

Responsible to HEAR



Your part in the preaching process

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Chapter One

The Need to Hear

If preaching were a performing art it would be the biggest draw in America. On an average Sunday the NFL draws a live attendance of 1.0 million fans¹, while estimates of church attendance range from 82 to 135 million.² The National Association of Theatre Owners states that in 2009 there were 39,233 movie screens in America³ while the estimates of the number of congregations in the United States alone range from 335,000 to 450,000.⁴ While estimates of the number of concert venues are hard to find it is safe to say that they pale in comparison to the number of church auditoriums.

Not only are the statistics of places of worship and worship attendance impressive, when one takes a look at the number of sermons delivered it is informative

¹ "NFL attendance," <http://espn.go.com/nfl/attendance> accessed October 22, 2010.

² "Church attendance inches up in 2010," <http://www.gallup.com/poll/141044/americans-church-attendance-inches-2010.aspx> accessed Oct. 22, 2010.

³ "Movie Screens in America," <http://www.natoonline.org/statisticsscreens.htm>, Accessed Oct. 25, 2010.

⁴ Kirk Hadaway and Penny Marler, "Church attendance in the US," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Volume 44, Number 3, September 2005, 307-322.

of the significance of preaching. Ignoring the fact that many churches have multiple services per week, even a conservative estimate of 300,000 sermons per week is staggering. If one multiplies that figure by fifty two then approximately 15.5 million sermons are delivered live annually. Add to this the sermons that are broadcast, telecast, and podcast; those that are transcribed, recorded and distributed then one reaches the conclusion that preaching, while not an art form, is certainly an active part of life in America, let along the rest of the world.

The practitioners of preaching need no convincing of the worth and place of preaching. This conviction goes beyond the relevance in our world it is founded on a foundation of the call of God and the command of Scripture. While there is always the possibility of laziness and sloth in the life of the preacher for most it is the most significant part of pastoral ministry. The preacher understands that there is no electronic substitute for live preaching. “Contrary to shallow dismissals of many critics, preaching has enormous appeal to a generation that is crying out for someone simply to talk to them. The deluge of technology has enhanced rather than diminished the importance of a real person talking to real people. People living in a culture of postmodernity are in desperate need of relationship...for someone to understand and speak with hope and help.”⁵ Fortunately the early twenty first century affords many

⁵ John H. Armstrong and Erwin W. Lutzer, *Reforming Pastoral Ministry: Challenges for Ministry in Postmodern Times*. (Wheaton, IL: Good News publishers, 2002), 114 .

resources to assist the preacher in improving the craft of preaching. Most have had the advantage of years of general education followed by college and seminary training. Journals, magazines and seminars allow the preacher to sharpen his skills in the pulpit. But with all of this training and support for the preacher what support do we give to those millions of folks sitting quietly in church each Sunday? An Amazon.com search reveals 14,525 results for the search term “preaching”⁶ and 109,114 results for “sermons”⁷ but amazingly only 5 results for “listening to a sermon.”⁸

This begs the question that is the heart of this study: what is the responsibility of the hearer in the preaching process? Answering this question will be the goal of this study. This question also opens up several other areas for investigation. First and foremost is what can be learned from the text of Scripture about the hearer’s part in the preaching process as well as what can research and observation reveal to us about the preferred activity of the person on the receiving side of the pulpit.

This line of thinking leads further to the question of how can these responsibilities be taught and infused into the life of the church-goer? Does the

⁶ “Amazon.com search: preaching,” http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_i_0_9?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=preaching&srefix=preaching accessed on Oct. 22, 2010.

⁷ “Amazon.com search: sermons,” http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=sermons accessed on Oct. 22, 2010.

⁸ “Amazon.com search: how to listen to a sermon,” http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=how+to+listen+to+a+sermon accessed on Oct. 22, 2010.

shepherd of the flock need to not only deliver a message but does he need to train the hearer in how to hear, and by what means does he do that? One can easily imagine the ease with which a person in a church in America can become lost in a homiletical fog. Has he been taught the purpose for preaching? Is it optional? Is it relevant? How does one navigate the varied sermon types and preaching styles? How is preaching evaluated? By its presentation or entertainment value or by how deep or biblical in content or is it by how insightful it is in real-world application? Perhaps one reason more don't successfully complete the journey intended by the sermon is that they have never been taught to navigate in the preaching environment.

Another roadblock the sermon listener must overcome is the rarity of public speaking in popular culture. Lori Carroll observes:

In Christian Churches across the United States, hundreds of thousands of preachers and millions of listeners participate in the communicative act of preaching. The face to face mode of public speaking (which dominated the political scene for much of this country's history) is now an unusual kind of presentation. How many people have heard a candidate speak "in person" before casting a vote for or against? Very few. Beginning with the Nixon-Kennedy presidential debates and continuing to this moment, most public speaking by leaders is now mediated by technology. With digital television and the Internet, public communication will need redefinition in Webster's next edition."⁹

⁹ Lori Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey* (Wheaton, IL: Mainstay Church Resources, 1991), 20.

In a world in which interactivity is valued perhaps the nature of preaching being active on the part of the speaker and (apparently) passive on the part of the hearer also mitigates against success in the homiletical enterprise. It apparently was not always so for even in the time of the Puritans there was a view that the hearer was to be more than passive.

