

# Of Public Hearings of the Word.

by John Gill

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of hearing the word of God, which is the substance of Christ, the truth, and the means by which faith comes.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 31:10-13, Luke 21:38, Acts 13:15, Romans 10:17, James 1:22

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Hearing the Word"

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## Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of public hearing of the Word as a vital ordinance in the Christian faith, tracing its roots from the synagogue worship to the early church. He highlights the necessity of attentive and reverent listening, distinguishing between different types of hearers and their responses to the Word. Gill encourages believers to approach the hearing of the Word with prayer, eagerness, and a heart prepared to receive the truth, as it is through hearing that faith is cultivated. He also discusses the benefits of hearing the Word, including conviction, conversion, and spiritual nourishment, urging the congregation to be doers of the Word and not merely hearers.

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## Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 4

OF PUBLIC HEARING THE WORD

The public hearing of the word is another ordinance of divine service under the gospel dispensation. Public reading of the scriptures was a part of synagogue worship (Acts 13:15, 15:21; see Luke 4:16, 17), and reading the scriptures publicly obtained in the primitive times of Christianity; as appears from Justin Martyr[1] and Tertullian[2]; and in later times there was a particular officer appointed to this service, called the "lector," or reader. Public hearing is connected with the public ministry of the word; they go together, and support each other, and the one cannot be without the other: under the former dispensation there was a public hearing of the law, or word of the Lord, at certain stated times and seasons; at the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles the law was to be read "before all Israel, in their hearing;" men, women, and children, were to be gathered together, that they might "hear and learn to fear" the Lord their God (Deut. 31:10-13), at certain times, as at new moons and sabbaths, the people used to come and sit before the prophets, and hear the word of the Lord from their mouths; and even in the Babylonish captivity, it is said to Ezekiel, of the people of the Jews, "They come

unto thee as the people cometh;" whence it appears it was a custom and usual so to do (see Deut. 8:1, 14:1; Ezek. 33:31); when that people were returned from their captivity, in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, the book of the law was brought forth publicly and read, in the open street, from morning till noon, "before men and women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive to it" (Neh. 8:2, 3).

In some periods of time, under the former dispensation, there was a great scarcity of hearing the word; in the times of Eli, and when Samuel was young, "the word of the Lord was precious;" that is, scarce and rare, as such usually be that are so; for "there was no open vision;" no public prophet, to whom the Lord spoke in vision, and to whom the people could have recourse, to hear and learn, and know the word and will of God. In the times of Asa the people of Israel had been for a long season "without a teaching priest;" and so without hearing the law, or word of the Lord, from his mouth; they had, as it was sometimes threatened, a famine, "not a famine of bread, nor of thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (1 Sam. 3:1; 2 Chron. 15:3; Amos 8:11).

Under the gospel dispensation, opportunities of hearing the word have been more frequent, and of hearing it more clearly, plainly, and fully; of hearing what kings and prophets desired to hear, but heard not; and that by all sorts of people, and oftentimes in great numbers; "The law and the prophets were until John," read, explained, and heard publicly; "Since that time the kingdom of God is preached," the gospel of the kingdom, in a clearer manner, and "every man presseth into it," to hear it (Luke 16:16), there were great flockings to hear John, when he came preaching in the wilderness of Judea; and multitudes attended the ministry of Christ and his apostles; in process of time the Jews indeed put away the word of God from them, and showed themselves unworthy of it, and even of everlasting life; when the apostles, as they were ordered, turned to the Gentiles, and they gladly received it (Acts 28:28), and it is both the duty and privilege of all, who have the opportunity of hearing it, to hear it; "For faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," (Rom. 10:17) and this is what is to be treated of; concerning which may be observed the following things, 1.

