

## LISTENING

Are you listening? Do you really hear what is being said around you? These are questions we may readily pass over, but deserve some consideration. Listening is as important as proper writing or speaking. On the whole we are very poor listeners. Many times, people have misrepresented what someone has said, not because the speaker was not clear or understandable, but because they were poor listeners and therefore mixed up the facts. This type of activity is almost always present when people are circulating rumors. We don't always hear what is said (that is, hear correctly) and then repeat what we thought we heard. Good listening habits can't stop rumors, but they can help us more accurately understand one another thereby cutting down misrepresentation.

There is more to listening than just hearing. Listening involves our total comprehension of what is said. I may hear some people talking in another room, but that doesn't mean I can understand everything they are saying and therefore follow their conversation. Listening means to be alert to the speaker and to make a concentrated effort to understand and ponder the messages received. Jesus often said, "He that hath ears, let him hear..." Jesus didn't mean if a person didn't have physical ears, he was not to hear the message, but that in listening to the discourse one would have to put in some effort. Basically, He was saying if you are interested and want to know; understand what I am about to say. We need to do just that if we are going to be a good listener; be interested, want to understand, and then hear the message.

Listening has not always been one of man's greatest assets. There are reasons why people aren't listeners. But listening is so important that many homes, families, and other relationships (such as those in the church) can be destroyed by poor listening. When a husband doesn't patiently listen to his wife, he can't communicate in return. When children do not listen to their parents, trouble is just around the corner, and when parents don't listen to their children, they can't know their real problems well enough to help them be resolved. Only history can speak of the plans that never worked, buildings never built, or products made that were less than top-quality because someone, somewhere didn't listen. There is no communication between two people if one is talking and the other isn't listening.

Some bad skills that accompany poor listeners are:

1. We already have our mind made up and nothing can change it.  
If your frame of mind is such that, new information not going to have any bearing, then we are not listening. Many prayers have been offered before sermons for "open minds and open hearts" which we want to be good listeners to the word of God as it is preached.
2. We interrupt the speaker before he/she can complete their thought.  
In effect, we don't get the whole story. But many times, we cut off a good logical series of thoughts spoken by someone by interruption. This effectively destroys good listening. Only when we have all of the facts can we reason on whether the statements made are true or false.
3. We hear what we want to hear.  
Lastly, when we hear many things in a conversation we sometimes, because of deep-seated prejudice, only remember those things we want to retain. Again, this is poor listening. True open-mindedness means taking all things into proper consideration and then weighing the evidence.

Proper listening habits can be stated in three simple terms (and this list is by no means exhaustive):

1. Patience.  
Let us be patient with those speaking and not interrupt their speech (which also means their train of thought). We may have something very pertinent to the subject in which to say, but patience will allow the other person to finish their views orally, which in the long run will better "open the door" for what you have to say in return.

2. Association.

Association with the speaker simply refers to the idea of "putting yourself in their shoes." Good listeners not only attempt to hear what a person has to say but they want to know "why" behind what is said. Effort will be exerted by the good listener to be able to go beyond the mere words spoken, and put them in proper context to receive the full benefit of what has been said.

3. Concentration.

This logically brings us to our third good habit of listening and that is concentration. The human brain can think much faster than the mouth can speak words. Therefore, the brain has time to "do other things" while it is listening and comprehending conversation. When a preacher speaks for a long period of time, always stays behind the pulpit, and never raises or lowers his voice, the human brain has very little to do in receiving the sermon. This is what brings on all of the sleeping during the sermon jokes because it is a real possibility. Concentration is essential to good listening. Without, it our mind recalls a thousand things other than what is being said, and before you know it you didn't hear the conversation. Good listeners concentrate on that which is being said, and not to let other things cloud their thinking.

A Positive Spiritual Attitude can only be attained when we effectively begin to listen to what God has said to us. The three-step process of discipleship is "Jesus speaks, I hear, I do." Jesus has done the speaking, and before we can do what He desires we must be good hearers (listeners) of what is said. When we have accurately heard what is expected of us to be pleasing to God, then we can exercise that will and feel good about our spiritual life.

"He that hath ears, let him hear..." Are you listening?

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