“The Puritan practice of affective preaching meant that listening to a sermon was not a spectator sport but an active involvement. Critiques of sermons by liturgical advocates, in the Puritan era or today, misunderstand the dynamics of good sermon listening. For the Puritans, listening to a sermon was an active exercise that required full attention of the listener. Several Puritan practices show exactly how active the person in the pew was. One of the practices was notetaking... A second practice was further meditation on a sermon by the listener after it has been heard.”¹⁰

In essence it is possible that the fact of passiveness in hearing may lead to passiveness in response as well. With these and other hurdles to overcome then the person in pew needs help. If indeed there are clearly defined areas of responsibility for the hearer then this is a neglected area in training, mindset and outworking in the average pastoral ministry. It is the goal of this study to present a work that will further aid the cause of Christ as well as the practice of preaching from both sides of the pulpit. That it will adequately prove and delineate the responsibilities of the hearer and offer practical helps to allow the pastor to equip the saints to do this part of the ministry.

¹⁰ Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 103.

Blame can be placed on both the pastor and people but perhaps the lack of understanding of the hearer responsibility contributes to a lack of life change as a result of preaching. Although the United States is known worldwide to be a religious nation, few Americans say that faith is a top priority in their life. According to a 2010 study by the Barna Group nearly 90 percent of Americans, according to the CIA World Factbook, identify themselves with a religion. But only 12 percent of American adults say faith is a top priority in their life.¹¹ With such a lack of priority in life every effort should be made to help the hearer understand and assume their personal obligation to engage fully in the preaching process.

The Scriptural investigation into the hearer's responsibility in the preaching process begins in chapter two.

¹¹ "Study: Few Americans Say Faith is Top Priority," <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20100726/studyfew-americans-say-faith-is-top-priority>, accessed Oct. 28, 2010.

Chapter Two

Ears to Hear

The preaching ministry of Jesus affords the perfect place to begin to discover the responsibilities of the hearer in the preaching process. Unlike any other preacher, in His case there was never a fault with the preacher. If there was a breakdown, it was entirely on the side of the audience. Hearing was a common topic of Jesus' teaching ministry: Nineteen times in Matthew 13 we find the word "hear." The Parable of the Sower is found in the first three Gospels, and in each one, the closing admonition is different. Jesus said, "Who hath ears to hear" (Matthew 13:9), "Take heed *what* you hear!" (Mark 4:24), and "Take heed *how* you hear!" (Luke 8:18)"¹² All three of the synoptic gospels record what is commonly referred to as the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20 and Luke 8:1-15). In each account the parable follows growing opposition to the preaching of Jesus from the Pharisees (Matthew 12:14, Luke 7:49), The Herodians (Mark 3:6), the Scribes (Matthew 12:38, Mark 3:22), and even His

¹²W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"(Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1989), Mt 13:1.

own family (Matthew 12:46, Mark 3:21). With this background of opposition Jesus tells the parable of sower scattering seed on four distinct types of soil with only one producing a viable crop. The meaning of this parable is not obscure since it is one of two that Jesus interpreted Himself, and He also expands the varied responses as part of the reason for speaking in parables in general. “The same message, as the parable of the sower has indicated, will meet with different response depending on the receptivity of the hearer. By explaining his parables to his disciples Jesus opened up the *secrets* of the *kingdom of heaven*. It has a logic all its own, which human reason cannot penetrate; its truth must be revealed. To be a disciple is to be in the school of revelation.”¹³

Jesus quotes from Isaiah 6:9-10 to prove that point that people can and do hear but not understand the meaning of what is spoken. Constable offers this summary:

“Jesus restated His reason for using parables in terms of human perception rather than divine intention (cf. vv. 11–12). The unbelievers were not able to understand what He had to reveal since they had refused to accept more basic revelation, namely about Jesus and the kingdom. The parables do not just convey information. They challenge for a response. The unbelievers had not responded to the challenge Jesus had already given them. Until they did they were in no position to receive another challenge.

¹³D. A. Carson, *New Bible commentary : 21st century edition*. Rev. ed. of: *The new Bible commentary*. 3rd ed. / edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer, 4th ed., (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL, USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994). Mt 13:10

Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9–10 where God told His prophet that widespread unbelief and consequent divine heart-hardening would be what he would experience in his ministry. The context of the Isaiah passage explained that Israel’s hardness would continue until the land lay in ruins. The Exile was not the complete fulfillment of this prophecy. The hardhearted condition was still present in Jesus’ day and, we might add, even today.”¹⁴

The reason that hearing did not result in understanding was a rejection of revelation that led to further non-understanding.

Jesus then moves to specific treatment of the parable. The seed is identified as the Word of God (Luke 8:11), so by inference anyone scattering the seed would be the teacher or preacher, while the soils would be the differing types of hearers of the message.

Jesus clearly put the responsibility on the hearer in that “the difference in these results was not in the seed but in the soil on which the seed fell. As the gospel of the

¹⁴Tom Constable. *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Dallas: Galaxie Software, 2003), Mt 13:13-14.

kingdom was presented, the good news was the same. The difference was in the individuals who heard that Word.”¹⁵

The first is the seed on the path (Matthew 13:19); they do not understand due to unbelief so there is no germination of the truth and the seed is taken away by Satan. The second soil is stony ground (Matthew 13:20-21); there is germination but continued growth is impossible as the plant cannot find root. The hearer abandons the truth when circumstances get difficult. The third category is that of the seed falling among the thorns. Here the attractions of the world and the desire for things overcome the desire for the things of God and there is not fruitfulness in life. The final soil is the good ground and the seed takes root, grows and produces a harvest. Without descending too deeply into the interpretation, two concepts can be extracted that show a portion of the responsibilities of the hearer.

