

# Take Heed How You Hear

by J.B. Stoney

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*The sermon stresses the critical importance of how we receive and respond to God's revelation in our lives.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 6:23, Isaiah 66:2, Luke 11:34, Romans 13:12

**Topics:** "Divine Revelation", "Spiritual Transformation"

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## Description

J.B. Stoney emphasizes the importance of God's revelation as light in a world darkened by man's own reasoning and desires. He contrasts man's limited understanding with the illuminating power of God's Word, showing how acceptance of divine revelation requires a complete shift in mindset and action. Stoney highlights the responsibility and consequences of hearing and accepting God's truth, urging believers to allow the light of God's Word to guide and transform every aspect of their lives, rejecting the darkness of human wisdom and selfish motives.

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## Transcript

Man was in darkness as to the mind of God until He was pleased to reveal it. Hence His word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our paths. He tells us His mind in His word, which otherwise we could never have known by research or thought of our own. His revelation is therefore light; "The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple". The darkness is the conclusion of man's mind untaught and undirected by the word of God. Man follows the bent of his own mind, and makes himself the centre, just as Cain did at the very first. He builds a city and calls it after his son Enoch; it is characteristically what is derived from himself. The children of Lamech, the seventh from Adam in the Cain line, are Jubal, the father of all such as handle the harp and organ, and Tubal-cain, the instructor of every artificer in brass and iron. Up to the flood we have man left to himself, without any revelation from God that we know of, save the promise that God would through the seed of the woman bruise the serpent's head. We have no positive record of God's mind save as it was communicated orally. Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and none of the fathers died before his translation, except Adam; and Lamech the father of Noah was more than a hundred years old before the translation of Enoch. I notice this to show how man was at first entrusted with the oracles of God, and that they were not committed to writing; but while he was left to himself and to his own resources, the family of faith, like a silver thread, was preserved through God's mercy, and Noah, the remnant of it, was saved in the ark.

There can be no question as to the great difference between man without revelation, and man with it. The great philosophers at Athens indirectly admitted that the mind of man, however fertile and able, could not

discover the true God. They had an altar inscribed, "To the unknown God", Acts 17. Thus their research and learning had only disclosed their ignorance of God, and it is just here Paul addresses them; he presents to them the light of revelation.

If it be admitted - and it cannot be denied - that man is in darkness as to everything that suits God, for I cannot know the mind of the Supreme unless He divulges it; then if I accept the light of revelation, I must refuse the darkness which is in principle and practice quite independent of the mind of God. The darkness, that is man's mind, is solely and entirely set on discovering and securing everything to exalt himself in his departure from God, as we have seen in Cain. God's light has been given to show to man the way God can have mercy on him, and how He would set him up anew well pleasing to Himself; and as this light is received, an entirely new course must be pursued to that which man had invented or desired for his own benefit and enjoyment. Man's thoughts or plans at best cannot exceed his own measure, and as it must be limited to himself, it could not propose anything beyond human power, and therefore it must be finite, and within the region of human sense.

Thus man is in will a creature independent of his Creator; he seeks and designs for himself, absorbed in promoting his own pleasure and profit, though ignorantly, and blind as to his real profit; which is as great an anomaly as if a bird were to refuse the instruction of its parent, and attempt to run only, never using its wings. The blessed God alone knows what is best for man, and He declares it in His word. He tried man first without law, and then with law, and lastly He sent His Son "with healing in his wings." In the Greek we have man left to his own mind, unenlightened by revelation; in the Jew we have man in the flesh with the law as a given standard. Then grace and truth came by Jesus Christ, God's Son from heaven, "which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

The simple point is, does the light from God supersede and supplant in our minds the reasonings and judgment of man, and is it adequate and sufficient to direct or fit man for his true relation to God in every position in which he may be set? If this be answered in the affirmative - and it could not truly be answered otherwise, or God's revelation would not have perfectly disclosed His mind and will respecting us - it is plain that there is great responsibility in hearing, and that the word, "Take heed how ye hear," is a solemn one for us. Every word of God is light, and as it is received there is light in him who receives it, and this light is not to be put under a bed or under a bushel, but is to be manifested in the darkness. When the light of God comes to man, it finds him governed and influenced by his own and his fellows' conclusions, which is simply the light of his own reason; and therefore if he accepts the word of God, and as he does so, he must refuse the one while adopting the other.

It is here that all the difficulty lies, and all the responsibility as to hearing the word. If the word of God were only to improve and to add to the mind and thoughts of man, it would be comparatively easy to bow to it; it would be a further step in the science of human development. But when it introduces an entirely new principle of action, and not merely new actions, it is evident that if His word be accepted, it must be fatal to that which is already in existence. If the same identity, man, is governed by different and entirely new principles, it follows that as the better and greater are adopted, the former and inferior must be repudiated. The butterfly was once a caterpillar, but its mode of action is now quite different, and it could not return to that of its prior and inferior state.

