

PREACHER AND HEARER EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE

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Much has been written about the responsibility of the preacher. Some have written thoughtfully; others have indulged in irresponsible prattle. Often people feel fully competent to tell a preacher what and how to preach when they themselves might not be able to tell a sinner what to do to be saved. The responsibilities of the preacher, both real and imagined, has long been a favorite subject with both the informed and the uninformed—with the latter generally being the more loquacious. Suggestions or criticisms based on study and experience in preaching is an entirely different thing from airing the petulant views spawned in ignorance, inexperience, or cowardice.

That the responsibility of preaching the Word is great, is evident from even a casual consideration of a few passages. "Be not many of you teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive heavier judgment." (Jas. 3:1) The anathema of God is pronounced upon any who change the gospel. (Gal. 1:8) The Apostles were approved of God to be intrusted with the gospel, and Paul states that he so spake—that is, as one approved of God. (I Thess. 2:4) How does a God-approved speaker speak? "Not as pleasing men, but God who proveth our hearts." The apostles' responsibility was to please God in preaching. A method of approach pleasing to men is considered by many to be a paramount responsibility of the preacher. They would require him to give much study and preparation to the method of approach, with little concern as to whether or not his "approachers" are "shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace."

Responsibility to Hear

The preacher, however, is not alone in the matter of responsibility; the hearer also is equally responsible. Reluctance on the part of the hearer to accept responsibility is wide spread. We had rather read about another man's duties than to face our own. But there is no way to avoid the fearful consequences of ignoring accountability as a hearer. No one can say, "I will avoid hearing the gospel, and thus not have a hearer's responsibility." Christ said, "If any man has ears to hear, let him hear." (Mark 4:23) This includes every being with faculties capable of receiving a communication intelligently. Not only is it required that you hear, but in addition you must "take heed what you hear". (verse 24)

Attitude of Hearer

The proper attitude must be maintained toward the word. Upon discovering that your attitude is not right, you must cultivate an attitude that God will approve. Too little attention has been given to shaping our attitude. Those who "receive not the love of the truth" will be sent "a working of error that they should believe a lie, that they all might be judged who believe not the truth." (II Thess. 2:10-12) Paul thanked God that the Thessalonians had accepted the "word of the message as the word of God" and "not as the word of man". (I Thess. 2:13) There is to be recognized a vital difference between the words of God and the words of men. While it may be allowable (or even necessary at times) to apologize for the words of some men, it is inexcusable for any one ever to apologize for the word of God.

Hear Discerningly

If the hearer entertains the correct attitude toward the truth, he will re-act properly when he comes into

possession of the truth, The Bereans were more noble than those in Thessalonica. They manifested their nobility in their readiness and carefulness as hearers. While they were open for the truth, yet they were careful. They examined the scriptures to determine if the things taught by Paul were so. Too often today, in contrast to that attitude, hearers consult their prejudices, whims, fancies—allowing such to be the standard by which they accept or reject the things heard.

"Be not carried away by divers and strange teachings." (Heb. 13:9) No innovation could have occurred had hearers been more concerned with this warning of the Holy Spirit and less enraptured with the "man-pleasing" approach of teachers of divers and strange doctrines. It would be well to scrutinize carefully the doctrine which is taught, even at the expense of missing some thrilling details of the sheep's skin disguise. The content of the sermon must be the chief concern if one is to hear discerningly. He must not allow the drapery of the preacher's manner to weigh too heavily with him. Errorists can use just as smooth and fair speech as can true gospel preachers; they can pray just as long and fervent prayers (and sometimes longer). The sincere are pious; but they do not display their piety. The discerning hearer will always give an extra careful study of the teachings of those who are "over-much" pious.

That the truth of a proposition cannot be determined by a consideration of the manner of the one preaching it is evident from Paul's statement, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly, and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent." (Rom. 16:18) "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world." (I John 4:1)

Hearing Plus Doing

Hearing unaccompanied by doing is profitless. The one who hears, but fails to do, is deluded (Jas. 1:22-25) The wise man is the one who hears and does, while the fool is one who stops at hearing. "Every one therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man and every one that heareth these words of mine and doeth them not shall be likened unto a foolish man." (Matt. 7:24-26)

Itching Ears

Hearers can always find teachers who will teach as the hearer demands. As long as hearers allow itching ears to determine what they will hear, there will be teachers willing to be used as tools to tickle their itching ears. "Having itching ears, they will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables." (II Tim. 4:3,4) A great need exists for hearers who are aware of their responsibilities as such, and strive to measure up to God's standard of approved hearers.

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a hundred of the ablest preachers, writers, and teachers to be found in the church today, the editor of the Gospel Guardian and the Bible Banner, with a considerable number of the staff (including the founder and editor) of those publications on our editorial board, we face the fray with confidence and courage. E. Y. F.