The first responsibility uncovered in this passage is that the hearer must approach the delivery of the Word of God from a standpoint of belief. One must believe in the God of the Word and the Word of God. The first and second soils produce fruit, not for lack of hearing what is being said (seed sown), but rather there is a preconditioned aversion to it since there is no real belief that it is the Word of God, and in Jesus' case, that He was God in the flesh. Therefore, the seed did not produce fruit.

¹⁵J. F., Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 250.

From a practical standpoint the hearer must have the perspective that accepts in faith that the Bible is the Word of God and as such, is worthy of our listening, understanding and practicing it. The hearer must also understand that behind the words of the text that is being presented is the God who inspired them and before whom all are responsible. The pastor of a flock would do well to incorporate frequent reminders of the authority of the Scriptures and in elevating God in the heart of his hearers so they, in turn, will have hearts of belief to receive the Word of God.

The second responsibility is that of priority. In the case of the third soil, the hearer “is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful” (Matthew 13:22). “The thorn-infested ground represents another class who hears the word in a superficial way. They appear outwardly to be genuine subjects of the kingdom but in time their interest is choked out by the cares of this world and by their delight in riches. There is no fruit for God in their lives.”¹⁶

With all of the competing values in life the hearer is required to place the Word of God in a place of highest priority. The hearer must be on guard for the “choke points” in his life that lead to an undervaluation of the Scriptural teaching. The person in the pew

¹⁶W. MacDonald, & A. Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1995), Mt 13:22.

must be reminded of the critical importance of the Word in the life of a believer. This is the only path toward fruitfulness which is the purpose of our existence.

To summarize these first two responsibilities we could state it this way: “The Effect of the Word is dependent on the State of the Heart.”¹⁷ To better track these and the following responsibilities, the chart below and in the chapters to follow will offer a simple summary of the work in progress.

Area of Responsibility	Specific Responsibility of Hearer	Scriptural Support
The Heart		
	Believe in the Word of God	Mt. 13:1-23
	Put the Word of God as a priority	Mt. 13:1-23

¹⁷R. Jamieson, A. R Fausset, A. R. Fausset, D. Brown, & D Brown, *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997), Mt 13:3.

Chapter Three

Mental Engagement

Beyond the issues of the heart, the Word of God indicates that issues of the mind also inform the subject of the hearer's responsibility in the preaching process. Of all of the cities the apostle Paul visited during his preaching expeditions around the Roman world, one group of individuals are singled out for particular praise in this regard.

“Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Therefore many of them believed, and also not a few of the Greeks, prominent women as well as men” (Acts 17:10-12 NKJV).

The praise of those Jews who heard the Word of God proclaimed in the synagogue of Berea is contrasted to the reception in Thessalonica:

“Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” (Acts 17:2-4)

In the former case the Jews of the Synagogue of Thessalonica, (which immediately preceded Paul’s ministry in Berea) for the most part, did not believe and the bulk of those who did believe in that city were Gentiles, while in Berea more Jews responded by accepting that Jesus was indeed the Anointed One. One author summarizes the contrast this way:

"The emphasis on Luke's contrast between the Bereans and the Thessalonians is their reaction to the gospel, not in their Bible habits. They received the message with 'great eagerness' --searching the scriptures was evidence of this.

In Thessalonica, Paul had 'reasoned with them from the scriptures' but obviously there were many who rejected the message out of hand, too bull-headed to even re-visit their own holy writings. The nobility of the Bereans is to be found in their hunger

for the truth, in their willingness to open their eyes to the scripture in a new way -NOT in an effort to proof-text the apostle Paul."¹⁸

Luke included some commentary as to why the Berean's response was different. He notes that these were more "fair-minded." They "received the Word with readiness" and they "searched the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Each of these descriptions offers additional responsibilities, of an intellectual nature, for the hearer of preaching to assume.

The first descriptive phrase is "*More noble than those* (εὐγενεστεροι των [eugenesteroi tōn]). Comparative form of εὐγενής [eugenēs], old and common adjective, but in N.T. only here and Luke 19:12; I Corinthians 1:26. Followed by ablative case των [tōn] as often after the comparative."¹⁹ This more "noble-mindedness" includes the concept that they were more open to new ideas and avoiding the assumption that everything they believed was correct without the possibility of review. They not only rejected out of hand that the conclusions of Paul could be correct; they also did not compare his view with their own scriptures. The opposite concept of "noble-mindedness" is that of being closed-minded. This commendation allows the modern

¹⁸ Charles J. Wilhelm, *Biblical Dyslexia* (Longwood, FL: Xulon press, 2004), page 13.

¹⁹ A. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems), Acts 17:11.

hearer of preaching to conclude that one must approach the sermon with a degree of open-mindedness. While not open to meaning outside the limitations of Scripture, the hearer must assume that there is more to learn. The hearer should approach each opportunity to hear the Word taught as a fresh opportunity to learn something that had not been known before or to refine the understanding of a passage in a way that improves the hearer's perception of the truth revealed.