The object of hearing, or what is to be heard; this is a matter of moment, and about which men should be cautious; our Lord's advice is, "Take heed what you hear," (Mark 4:24) not the cunningly devised fables, and illusory dreams of men are to be attended to, and heard; but "the word of God;" between which there is as much difference as between chaff and wheat (Jer. 23:28), that word, which comes from God, relates his mind and will, especially concerning salvation by Christ, is to be hearkened unto; and whatsoever is delivered by the ministers of the gospel, agreeable to the word of God, which is fetched out of it, and confirmed by it, is to be heard and received, not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God: not lies, spoken in hypocrisy, as all false doctrines are; for no lie is of the truth; not these, but "the word of truth," is to be heard and embraced (Eph. 1:13), which comes from the God of truth; the substance of which is Christ, the truth, and which the Spirit of truth leads into the knowledge of, and contains in it nothing but truth: not the law, as in the hands of Moses; that voice of words, which they that heard, intreated they might hear no more, they were so terrible; but the gospel of salvation, which brings the good news and glad tidings of salvation by Christ.

When Moses and Elijah were with Christ on the mount, the voice there from the excellent glory directed to hear, not Moses and Elias, but the beloved Son of God, saying, "Hear ye him": the sheep of Christ will not hear the voice of a stranger, which they know not, but the voice of Christ, the great and good Shepherd, in the gospel and in his ministers; which is a voice of love, grace, and mercy; a voice of peace, pardon, righteousness, life, and salvation by Christ; a soul quickening voice, a very powerful one, a soul charming,

a soul alluring voice; a comforting and rejoicing one, and therefore very desirable to be heard, and very useful and profitable to attend unto; blessed are the people that hear and know this joyful sound. 2.

The act of hearing, which is twofold, internal and external; there may be one, the latter, without the other, the former; sometimes they go together; and then hearing is not only a duty, but grace, benefit, and blessing. 2a. First, there is an internal hearing of the word; when it is so heard as to be understood, and when men know it to be the word of the Lord, as the flock of Christ do, even the poor of the flock, and can distinguish the voice of Christ from the voice of a stranger; when it is heard so as to approve of it, like it, love it, and receive the love of the truth, and that from love to it; when men feel the power of it, enlightening their minds in the knowledge of divine things, attracting their affections to Christ, bowing their wills to him; it coming not in word only, but in power, works effectually in them; when they taste the sweetness of it, and eat it, and it is the joy and rejoicing of their hearts; and they esteem the words of Christ's mouth more than their necessary food; when they hear it so as to believe it, not with a bare temporary faith, but with a spiritual saving faith in God and Christ revealed in it (John 5:24), and when they hear so as to receive the word into their hearts, and it becomes the ingrafted word, and springs up, and brings forth fruit in heart and life.

Should it be asked, how any come by such hearing of the word, since men are naturally and wilfully deaf unto it, are like the deaf adder, which stops her ear to the voice of the charmer, charming never so wisely; they refuse to hearken, pull away the shoulder, stop their ears, that they should not hear? the answer is, that it is not of themselves, but of the Lord; as the seeing eye, so the hearing ear, both in a natural and in a spiritual sense, is from the Lord (Prov. 20:12), it is he that gives them ears to hear, which he does not give to all, only to some; when he gives them hearts and new spirits, then he gives them new ears to hear, what they never heard before, at least in such a manner; he opens their ears and hearts, as he did Lydia's, to attend to the things spoken in the ministry of the word; he circumcises their uncircumcised hearts and ears, as to love him, so to hear his word with delight and pleasure; all which is done in regeneration: "He that is of God," who is born of God, "heareth God's words," internally and spiritually; "ye therefore," says Christ to the Jews, "hear them not, because ye are not of God," are unregenerate persons (John 8:47). 2b.

