

12. Opening Spiritual Ears

“He who has ears to hear, let him hear!” (Mt. 11:15 to Rev. 3:22) was a primary and unique feature of Christ’s preaching. The ear that hears what God is saying is one of the most important things that accompany salvation. (see Heb. 6:9) Yet in modern churchianity even the notion that anyone is supposed to hear the Lord for oneself is explained away or ridiculed, especially since those people who begin to hear the Lord for themselves quickly develop ideas that are anathema to the “church.”

In spite of churchianity’s attempt to downplay and dismiss the need to hear the Lord for oneself, this facet of salvation remains a key ingredient of the gospel and a core element of the genuine resurrected life in Christ. Jesus described His own teachings when He said, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life. But there are some of you who do not believe.” (Jn. 6:63-64) Belief (or faith) is intricately wrapped up with spiritual hearing. Immediately after Jesus said this, “many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.” (Jn. 6:66)

Jesus – instead of apologizing and begging those who were leaving to return and remain – turns to the twelve and invites them to leave too! “Do you also want to go away?” (Jn. 6:67) This question evokes Peter’s declaration, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Jn. 6:68-69) In Matthew’s account, Jesus responds to this statement (or a similar one) by saying, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” (Mt. 16:16-17) Peter had spiritual ears to hear that Jesus was the Messiah and he believed what he heard and acted accordingly – he did not abandon Jesus but remained at His side.

The Shepherd and the Sheep

We see this again when Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd. (Jn. 10:11, see also the surrounding verses) Here was a group of Jews who *did not* have spiritual ears to hear what God had revealed to Peter. “How long,” they demanded, “do You keep us in doubt? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you [in words that could only be spiritually discerned], and you do not believe. The works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me. But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep, as I said to you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.” (Jn. 10:24-28)

We need to slow this down and digest this more carefully. There were two groups here – the Jews and Jesus’ disciples. Both are called sheep.

The sheep of another shepherd (the Jews) neither believed nor were able to hear what God was saying. Jesus’ spiritual words were not penetrating their dulled ears. Even though these Jews were undoubtedly well-versed in the Scriptures, they had no ability to hear the truth because they were not willing to believe that Jesus was the One who was to come – He did not fit their own preconceived notions of who and what the Messiah would be, He did not accept the religious hypocrisy with which so many “served God,” and their God would certainly never say such things to them as what Jesus said and certainly not in public to their face! Jesus must therefore be a fraud. (see also Jn. 5:39-40, 6:29, Mt. 23:13-15, etc.) These Jews would then attempt to capture and stone Him (Jn. 10:31, 39) and undoubtedly later were among those who participated in having Him crucified. (Jn. 19:6, etc.)

The sheep of the true Shepherd (the disciples) had heard Jesus' words and God had somehow confirmed truths to them in their hearts, among these truths that Jesus was indeed the Christ. They, in obedient response, followed Him. It is to be noticed, however, that just because God had opened up certain truths, the disciples did not have a grasp on the whole counsel of God at this point in their life – they had no ability to receive the necessity and impact of the crucifixion of the Christ until *after* the event! (see Lk. 24:45) However, Jesus still gives these sheep life – both eternal and abundant. (Jn. 10:10)

The ear that hears God *is* the first difference between these two groups. God designed man to live by hearing Him. (Mt. 4:4, Dt. 8:3) Without this ability to hear God (however imperfectly) there simply is no ability to enter into the life that Christ gives.

The Prophet

This linking of faith with spiritual hearing is no accidental development. It was prophesied by Moses. When the man who had been lame from birth was healed, Peter plainly told the people that Jesus was the Christ and referred to Moses' prophesy, saying, "Moses truly said to the fathers, 'The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among your brethren. Him you shall hear in all things, whatever He says to you. And it shall come to pass that every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.'" (Acts 3:22-23)

Modern churchianity has so warped and spun this truth virtually out of existence by limiting "hearing the Prophet" (a clear reference to Christ) to hearing Him just enough to say a "sinner's prayer" and thus "safely" secure one's eternal abode in "heaven." That no "sinner's prayer" can be found anywhere in the Scriptures does not keep the "church" from making it a central means of drawing members into their religious and social club. But modern practice is far from the truth as Peter preached it that day.