Robertson gives the technical brief on the next phrase in this manner: "With all readiness of mind (μετα πασης προθυμιας [*meta pāsēs prothumias*]). Old word from προθυμος [*prothumos*] (προ, θυμος [*pro, thumos*]) and means eagerness, rushing forward. In the N.T. only here and II Corinthians 8:11–19; 9:2.

In Thessalonica many of the Jews out of pride and prejudice refused to listen. Here the Jews joyfully welcomed the two Jewish visitors."²⁰ Ogilvie defines the phrase as meaning "free from prejudice."²¹ The Bereans were eager to hear and learn what Paul was teaching. They engaged fully and enthusiastically in the process. They would have paid close attention and followed the arguments; they listened with focus and intent.

The same is true of a hearer in any era. It is the hearer's responsibility to enter the

²⁰A. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems), Acts 17:11.

²¹Ogilvie, L. J., & Ogilvie, L. J., *The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 28 : Acts* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.,1983), 251.

preaching environment with not only an open mind, but an eager mind. While poor preaching can stifle enthusiasm on the part of a congregation, it does not lessen the hearer's responsibility to fully engage in the preaching process by actively and eagerly engaging in the discourse.

The Bereans not only had an open mind and eager mind, they also took the added step of personally studying the Scriptures for themselves: "Examining the Scriptures daily (καθ ἡμέραν ἀνακρινόντες τὰς γραφὰς [*kath hēmeran anakrinontes tas graphas*]). Paul expounded the Scriptures daily as in Thessalonica, but the Bereans, instead of resenting his new interpretation, examined (ἀνακρίνω [*anakrinō*] means to sift up and down, make careful and exact research as in legal processes as in Acts 4:9; 12:19, etc. the Scriptures for themselves."²² They, being active participants in the synagogue, had access and frequent experience in studying the Old Testament Scriptures, and they put this to good use when Paul entered their synagogue and began teaching that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied about in the Old Testament Scriptures. "The Bereans were eagerly interested in the new message of Paul and Silas but they wanted to see it for

²²A. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems), Acts 17:11.

themselves.²³ As opposed to the Thessalonian synagogue where their arguments were dismissed outright, here they processed what they were hearing by engaging daily in researching the claims of Jesus against the standard of their own scripture.

Modern listeners of preaching should emulate the example of these, for the intellectual responsibility includes the application of personal Bible study- to use the tools and previous learning to verify and amplify the understanding of the preacher’s message. While the preacher may have the benefit of unique giftedness, education and experience at his disposal, both the preacher and the hearer have access to the original subject of research. As American statesman, James Madison said of the Bereans, they are “a noble example for all succeeding Christians to imitate.”²⁴

Area of Responsibility	Specific Responsibility of Hearer	Scriptural Support
The Heart		
	Believe in the Word of God	Mt. 13:1-23
	Put the Word of God as a priority	Mt. 13:1-23
The Mind		
	Have an open mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Have an eager mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Personally study the Scriptures	Acts 17:11-12

Letters, Governmental Documents, Speeches, Charters, Court Decisions and Constitutions (St. Louis, MO: AmeriSearch, 2001), Electronic Ed.

Chapter Four

Doers of the Word

Those who assemble in places of worship and invest the valuable commodity of their time into listening to a thirty- five to fifty minute message delivered by a servant of God each Sunday often do so with both their understanding of the purpose and practice of sermon listening in auto-pilot mode. Either habit, routine or external obligation can contribute to this malaise while the responsibilities that God has delivered to the hearer are ones that those who regularly inhabit pews should take seriously. Not only do these serious responsibilities rest in the sphere of the heart and the mind, there is also the venue of the will. What will the hearer of the word who is a free agent endowed with free choice do with the truth delivered? What is the proper practical response and where does the truth apply in life? Intellectually understanding the truth that has been poured through the conduit of a preacher within the mold of a homiletic format falls short of the ultimate goal of the preaching. To reach this goal it must ultimately result in life change or the goal of the preaching-hearing process goes unfulfilled. We will now

turn our attention to what divine revelation reveals about putting the sermon into practice as an act of the will.

The apostle James bears in on this issue with these Words:

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” (James 1:22-25)

James is addressing a concern that he was seeing in his day and lingers in the heart of every preacher. It is a fear of many pastor-preachers to contemplate that after all the effort to prepare and deliver a sermon and additionally considering that the Bible is the most important content that can be taught, that one may hear with their ears and process with minds and then make no life change. Fortunately, James does more than bemoan a common problem. He offers an insightful view into both the cause and the cure for the “hearer only” syndrome. An exegetical study of this passage shows the way to be a doer of the Word.

James begins with a declarative command and then offers an illustration to clarify the injunction just given. The command is to practice what the Word of God says to do and not enter into self-deception by merely hearing it. “Frankly, this is the

problem faced by many Christians within the contemporary church. They have become mere spectators who enjoy listening to the Word of God preached and taught Sunday after Sunday. Their heads are filled with biblical knowledge and facts, but they ignore the translating of that knowledge into godly living.”²⁵ It is a clear and irrevocable standard that study of God’s Word is to result in godly practice in life. “The growing numbers of sermon-sippers who flit from one doctrinal dessert to another like helpless hummingbirds are deceiving themselves. ‘Deceiving’ is from a verb used in the New Testament only here and in Colossians 2:4. *Paralogizomai* means “to cheat or deceive by false reasoning.” The deception comes from thinking they have done all that is necessary when actually listening to the Word is only the beginning.”²⁶ The sermon is not done until it is done. The hearer must not mistake the process (preaching) from the product (doing). “The true disciple, say the rabbis, learns in order that he may do, not in order that he may merely know or teach.”²⁷

One writer summarizes this plague of self-deception in this way: “As we have seen, listening is terribly important. But it is not enough. Our lives can become

²⁵Ogilvie, L. J., & Ogilvie, L. J., *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 34 : James / 1 & 2 Peter / Jude* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.,1983), 45.