Secondly, there is an external hearing of the word, which is both a duty and a privilege, since it is the word of God that is heard, and oftentimes much profit arises from it; and it is therefore to be heard, 2b1. Constantly, and with great assiduity (Prov. 8:34), the public places of worship, meant by wisdom's gates and doors, where the word is to be heard, are daily or frequently to be attended; if the word is to be preached in season and out of season, it is to be heard as often; or otherwise preaching is to no purpose: much may be lost by a non-attendance on and a neglect of public worship, as the case of Thomas shows; and much advantage may be got by a perseverant waiting on the means of grace, as the case of the man having an infirmity eight and thirty years, after long waiting at the pool, may encourage to hope for and expect. 2b2.

The word of God should be heard early and eagerly. It is said of Christ's hearers, "that all the people came early in the morning to him in the temple, for to hear him," (Luke 21:38) these were such who were swift to hear, and their earliness to hear showed eagerness to it: an instance of eagerness to hear we have in Cornelius and his family, who having sent to Joppa for Simon Peter, who was to tell him what he ought to do, prepared to receive him, and therefore when he came, thus addressed him; "Here we are all present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God," (Acts 10:33) they were ready waiting for the preacher, to hear what he had in commission to say unto them; and not the preacher for them, as the custom now is; so the Gentiles at Antioch, having heard the word of the Lord, desired that the same words

might be spoken to them the next sabbath, when almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God, so eager and intent were they upon it (Acts 13:42, 44). 2b3.

The word of God should be heard attentively; it is observed of Christ's auditory, "that all the people were very attentive to hear him," (Luke 19:48) or "hung on him"[3], as they were "hearing;" they pressed to him, got close about him, and hung as it were upon his lips[4], to catch every word that dropped from him; as Benhadad's servants, when they waited upon the king of Israel, on account of their master, "diligently observed whether anything would come from him, and did hastily catch it," to improve it in their master's favour (1 King 20:33).

When our Lord entered into the synagogue at Nazareth, and had the book of Isaiah given him, out of which he read a passage, and explained it, "the eyes of all the synagogue were fastened on him," looked wistly at him, they attentively heard him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth (Luke 4:20, 22), when "the eyes of a fool," while hearing the word, "are in the ends of the earth," roving and wandering here and there, and he inattentive to it. 2b4.

The word of God should be heard with reverence; all irreverent looks and gestures should be avoided in hearing it; men should consider in whose presence they are, and whose word they are hearing; not the word of man, but the word of God; "Where the word of a king is, there is power," and it commands awe and reverence; and much more the word of the King of kings: God is to be feared, and had in reverence, "in the assembly of the saints;" in every part of religious worship there performed, and particularly in hearing his word; we read of some that "tremble" at his word, which I understand not of a slavish fear, and legal terror at it, but of a reverential affection for it, and behaviour under it. 2b5.

The word of God is to be heard with faith, since without it it is unprofitable (Heb. 4:2), as food not being mixed with a liquid, an agreeable humour in the stomach, is not digested, and becomes unprofitable; so the word, not being mixed with faith, is not concocted, and yields no nourishment. 2b6. The word of God heard, should be carefully retained, and not let slip[5] (Heb. 2:1) like leaking vessels, which let out the liquor put into them, or like strainers which immediately let through what is poured into them; such are the forgetful hearers of the word, which ought to be laid up in the mind and memory, as a jewel in a cabinet; and which, when heard, should be kept in an honest and good heart, not only for present use, but for future good (Ps. 119:11).

I proceed to consider, 3. The various hearers of the word; for all men do not hear alike, and to like profit and advantage. Some writers[6] distribute hearers into four sorts, whom they compare to the following things; some are like "sponges," which attract and suck in all, both good and bad; such are those hearers who receive and like all they hear; be it a sound, evangelical discourse, they will express their approbation of it; and be it the very reverse, they will commend it as a good discourse, not being able to distinguish between truth and error, sound and unsound doctrine; the best in those hearers is, they are not difficult, but are easily pleased.