If I see that man in himself is ignorant of what suits God, and that at best he can only order for himself up to his own measure, it is plain that when the light of God comes in, there must be an entirely new principle

of action, as well as a new mode, and that as the word of God gets a place and rules, so the other must be displaced and silenced. The simple lesson of Christianity is that it is the word of God, His light, which is to control and influence me in every transaction of life; and every one of the principles which I have derived from men, and heretofore acted on, must be feared and refused. If I say that man has been walking in the twilight of reason, and that revelation is the light of the sun for him, I give the idea that God's light only increases the light of human reason; but the moment I see that the light from God is above the brightness of the sun, and that it reveals Himself, then I see that everything which He reveals as to His purpose respecting man must be characteristic of Himself.

To man, fallen and ruined because of sin, and unable to resist the assault and influence of Satan, the god of this world, God imparts His mind; and as it is simply received from God, if through grace there is capacity to take it in (for an eye is this capacity; see Luke 11), the body is full of light. If the light be but taken in, the body yields to the force and power of it and expresses it; but if there be any wrong selfish motive of action, it perverts the light, as jaundice discolours every object, however good and perfect the light may be. When there is not a clear and full expression of the light, there is either a defect in the eye or in its power on the body. In the one case it is the way the light is perverted on receiving it, and the other is its influence practically; there is a dark part. Now it is a very solemn thing how I, through grace, receive the light from God; for if I have not a true sense of the responsibility of hearing and accepting the word of God, the greatest light becomes the greatest darkness. It is the most painful fact connected with God's people, that it is men who have been in the forefront in accepting God's word who have most grievously apostatised from it and brought reproach on the truth; and it is thus that the house of God is made a den of thieves.

Cain showed at the outset how little a man, even with good intentions, could meet the mind of God. And as we come on we see that, even in a righteous man like Lot, the true ground, Canaan, is no security against failure; and in the case of Aaron, that occupation in the closest way with the ways and works of God does not preserve from the people's untoward influence when His word is forgotten. Again, a later day and with greater light, Peter would have compromised the truth by refusing to eat with the gentile saints (Gal. 2). Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim. 2) were evidently men of note, or there would have been no use in mentioning their names; and they damaged the truth more than the most open adversary who was ignorant of it could have done.

The great damage done to the truth of God in every age was that it was not faithfully expressed by the recipients of it. It was placed under a bed without design, out of the way, or under a bushel designedly, and therefore was not manifested. In every instance it is the man who has received revelation, and has not been governed by it, but has reduced it to suit himself and minister to his own advantage, who is at any given time the most repugnant to God and most opposed to Him. The name of God was blasphemed among the gentiles through the Jew, and every dispensation has been marked by the way man has formalised for himself the truth of God without the power of it. So that every new revelation tested the sincerity of God's people, for the question was, would they accept what was entirely outside of human conviction and simply of faith?

God says, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Isa. 66:2). "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given." The soul in a right state before God says, "Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth". And this will always be accompanied with the sense of the claim His truth has on one. In this day it is not so much dullness of comprehension we have to lament, as the little sense of responsibility in hearing. The most

conscientious as a rule are the slowest and most fearful in hearing or accepting any additional truth, because they are most sensible of its claim when once heard. In divine things, the one who knows most always feels how little he knows, while he longs to know more of that of which he already knows most. He listens to the word as that which he needs and by which he grows; but he hears with the deepening sense that, as he accepts it, it will impart a more divine tone and spring to every act and movement of his life; that it cannot be accepted without confirming the truth already received, and rebutting and refusing in a greater degree the scope and tendency of carnal feeling and wisdom. It is a wondrous operation of God's Spirit in his soul, that of implanting the mind of God to supersede the principle of action heretofore dominant there. He does not know how he may be shaped by it, or to what he may be appointed; but like the vessel to the potter, or the tablet to the engraver, or the canvas to the painter, he is ready and prepared for the wondrous and beautiful touches which will make him a truer picture, or imitator, or expression of the one perfect Man. And as he hears, so is the measure of his gain; and more is given where most has been received.

If you do not hear with the sense of responsibility, you are not really a canvas ready to receive the colours of Christ; but if you are, you will bow to the truth, prepared of heart, and assured that as it is heard, so must there be a manifestation of it. It must not be put under a bed or under a bushel. You must maintain it, or it will not maintain you. If you do not use light, you will lose it. As you express it, you put on the armour of light. The evergreen resists the frost. Truth will not preserve you unless you preserve it, and then it is an armour to you; but if it be neglected, the receiver of the greatest truth will become like the sow that was washed, wallowing in the mire.

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