²⁶J. F., Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), 823.

²⁷R. Jamieson, A. R Fausset, A. R. Fausset, D. Brown, & D Brown, *A commentary, critical and explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997), Jas 1:23.

spiritually stagnant like the Dead Sea when we only receive the Word of God and then do not translate it into appropriate action.

A lake can have the most beautiful spring water in the world flowing into its reservoir. But unless there are outlets, that beautiful water becomes stale and stagnant. The same phenomenon takes place in our lives if we are not living the life of active obedience and allowing the Holy Spirit to overflow into our lives. Nothing is more obnoxious to God than dead orthodoxy. To know the Word of God and not to live it is sin.”²⁸

One can speculate that if biblical preaching is not clearly distinguished in the minds of the hearer, from other forms of oral discourse such as political speech, the latest advertising approach or a populist YouTube viral video, it can all be a blur of information that pours upon us but does not touch the soul so as to motivate or the will so as to actuate. If preaching is seen as just another menu item on a large buffet of intellectual choices, it will likely be seen as amusing, interesting and at times entertaining, but not life-changing. There needs to be recognition as to the uniqueness of God’s message and its direct connection to the choice we make in our behavioral

²⁸Ogilvie, L. J., & Ogilvie, L. J., *The Preacher’s Commentary Series, Volume 34 : James / 1 & 2 Peter/ Jude* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc.,1983), 45.

lifestyles. A verse of anonymous poetry may form a fitting conclusion to this part of the discussion:

“It’s easier to preach than to practice;

It’s easier to say than to do.

Most sermons are heard by the many,

But taken to heart by the few.”²⁹

James then moves into a picture to help amplify the meaning of the command. Verse 22 sets up the metaphor – Hearing the Word of God is compared to looking into a mirror. It shows us how we really are. It displays what needs to be corrected – what action needs to be taken. The hearer/mirror looker then can respond in one of two ways. The hearer but not doer person looks but then makes several mistakes. Wiersbe summaries these mistakes as follows:

“James mentions several mistakes people make as they look into God’s mirror. First, *they merely glance at themselves*. They do not carefully study themselves as they read the Word. Many sincere believers read a chapter of the Bible each day, but it is only a religious exercise and they fail to profit from it personally. Their conscience would bother them if they did not have their daily reading, when actually their conscience should bother them *because they read the Word carelessly*. A cursory

²⁹J. V. McGee, *Thru the Bible commentary. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997, c1981), Vol. 5, 641.

reading of the Bible will never reveal our deepest needs. It is the difference between a candid photo and an X ray.

The second mistake is that *they forget what they see*. If they were looking deeply enough into their hearts, what they would see would be unforgettable! We tend to smile at the “extremes” of people back in the days of the great revivals, but perhaps we could use some of that conviction. John Wesley wrote about a preaching service: “One before me dropped as dead, and presently a second, and a third. Five others sunk down in half an hour, most of whom were in violent agonies” (*Wesley’s Journal* for June 22, 1739). Before we consign these people to some psychological limbo, remember how saints in the Bible responded to the true knowledge of their own hearts. Isaiah cried, “Woe is me! for I am undone!” (Isa. 6:5) Peter cried, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!” (Luke 5:8) Job was the most righteous man on earth in his day, yet he confessed, “I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6).

Mistake number three is: *they fail to obey what the Word tells them to do*. They think that *hearing* is the same as *doing*, and it is not. We Christians enjoy substituting *reading* for *doing*, or even *talking* for *doing*. We hold endless committee meetings and conferences about topics like evangelism and church growth, and think we have made progress. While there is certainly nothing wrong with conferences and committee meetings, they are sinful if they are a substitute for service.”³⁰

“It is proper to give some credit to the hearer, only in that he does look and processes what He sees, but that is as far as it goes. He observes, becomes entirely cognizant of the flaws, and promptly forgets.”³¹

³⁰W. W. Wiersbe, *The Bible exposition commentary*. "An exposition of the New Testament comprising the entire 'BE' series"(Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books,1996, c1989), Jas 1:22.

³¹E. D Radmacher, R. B. Allen, & H. W House, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers 1999), Jas 1:23-24.

The second potential response is the correct one, as seen in verse 25, wherein a person looks, processes and then practices the Word. It is important to note that the word translated “look” in verse 25 is a different Greek word than used for “observing” in verse 23-24. “The word for “looks intently into” (*parakypsas*) literally means “to stoop down” in order to have a good close look.”³² This is a reminder that the consumer of biblical preaching needs to fully engage in processing what he is hearing (the subject of chapter 2) in order to properly remember and be a doer of the Word. The word “continues” in verse 25 is set in contrast to the forgetfulness of verse 24. The message’s content and its implications for application remain in effect long after the sermon is completed and the benediction is given.

This type of applicational living is not only results in a life of obedience to God, it also is accompanied with a promised blessing to the one who does and in what he does. God promises to bless both the practice and the practitioner of godly living that is informed by the message of Holy Scripture.