Others are compared to "hourglasses," in which the sand runs quick out of one glass into another; so some hearers, what they hear with one ear, they let out at the other, as is usually said. A third sort are compared to "strainers," cloth strainers, which let all the good liquor pass through, and retain the dregs and lees; so these let pass, and take no notice of what is valuable, which they hear; but if there is any thing in a discourse that is weak and impertinent, foolish and vain, that they are sure to observe.

A fourth sort are compared to a sort of "sieves," which let pass everything that is good for nothing, and only retain the fine flour; these are the best of hearers, and who are fed with the finest of the wheat. But our Lord, with much greater propriety, has divided hearers of the word into four sorts also; one he compares to seed that falls on the wayside, which the fowls of the air pick up and devour: another sort, to seed that falls on stony ground, or on a rock, which springing up hastily, soon withers and comes to nothing: a third sort, to seed that falls among thorns, which growing up with it, choke it, and it becomes unfruitful: and a fourth sort, to seed that falls on good ground, and brings forth fruit of various degrees (Matthew 13:1-23). 3a.

First, one sort is comparable to seed that falls by the wayside; by which seem to be meant casual and accidental hearers, who passing by a place of worship stop and step in; not with an intention to hear, but to gratify some curiosity or another; and therefore hear in a very careless and indifferent manner, and forget what they hear as soon as they hear it: these are compared to a way by the side of grain fields, left for persons to walk on between them, and so a common path, a beaten road; to which their hearts are like, every sin, lust, and evil thought passing and repassing in them, and become desperately wicked; and as a path thus frequently trodden becomes hard and unsusceptible of seed that falls upon it; so the hearts of men become hard through the deceitfulness of sin, and incapable of receiving any impressions upon them by the word they hear; and as such a wayside must be ploughed, broken up, and opened, ere seed can be received into it; so such hearts of men must be opened, as Lydia's was, to attend to the things spoken in the ministry of the word.

These hearers are such who hear, but "understand" not what they hear, as a natural man does not, and so it is lost unto them. Our Lord interprets, "the fowls of the air," catching away what was sown, and devouring it, of the wicked one, Satan, the devil; and it being in the plural number in the parable "fowls of the air," may denote the wicked one with the spiritual wickednesses in high places, Satan and his principalities and powers, the devil and his angels, compared to fowls of the air, because of their habitation in it; Satan being the prince of the power or posse of devils that dwell in the air; and because of their voraciousness, seeking whom and what they may devour; and as where seed is sowing, birds flock about to pick up what they can; so where there is a ministration and hearing of the word, Satan is sure to be there, to hinder the benefit of it as much as in him lies; and who may be said to "catch away that which was sown in the heart;" not grace, which was not sown there, and which where it is cannot be taken away, but remains; but as Mark and Luke have it, "the word," that was sown in their hearts; not in their understandings, for such hearers understand it not; nor in their affections, these being distinguished from the stony ground hearers, who receive the word with joy; but in their memories, and that very slightly, the heart being put for the memory, as in Luke 2:51 out of which it is suddenly and secretly caught, being made to forget it immediately, by diverting the mind to other objects, and fixing the attention elsewhere, so that the word to such an hearer is entirely useless. 3b.

Secondly, another sort is like to seed that falls on stony ground, or on a rock, as Luke has it; by which such hearers are meant, who are constant and attentive, understand what they hear in some sort, and assent to it, "believe" it, at least "for a while," and make a profession of it, yea, receive it "with joy," with a flash of natural affection, like Herod, and others of John's hearers (Mark 6:20; John 5:35), yet but stony ground still; their hearts are as hard as a rock, unbroken by the word, without any true sense of sin, and repentance for it, and destitute of any spiritual life and motion, stubborn, inflexible, stout hearted, and far from righteousness.