"*Every soul who will not hear that Prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.*" (Acts 3:23 - emphasis added) How much more clearly can this be said? Hearing God is not an option for those who do not wish to be utterly destroyed. This is such a serious matter that God promises strong delusion for those who demonstrate they have no love of truth (2 Ths. 2:10-12), in this context, those who willfully refuse to hear what the Spirit of truth is saying to them in their innermost being. Nor should we miss Paul's warning that those who heap up teachers in the last day "turn their ears from the truth," that is, deliberately refuse to spiritually listen and learn from the Spirit of truth, but instead soulishly (intellectually, emotionally, willfully) gobble up "fables," myths about Christ and God and the right way to follow Him. (2 Tim. 4:3-4, Jn. 16:13) These are dire consequences indeed and they are reserved for those who *will not or refuse to* hear what God is saying.

The writer of Hebrews sounds a similar note when he writes, "See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven." (Heb. 12:25) Once again, "church" "theologians" dilute the power of this truth by intellectually attributing "salvation" to those who have said their "sinner's prayer" and who practice "church" attendance – these same "theologians" would scream bloody murder, however, if anyone but them preached this kind of "salvation by works" doctrine! – and thereby they and their followers routinely and systematically fail to listen to the Spirit of truth and thus make themselves qualified for the dire consequences that come of neglecting their salvation.

Truth and Error

The necessity of having an ear that hears God is also found in John's letter. He wrote, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [the spirits and false prophets of antichrist], because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 Jn. 4:4-6)

Again we see two categories – the dangerously ambiguous terms "us" and "them." It is very easy to presume that, because we have had some experience or because we have some Bible knowledge that, of course, *I* belong in the "us" category. However, the primary difference between "us" and "them" is the question of *who* is within – whether the Spirit of Christ and God or the spirit of antichrist (both the attitude and the actual demonic spirit that replaces and displaces Christ and God are in view here) is the "line of demarcation" between these two groups. How is one to know which spirit resides within? It is made clear by who one listens to and understands. If one hears the words of the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of truth – note well that no mere human speaker is necessarily involved in *this* conversation! – then that one will progressively conform to the likeness of Christ. But if all one can do is listen to the world or listen in its carnal ways – and this includes listening to one's favorite, ear-scratching spiritual guru who preaches our favorite pet doctrines – then one will continue on in worldliness and the desires of the flesh, however subtly revamped by "Christian" religion.

"By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error." (1 Jn. 4:6) The "church" and its "theologians," because they have written off and dismissed the need to have an ear that hears God, propagates the spirit of error even as they speak words that come from the Book of truth. One who operates under the influence of the spirit of error cannot hope to rightly divide the word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) and cannot possibly deliver the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:27) These can only be those who are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. ...these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith..." (2 Tim. 3:7-8) There is perhaps no greater tragedy visible today than to see a man learned in the Scriptures embrace a role reserved for God alone, routinely robbing himself and the people while he purports to "feed" the sheep ensnared at his feet.

Hard of Hearing

The writer of Hebrews wanted to share spiritual insights regarding Christ as High Priest in the order of Melchizedek and indeed had much to say but it would be hard for him to explain because his readers were "dull of hearing." (Heb. 5:11) It is of utmost importance that we understand how they came to this condition. The writer of Hebrews goes on to say, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles (sayings, Scriptures) of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are mature, that is, those who by reason of use (practice) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (Heb. 5:12-14)

Becoming skilled in the word of righteousness or rightly dividing the word of truth, to use Paul's phrase to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:15), takes practice. After much practice, one is then mature, ready for solid food, meat. But everyone who drinks only milk, taking in all their spiritual nutrients from some other man's sayings, is still only an immature infant child, at best, and is completely unable to rightly divide the word of truth. Listening to sermons and attending

Bible studies (assuming God enables one to survive the inherent dangers of over-reliance on men who very well may be secretly dominated by demonic deceptions) may be a place to start. But if one stays there too long or if one is never taught (as happens in most “churches”) to compare what the man says with what the Spirit of truth says, one ends up with a collection of old babies – and Satan could not be much more pleased with his work in their midst.

