

### ***WHAT WE'VE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE!***

I'm not sure if I've ever seen the movie "Cool Hand Luke" (1967). Paul Newman played the role of "Luke," an inmate in a Florida prison, serving on a road crew. After escaping and being re-captured, the warden puts Luke in leg irons. That's when he spoke one of the most memorable lines in the film: "What we've got here is a failure to communicate. Some men you just can't reach. So you get what we had here last week, which is the way he wants it. Well, he gets it."

That reminds me somewhat of saying "I told you so" to someone who has had to learn his lesson the hard way. It reminds us that communication is a two-way street. Communication doesn't occur just because one person talks or writes. Another person must listen or read. Likewise, no matter how hard you listen, communication doesn't happen unless someone else says something.

Jesus applied the words of Isaiah the prophet to the Jews in 1st-century Palestine: "The hearts of this people have grown dull. **Their ears are hard of hearing**, & their eyes they have closed, lest they should see w/ their eyes & hear w/ their ears, lest they should understand w/ their hearts & turn so that I should heal them" (Matt. 13:15). The problem wasn't that Jesus wasn't teaching; it was that people deliberately ignored what he said. For all practical purposes, their ears were hard of hearing. When Stephen gave his defense before the Sanhedrin in Acts 7:57 "then they cried out w/ a loud voice, **stopped their ears**, & ran at him w/ one accord; & they cast him out of the city & stoned him." Undoubtedly here was a "failure to communicate" – but the fault was not Stephen's, it was the Sanhedrin's.

However, there is also a responsibility to speak, write, or otherwise set forth what we want others to understand – or, more importantly, what God wants people to understand. God told Ezekiel that he was like a watchman on the wall surrounding Jerusalem. The watchman's duty was to cry out a warning when danger was approaching. If the watchman said nothing, then the people would

suffer calamity and death; and their blood would be on Ezekiel's hands. If Ezekiel didn't speak, the people would have no opportunity to hear what the Lord wanted them to know. The same is true today regarding the gospel. If we don't speak to people about the gospel, how will they know? Paul wrote in Romans 10:13, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But listen to what he wrote as a follow-up: "How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? (v. 14) Yes, people have a responsibility to hear; but you and I have a responsibility to speak! Paul said he was innocent of the blood of all men because he had not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26f). If there was any failure to communicate, it would not be because Paul hadn't spoken!

Communication often fails among people even when it isn't directly related to God & His word. In the political realm, there is a great deal of screaming & yelling and not much listening. In personal lives, the same may be true. Sometimes people listen just long enough to come up with a reason to disagree. They end up talking past one another, never really understanding what the other person is trying to put across. But sometimes there isn't even any talking – just a silence that is so thick you can cut it with a knife. One says, "What's wrong?" And the reply comes back, "If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you!" And we're back to square one: "What we've got here is a failure to communicate!"

So, let's work on communication. Let's learn to listen, not in order to formulate a reply to prove the other person wrong, but listen in order to understand what the other person is actually saying. Let's not expect anyone to read our minds. Whether it's dealing w/ a spouse, a friend, a neighbor, a fellow-church-member, or whomever it might be, let's speak clearly, and listen respectfully. And particularly when we're dealing w/ the word of God, let's speak & listen w/ eternity in mind.