Now it is said of this seed, that it "withered away," for want of depth of earth; and as Luke has it, because it lacked moisture, and through the scorching heat of the sun, and because it had no root; so hearers, comparable to such ground, and the seed on it, "wither" in their profession; the leaves of profession drop from them like leaves from trees in autumn, and leave them bare and naked; and because of the trouble they meet with in their profession, they are "offended and stumble, and in a time of temptation," as a time of persecution is, they "fall away;" not from grace they never had, but from the doctrine of grace they professed: which is owing, partly to the word not being sown deeply in their hearts; for as the seed to which they are compared soon sprung up, because it had but little depth of earth to get through, for the same reason it soon withered away; and so in these hearers, there being only some slight convictions, and superficial knowledge, and a temporary historical faith; but no solid, substantial truth and wisdom in the inward parts, they soon decline in their profession: and partly to their not being watered continually with the rain of heavenly doctrine, and the dews of divine grace, and also to the sun of persecution beating upon them they cannot bear, and to their having no root, neither in the love of God, nor in Christ, nor in themselves; the root of the matter not being in them, in of time they come to nothing. 3c.

Thirdly, a third sort is like to seed that falls among thorns, which choke it; these design such who having heard the word, "go forth," as Luke says, not in acts of growth and fruitfulness, as in Malachi 4:2 rather in the course of an external profession, as the virgins, wise and foolish, took their lamps of profession, and went forth to meet the bridegroom; or it may be, those hearers may be said to go forth, not to hear the word, but from it; neglecting and forsaking it, as Demas forsook the apostle Paul, having loved the world; of which complexion these hearers seem to be, and so went forth to their worldly business; like those invited to the wedding, who made light of it, and went their way, one to his farm, another to his merchandise.

Our Lord interprets the thorns which choked the seed, of worldly cares, deceitful riches, the lusts of other things, and the pleasures of this life, which all are of a surfeiting and suffocating nature. By the "care of the world," is not meant a laudable care of a man to provide for himself and family, and that he may have to give to them that need; but an anxious, immoderate one, which is, like thorns, distressing, afflictive, an, perplexing; and which is vain and fruitless, since by all a man's care and thought he cannot add a cubit to his stature; and yet so much engross his thoughts, as to hinder the usefulness of the word: riches are "deceitful" things, they do not give the satisfaction they promise, nor continue as long as may be expected; and are sometimes the means of leading out of the right way, and cause men to err from the faith, and drop the profession of it; or prevent their going into the right way, and following Christ, as the young man in the gospel: and like thorns, they are pricking, and pierce men through with many sorrows, who covet after them (1 Tim. 6:9, 10), and are injurious to others; the prince, the judge, and the great man, the best of them is as a brier, and the most upright is sharper than a thorn hedge, who oppress and crush the poor; and they are unprofitable, as to another world, cannot profit in the day of wrath, nor give to God a ransom for the soul: and "other lusts," worldly and fleshly ones, as they are contrary to the word, they war against the soul, and so are hurtful; and the "pleasures of life" are but for a season, and short lived, and though they are sweet and pleasant for a while, they are bitterness in the end, and are found to be vanity and vexation of spirit, and lead to destruction; such hearers, in whom these things prevail, are like the earth, described Hebrews 6:8.

Now it is said of the thorns, that they "sprung up," that is, of themselves, as thorns do, and are not sown and planted; and the lusts signified by them, are the works of the flesh, and spring from corrupt nature; and these "enter" into the heart, and overspread the powers and faculties of the soul, and so "choke" the

word, as the thorns the seed, by overtopping it, and it becomes unfruitful, brings forth no fruit, at least none to perfection. 3d.