To add to the growing list of responsibilities of the hearing in the preaching process, James provides a simply stated, but profound, addition. We must put into practice what we hear.

³²J. F., Walvoord, R. B. Zuck, & Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), Vol. 2, 823.

Area of Responsibility	Specific Responsibility of Hearer	Scriptural Support
The Heart		
	Believe in the Word of God	Mt. 13:1-23
	Put the Word of God as a priority	Mt. 13:1-23
The Mind		
	Have an open mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Have an eager mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Personally study the Scriptures	Acts 17:11-12
The Will		
	Put the Word into practice	James 1:22-25

Chapter Five

Know Thy Preacher

In the early twenty-first century there are more avenues of delivery available to both the hearer and the preacher than at any other time in the history of the church. In addition to the “live event” of the preaching enterprise, there are multiple technologies by which a sermon can be heard. There is no shortage of sermons available on television that is now delivered by cable and satellite as well as the “over the air” broadcast television. These outlets only seem to increase with each passing year. Radio as communication medium remains a constant outlet for preaching but now can expand beyond the reach of an AM or FM transmitter. Now satellite radio is not limited by a narrow field of broadcast geography. Sermons and sermonic material have been issued in print for nearly five hundred years, and so it continues today. It seems that each new era of communications technology does not replace the former; it only adds to the menu of options that exist. In the last 15 years the rise of the internet has caused a boom in the dissemination of sermons. Anyone with even a minimum of recording

equipment and a computer can offer sermons online that stream live as the sermon is delivered, then can be recorded in both video and audio formats for delivery on demand. The creation of methods that not only sit passively on the internet but actively deliver the content to a user's computer, iPod or smart phone allows sermons to be put within easy reach of hearers who may never see or know the person who is delivering God's Word to them. While not to criticize the leveraging of these mediums for kingdom purposes, one can legitimately ask the question if this is a good thing. Does the hearer have more responsibility in the preaching process than just to hear the message from a stranger? Does having a relationship with the preacher add to the process of preaching as God intended it? Does scripture shed any light on the need to know your preacher? As answers to these questions are sought, we shall seek to further delineate the responsibilities of the hearer in the preaching process.

In an effort to gain some knowledge of the perspective of a sampling of hearers, a survey was conducted by this author to seek a wider perspective than his own on this manner. The survey was conducted in the fall of 2010 and participants were solicited via Facebook and compiled on ChurchDevelopment.org. (The complete results of all questions and responses in this survey are provided in appendix A). The first question posed is as follows:



From this question we find that of those surveyed 88% view knowing the preacher to whom they are listening as either “nice to know” or “essential to know.” Only 12% believe that knowing the preacher is not an important factor in the preaching process. It would seem safe to conclude that even those 12% would believe that even if not important, they would see having a personal knowledge of the preacher as a good thing.

A second question poses the question above reversed by asking the value that the preacher know the hearer:



This question further confirms the conclusions from question one, that 86% of responders indicate that some level of knowledge of the hearer on the part of the preacher is preferred. It is only a minority of 14% who respond that it is not at all important to them that the preacher know them.

A third question from the survey seeks to discern if the respondents perceived experience correlates with their preferred experience.



These results are somewhat shocking in that nearly half (49%) of respondents, while preferring to know and be known by their preacher, in fact feel that there exists no personal relationship between themselves and their preacher. Another 38% indicate that there is a relationship but it is not considered “close.” Combining those two, one can conclude that based on this sampling an overwhelming majority (87%) do not have a close relationship with their preacher, while from earlier results a similar percentage would like to have one.

While a small-sample survey is not conclusive evidence and is not on par with biblical instruction, the above does indicate that current experience and practice does not match what a hearer would really desire. One could further conclude that effort expended by both the preacher and hearer to build relationship bridges would be profitable to all.

There are a number of scriptures that also would further the argument that a hearer has a need for a relationship with the one who preaches, and while not solely responsible for that relationship existing or being nurtured, the hearer needs to understand he or she does bear responsibility to seek out and develop a knowledgeable relationship with the minister of the Word.

Matthew 28:18-20 is called the Great Commission of the church and at its heart is the stated goal of making disciples. While the subject of disciple-making is beyond the scope of this paper, preaching, as biblical ministry of the church, must be part of the disciple-making process. Further, the discipling modeled by Christ in the gospels required there be a relationship between the teacher (rabbi) and the follower (disciple). A few key verses will prove this point. Jesus' first recorded encounter with teachers of the Law is in Luke 2:46 -- "Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions." Robertson explains the scene: "Probably on the terrace where members of

the Sanhedrin gave public instruction on Sabbaths and feast-days, so probably while the feast was still going on. The rabbis probably sat on benches in a circle. The listeners on the ground, among whom was Jesus the boy in a rapture of interest.”³³ This sheds light on the process of training in Jesus’ time- it involved interaction. This was the common model of teaching and would be the pattern Jesus would establish with His own followers.

Even more instructive is the statement in Mark 3:14 that summarizes Jesus’ approach to making disciples: *“Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach.”* It is vital to note that the disciple- making process required that the followers be with the teacher. “Jesus worked with the group principle—not so much the one-on-one. We grow in relation, not in isolation. In our case this is even more important because on the one hand, we don’t have all the gifts, and, on the other hand, we are sinful and give a distorted portrait of the Christ we seek to reflect. But a more balanced image will be given in the group.”³⁴ “Jesus called His disciples to be with Him because they need to see enfolded the concepts He taught. They needed to see the Word incarnated if they were to truly understand and be moved

³³A. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Vol.V c1932, Vol.VI c1933 by Sunday School Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems), Lk 2:46.

