word and your willingness to learn and obey it.

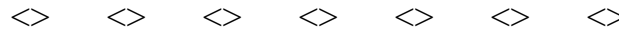
Isaiah described his stubborn, self-willed people in Judah as having ears that were hard of hearing (6:9, 10). Both Jesus and Paul quoted Isaiah's words, applying them to the people they were dealing with in the first century AD (Matthew 13:15; Romans 11:8). Do you suppose anyone today is spiritually hard of hearing? What about you and me? When God speaks through His word, do we listen? I don't mean merely having our ear drums vibrated, but understanding and doing what He says.

Paul warned against having "*itching ears*" (2 Timothy 4:3). Of course this, too, refers to a spiritual itch, not a physical one. Itching ears motivate people to "*heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts*" (2 Timothy 4:3 ASV). Just as a dog likes having its ears scratched, people enjoy being told that whatever they want to believe and do is all right with God. Does anyone today have itching ears? Once again, let's look first at ourselves. Certain passages and topics give us comfort – there's nothing wrong with that. But what about passages and topics that make us uncomfortable? How do we react to those? If we avoid them, or become angry when they come up, or (worse yet) if we exchange the truth for a soft-soap lie, then we are afflicted with itching ears!

Instead of ears that itch, or ears that are hard of hearing, let's have "*ears to hear.*" No less than sixteen times, the New Testament appeals, "*he who has ears to*

hear, let him hear" (or words to that effect). Every time but one, those words come straight from the lips of Jesus. In the gospels, He uses them repeatedly after telling parables or explaining particularly difficult truths. You see, not everything in Scripture is easily grasped. In the book of Revelation, Jesus closed each of the seven letters to the churches of Asia with that exhortation. We, too, must listen!

Virtually everyone has ears; but not everyone has "ears to hear." That is, not everyone is interested enough to listen; not everyone is devoted enough to put forth the effort to understand and obey. God won't force us against our will to pay attention to His word. If we are wise, however, we will discipline ourselves. Eternity is at stake. "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*"



If I Give . . .

...Nothing...I cast my ballot in favor of closing the church. I discourage others.

...Springly...I vote to close all missionary work. I refuse to obey God.

...Grudgingly...I find no joy in giving. I will not receive the Lord's blessings.

...Systematically...I make it possible for the work of the Lord to be planned. I make it easier for myself to give.

...Proportionately...I shall be blessed in my giving whether it is small or great.

...Sacrificially...I worship God in my giving. I shall encourage others to maintain a service of love and compassion.

Author unknown (via Bulletin Gold)

Wilted Roses

"Go away for now. When I have a convenient time, I will call for you" (Acts 24:25).

A young lady was surprised one day when she received a gift of roses from a wealthy woman in town. Upon opening the box she found to her bewilderment roses that were wilted and the petals falling off. Many things went through her mind assuming, for example, that the florist had failed to deliver them on time. Later that day, she met the woman on the street and thanked her for the roses.

The women said, "I'm glad you liked them. I cut them last Monday and enjoyed them all week, but this morning when I noticed they were getting old and faded I thought of you and had them delivered to your door." Seeing the puzzled look and hurt in her eyes, she continued, "The other evening I was sitting in the car while my husband went into the drug store. As you walked by, I heard you tell someone that you wanted to become a Christian later, but not now while you were still young. You said you wanted to have a good time first. In other words, you wish to give the Lord your life after the beauty, charm, and vigor have faded and you have become old and wrinkled. I thought these roses would be an illustration of what you are doing in relation to the Lord."

We would never, with a clear mind, think about giving God the crumbs, or leftovers, but isn't that what many do who wish to postpone serving the Lord? We must never forget that God has feelings too, and rejecting His love has consequences. There may never be another day when our heart is as tender to His call as it is today. After one rejection, the next is easier.

Let's give God our best, right now.

Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)