The Jews who heard Jesus’ teachings, who are a close parallel to the listeners in many “churches” today, also had ears that were “hard of hearing.” The disciples came to Jesus and asked Him, “Why do You speak to the people in parables?” Jesus answered them, “Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries (secret or hidden truths) of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.” (Mt. 13:10-11) The disciples would believe and know that He was the Christ but the people would argue back and forth among themselves and chose to wait until Jesus received the official approval from the Jewish leaders (Jn. 6:69, 7:12, 25-27, etc.) – something that never happened and never could happen!

Jesus continued explaining to His disciples, “For whomever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him.” (Mt. 13:12) This is the lesson of the third servant given a large sum of money and expected to earn yet more money for his master. (Mt. 25:24-30) Those who hear and understand the parable recognize that the large sum of money is symbolic of receiving the new life of Christ from above. Those who do not have ears to hear and understand will apply the parable to their own financial strategies and use their “once saved, always saved” “theology” to dismiss the truth that one who had received the life of Christ could ever be removed to the eternal outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt. 25:29-30)

Jesus continued to explain, “Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart and turn, so that I should heal them.’” (Mt. 13:13-15) Like the Laodiceans who thought of themselves as “rich, wealthy and in need of nothing” but God saw them as “wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked” (Rev. 3:17), the Jews who did not have ears to hear still thought themselves to be superior specimens of humanity but failed to be justified in God’s eyes. (Lk. 18:9-14) John amplified this idea when he wrote, “Beloved, let us *love* one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 Jn. 4:7-8) To have the facts and words of the gospel of Christ but fail to have the life, love and spiritual realities of Christ and God is a tragic condition indeed.

Safeguard Your Ears

Jesus continued to explain, “But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not hear it.” Jesus then gives forth several parables about the kingdom of God. (Mt. 13:16-18 and following) The one who has ears to hear what God is saying is the one who gains the opportunity to live, abundantly and eternally. The one with an ear to hear is the one who can be led of the Spirit of God and truly be a son of God. (Rom. 8:14) Finally, such a one can press into what God created and designed him to be and do, first individually and second corporately with anyone else who has and uses their ears to hear.

In this time and season of apostasy (departure from the faith under the name of Christ or God – churchianity), deception (false, inaccurate or incomplete knowledge, understanding and teachings about the gospel) and lawlessness (most people doing whatever is right in their own eyes – Mt. 24:10-12, Jdgs. 21:25), we need to safeguard the ear that hears God. Far too many teachers today rely on “the Greek” (their own personal distortions of it, that is – 2 Pet. 1:20, 3:16) to hold up their warped and twisted teachings – and far too easily Satan, the master of deception and guile, can imitate the voice of God within our own hearts. If we grow carelessly confident that we can hear God – a subtle confidence in our own abilities that shifts our faith from God to our flesh – Satan is all too happy to send us a lying spirit who will, with expert mimicry of our usual way of hearing God, ever so subtly at first, divert us away from hearing and obeying God. And God will allow this as a test of our loyalties – whether to Him or to ourselves and our own religious preferences.

The best safeguards to protect our ears that hear God is a humble, quiet and contrite heart (Psa. 46:10, Isa. 30:15, 66:2, Phlp. 4:6-7, etc.) and a commitment to cooperating with and obeying the will of God. Jesus said that anyone who wanted to do God’s will would know the source of any teachings he heard, whether they were from God or from some man’s vain imaginations. (Jn. 7:17) Jesus said that His *food* was to do the will of God and to finish His work. (Jn. 4:34) Jesus recognized that of Himself He could do nothing and therefore He did not seek His own will but the will of the Father. (Jn. 5:30, also see Heb. 10:7, Psa. 40:8) We do well to imitate Him!

Cultivating the ear that hears God is almost certainly the most necessary element we need so that we can do our part to maintain and preserve our salvation that was freely given to us by God, especially in the perilous and tumultuous days of the closing of the age. Those who are content to hear the words of men are those most likely to be propelled down the path of deception and plunged into the ditch of eternal destruction. (Mt. 7:13, 15:14) But those who persist on hearing and obeying the words that come from God’s mouth will be those who endure to the end and are saved. (Mt. 24:13)

Let he who has ears hear.

Chapter 11: Presenting the King

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Chapter 13: The Voice of Strangers

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