Fourthly, a fourth sort of hearers is like to seed that falls on good ground, and brings forth fruit of various degrees; by whom are meant such who hear, and "understand" what they hear; not merely notionally, but experimentally; into whose hearts the word enters, accompanied with a divine power; the entrance of which give light into the knowledge of divine things; by which such know the worth of it, and prize it above thousands of gold and silver, and can discern things that differ, and approve what is excellent; can distinguish between truth and error, and receive the one and reflect the other; these are such hearers who hear the word, and "receive" it, as Mark has it; not into their heads only, but into their hearts, where it has a place, and dwells richly; who receive it not as the word of man, but as the word of God; as his witness and record which he bears of his Son, of his person, and divine Sonship, and of eternal life and salvation by him; and receive it gladly, as did the three thousand pricked to the heart; and with all readiness, like the noble Bereans, having searched and examined what they heard; and also receive the ingrafted word with meekness, subjecting their reason to divine revelation; not exercising themselves in things too high for them, rejecting every vain imagination, carnal reasonings, and all high thoughts exalted against the knowledge of Christ: these are such hearers, as it is expressed in Luke, who, "in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it;" where the good ground is explained of a good heart, made so by the Spirit and grace of God; otherwise the heart of man is wicked, yea, desperately wicked; nor is it in the power of man to make his heart good; it is God only that can create a clean and good heart in him; give him an heart of flesh, soft and tender, susceptible of the word, on which, through divine grace, it makes good impressions; and here it is laid up as a rich jewel in a cabinet, and kept and preserved for future use: here what is committed is kept and held fast, such will not part with it, nor depart from it, but keep it without wavering, being established in it, and with it; stand fast in it, in the profession of it: and these "bring forth fruit with patience;" which fruit they have from Christ, the green fir tree; and through an ingrafture into him, and abiding in him, as branches in the vine; and which is produced under the influence of the Spirit of God, and makes much for the glory of God; and which appears in the exercise of grace, and in the performance of good works: and this is brought forth "with patience" under sufferings and is increased thereby, and continues until it is brought to perfection; and is in some more, in others less, and in all good fruit, of the same quality, though not of the same quantity (Matthew 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15).

I go on to observe, 4. What is requisite to the right hearing of the word, both before it, at it, and after it. 4a. First; what is necessary previous to hearing the word, and in order to it. 4a1. Prayer should go before it. Such who are desirous of hearing the word to profit and advantage, should pray for the minister, that he may be directed to what may be suitable to their cases, be assisted in his work, and be greatly blessed to their souls' good: and for themselves, that they might have their minds disposed to hear the word, and be kept from wanderings under it, and that they may understand what they hear, and receive it in the love of it; otherwise how can a blessing on Zion's provisions be expected, when it has not been asked? and how unreasonable is it to blame the preacher, when reflecting on their own conduct, should take the blame to themselves. 4a2.

There should be a previous consideration of the nature, use, and end of this service; that it is intended the good and edification of the souls of men, and glory of God; it should be considered of what importance it is to themselves, and how grateful to God when rightly performed (1 Sam. 15:22), men should consider into whose presence they are entering, whose word they are about to hear; what attention should be given to it, and what reverence of it! the advice of the wise man should be regarded (Eccl. 5:1), they should

consider the advantages which may arise from hearing the word, which they should propose to themselves for their encouragement, and consider what need they stand in of instruction, and what to be instructed in; for if they are wise in their own conceits, and fancy themselves to be wiser than their teachers, there is no hope nor expectation of the word heard being of any advantage to them; it is the meek and humble God will teach his way, and instruct by his word. 4a3.

An appetite to the word is necessary to hearing it; the word is food, hearing and receiving it in faith is feeding on it; this cannot be comfortably done without a spiritual appetite; there must be a desire after the sincere milk of the word; the church "desired and sat down," as the words [7] may be rendered (Song 2:3), desired to sit down under the shadow of Christ, his word and ordinances, and did sit down with delight; and it follows, "His fruit was sweet to her taste;" she had a gust for it, a relish of it; "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness," the word of righteousness, "they shall be filled," satisfied with it, as with marrow and fatness: to hear the word without an appetite, is like a man sitting down at a table well furnished with provision, with delicious food, and well dressed and served up, but has no appetite to feed upon it. 4b.