³⁴E. D Radmacher, R. B. Allen, & H. W House, *Nelson's new illustrated Bible commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers 1999), Mk 3:14.

to respond, and thus become like their teacher."³⁵ While it is true that preaching can be done in relational isolation from the hearer, if one correctly views preaching as part of the Christ-giving mission of discipling, it is best if there be a relationship between the two.

Another key concept to consider is Luke 6:40: "*A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher.*" The end purpose of discipling is not to impart information to the hearer (if it were an impersonal delivery system it would be wholly acceptable), but to impart life, in this case the life of Christ. "The 'Training' of a disciple focuses on making the disciple a complete person, a mature believer. As Jesus lived with and taught the Twelve, He was concerned about transformation; His goal was the nurture of life."³⁶ The principle of likeness prefers ministry settings wherein there is genuine relationship. The concept of what the Bible calls likeness has been well researched by sociologists and physiologists in recent years. The common secular term is "mirroring" – in essence we tend to mirror or reflect the actions, words and values of those we are in close contact. "Mirroring or emulating the nonverbal behavior of a communication recipient has been shown to be a potentially

³⁵ Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education, Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1975), 34-35.

³⁶ Lawrence O. Richards, *Christian Education, Seeking to Become Like Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1975), 31.

effective device for persuading others."³⁷ Therefore if Jesus trained His disciples by being with them for the purpose of their mirroring Him, it can be argued that on both sides of the pulpit there needs to be the creation of a relationship.

A further argument for the hearer to bear some responsibility to have a relationship with the preacher to whom he or she listens is that the New Testament cites multiple examples of not just listening to the minister of the Word but to imitate the lifestyle of the teacher/preacher, as well. For instance, Paul told the Corinthian believers: *"Therefore I urge you, imitate me,"* (1 Corinthians 4:16) and again: *"Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ,"* (1 Corinthians 11:1). Perhaps one can imitate some aspects of life from a distant impersonal position but in the context of Paul's appeals, he was referring to his manner of life that they had observed in person. In Philippians 3:17, he again cites his own example as a way his hearers should behave: *"Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern."* A final example in this flow of thought is found in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9: *"For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us."* The

³⁷ Van Swol, L. M. "The Effects of Nonverbal Mirroring on Perceived Persuasiveness, Agreement with an Imitator, and Reciprocity in a Group Discussion" *Communication Research*, 2003, 30, 461-480

interesting thing about this passage is that while Paul and company's primary mission was preaching and disciple-making, which would result in a church being planted, he uses his example of supporting his ministry through non-ministry labor as a means of showing the value of work. It was the extra-curricular activity that they knew of and were to follow as an example. His ministry in their lives was far beyond that which just came from a preaching session. "discipleship entails imitation of the personal exemplar. Paul called his churches to imitate his 'ways in Christ.' He could do this because his life was a concrete expression of what it meant to follow Christ."³⁸

So if there is a shared responsibility between the preacher and the hearer, then what steps can be made to allow the creation or an enhancement of genuine life-sharing in the preaching process? First, both sides must place themselves in a position where some type of relationship is possible. A live-preaching, local church setting is the preferred system of biblical preaching. Impersonal delivery systems (recorded media, broadcast, etc.) should only be seen as supplemental to a known person whose life is observable and with whom interaction is possible in a face-to-face setting. Secondly, all involved in the preaching process must open themselves to such a relationship. Perhaps in a church of significant size a pastor cannot have a close relationship with all who sit before him on a Sunday morning, but he can still be available when needed; he

³⁸ Richard N. Longenecker, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1996), 140.

should be able to respond to invitations to interact. Neither party can see as normal an impersonal barrier existing between them. Finally, active steps can be made to allow and foster such interaction even when many people may listen to a single preacher. He needs to interact in smaller groups; and listeners should reach out and make contact, ask questions, offer comments and offer hospitality to their biblical teacher. In so doing, this responsibility can be fulfilled to know thy preacher.

Area of Responsibility	Specific Responsibility of Hearer	Scriptural Support
The Heart		
	Believe in the Word of God	Mt. 13:1-23
	Put the Word of God as a priority	Mt. 13:1-23
The Mind		
	Have an open mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Have an eager mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Personally study the Scriptures	Acts 17:11-12
The Will		
	Put the Word into practice	James 1:22-25
Relationship		
	Know your preacher	Mark 3:14,
	Be known by your preacher	Luke 6:40

Conclusion

Who is responsible for the success of the preaching process from a human perspective? While not the subject of this work, it would be an easily proven proposition that the preacher bears significant responsibility to deliver the message of God. He must bring to bear upon the effort his godly character, his submission to the influence of the Holy Spirit, his submission to the authority of God's Word, his education, his individual effort to understand the passage at hand, to find a proper way to arrange the message, to select the methods by which it will be presented, and to involve his body and emotions into the passion of delivery. While much research and writing has been devoted to this side of homiletical responsibility, it has been the intention of this effort to look at the responsibilities of the hearer. By looking at primarily the exegetical evidence and explanation of the hearer's role as well as logic, secular research and original research, at least a partial accounting of the hearer's responsibilities has been brought to light. This is sufficient to prove that such responsibilities do indeed exist and are worthy of our efforts to fulfill them as we listen to the preached Word.

A final look at our summary chart will display the basic responsibilities

illuminated heretofore:

Area of Responsibility	Specific Responsibility of Hearer	Scriptural Support
The Heart		
	Believe In the Word of God	Mt. 13:1-23
	Put the Word of God as a priority	Mt. 13:1-23
The Mind		
	Have an open mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Have an eager mind	Acts 17:11-12
	Personally study the Scriptures	Acts 17:11-12
The Will		
	Put the Word into practice	James 1:22-25
Relationship		
	Know your preacher	Mark 3:14,
	Be known by your preacher	Luke 6:40

The hearer is responsible before God and to himself as an active agent in his own spiritual growth; to address the issues of heart, mind, will and relationship. He must then give diligent attention to the specific attitudes and actions that revelation dictates.

But once again turning to the acknowledged but unexplored responsibilities of the preacher in the preaching process, we should ask this question: How can a pastor bring the people he is leading to an understanding and acceptance of their

responsibilities? While it would be an admirable subject for further investigation in itself, a few summary thoughts could and should be offered.

First, the concepts and passages that touch on the hearer's responsibilities should be taught to the hearer. Since there is a sizeable investment of time on the part of the hearer, it may be assumed that the hearer would value making the experience as profitable as possible. The passages included in the preceding exposition would prove fruitful ground to explore and teach. Perhaps a series of messages entitled, "How to Survive a Sermon" would be both attractive and beneficial to all participants in the homiletic process. Many other passages could also be used for the same purpose. Psalm 119 is a good example, as are the actual sermons that appear in the text of Scripture such as the "Sermon on the Mount" (Matthew 5-7), Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), and Paul's sermon in Athens (Acts 17:22-34). Preaching sermons about listening to sermons is worth the effort to further the cause of effective preaching.

A wise preacher should also be always on alert for opportunities to show the craft and rationale for preaching. It should be defended against its critics and shown to be both a scriptural and effective means of ministry. The preacher, while seeking to improve his own skills, should also seek to improve the practical understanding of his hearers. Perhaps some explanation of sermon types and the reasons for using each

would be in order; also, to teach the hearers to preserve what they are learning through careful note-taking, journaling or other means of recording and reviewing of what is being taught. Any effort put forth in such practical areas will pay spiritual dividends.

Helping hearers hear has always been a need of the church, but this is especially true when ministering in an era in which first-person oral communication is in decline. For many, a Sunday sermon may be the only first-person oral presentation experience they have on a regular basis. Teaching hearers how to hear both scripturally and practically is part of the task of the preaching pastor.

A final area for practical consideration is that of building relationships with those to whom the preacher preaches. As argued in chapter five, there is a need for the preacher to have a relationship with the hearer and vice versa. One may deliver a sermon in an impersonal way to an equally impersonal audience but such a sermon would lack the potency that a heart connection between the pulpit and pew will provide. This means the preacher must be approachable, available and willing to invest his life in the lives of those to whom he ministers. A preacher must be as much a student of his people as of the Bible. He must know them to be able to serve them and address their needs from the authoritative position of divine revelation.

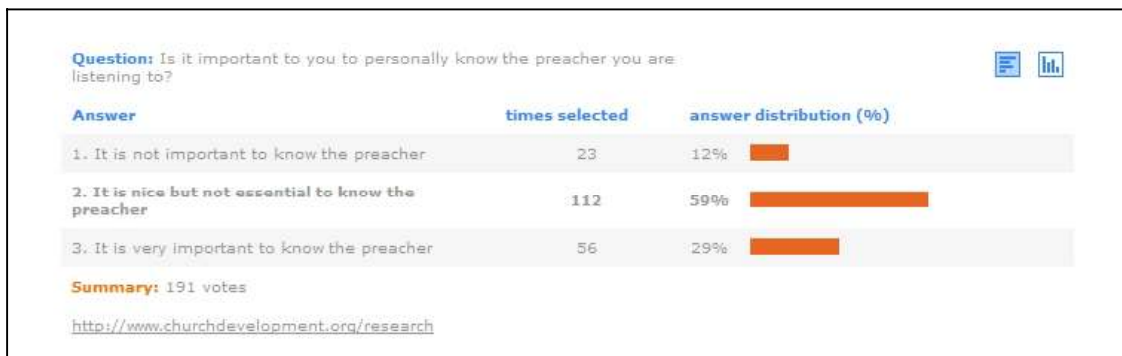
It is hoped that this work will in some small way contribute to the cause of Christ and to the cause of preaching by being a stimulant to both the sending agent and the receiving agent so that when God's Word is preached it can have the maximum effect on the maximum number of people, all for the Glory of God who has called His children to be hearers of the Word and some of His children to proclaim His Word. For it is through this means the message of the gospel comes, as Paul wrote in his first letter to the Corinthians: *"For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe"* (1 Corinthians 1:21, KJV).

Appendix One

Preaching Survey Results

The following results are from a survey was conducted in the fall of 2010 by this author and participants were solicited via Face book and compiled on ChurchDevelopment.org. Only questions 1-3 are discussed in the text of the preceding paper.

Question One



Question Two



Question Three



Question Four



Question Five



Question Six



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