Secondly, there are some things necessary while hearing the word. 4b1. A man should try what he hears, and while hearing; for "the ear tries words;" not that persons should sit as critics upon the words, phrases, and expressions of the preacher, to judge of the justness of his style, the propriety of his diction, and the cadency of his words; hearing the word to profit requires no such critical art: but men should try the things that are said, the doctrines that are delivered, by their own experience, whether agreeable to it; and by the word of God, whether according to it; and this they are to do while hearing it, so far as their judgment will reach, and they can recollect the sense of the sacred scriptures. 4b2.

A man should take to himself what he hears, and while hearing it. Some hear not for themselves, but for others; when such and such expressions drop from the preacher, they presently conceive in their minds, that they are suitable to such a man, and hit such a man's case, and have no regard to themselves; whereas, in hearing, they should observe what is "for doctrine;" whether it is for the illumination of their minds in it, and for the establishment of them in the present truth; and if "for reproof" for sin, that it is for their own; and if "for correction" of conduct and conversation, that it is of their own; and if "for instruction in righteousness," in any branch of duty, that it concerns them; so when they hear of Christ as a Saviour, and of the great salvation by him, and of the blessings and promises of grace, they are to take these to themselves by faith, as belonging to them; "To you is the word of this salvation sent" (Acts 13:26). 4b3.

Faith is to be mixed with the word, while hearing it; men should make faith of what they hear, or believe it for themselves, digest it as food, and so will it be profitable unto them (Heb. 4:2). 4c. Thirdly, after hearing the word some things are to be done, which may be of use and service. 4c1. There should be a recollection of what has been heard, as much as may be; persons should retire privately, and meditate upon what they have heard; the beasts that were accounted clean under the law, were such as chewed the cud; hearers of the word should endeavour to fetch back and call over again what they have heard, when their meditation on it is often as sweet or sweeter than at the first hearing it. 4c2.

When two or more meet together after hearing the word, and converse together about what they have heard, this may tend to much profit and advantage, to refresh one another's memories; what one has forgotten, another may remember; or what has appeared difficult to one, may be explained by another; and thus by speaking to and conferring with one another, it is a means of building up each other in their most holy faith. 4c3. It is proper to consider how it has been with them while hearing the word; if they have

been careless and inattentive, wandering, cold, and indifferent under it; they will see reason for humiliation and lamentation that so it should be with them, while hearing such evangelic truths, and such excellent doctrines delivered to them; or if their souls have been enlarged, their hearts warmed, their affections raised, their judgments informed, their knowledge increased, and their souls established in the present truth, they will be led to praise and thankfulness: and upon the whole, there should be a concern that what they hear is put in practice, that they are "doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving their own souls," (James 1:22). 5.

The utility of hearing the word, or the advantages which under a divine blessing arise from it, are next to be considered; and which may be regarded as so many encouraging reasons and arguments to attend to this duty; and which will be only just enumerated; as, 5a. Conviction of sin, and of a lost and undone state and condition by nature, oftentimes comes by hearing the word; as the three thousand under Peter's sermon (Acts 2:36), so sometimes an unbeliever comes into a congregation, where the word is preached, and he is "convinced of all," of all his sins and iniquities, and he is "judged of all," condemned for them in his own conscience (1 Cor. 14:24, 25). 5b.

Conversion also is by means of it; the end of the word being preached and heard, is to turn men from the darkness of sin and error to the light of grace and truth; from the power, dominion, and slavery of Satan, to serve the living God; from the ways of sin and folly to the paths of righteousness and holiness; from a dependence on a man's own righteousness, to trust in the righteousness of Christ (see Acts 26:18); hence one of the epithets of the law, or doctrine of the Lord, from its effect, is, "converting the soul," (Ps. 19:7). 5c.

In this way, or by hearing the word, the Spirit of God, his gifts and graces, are conveyed into the hearts of men (Gal. 3:2). 5d. Particularly faith usually comes this way (Rom. 10:17). 5e. The joy of faith, and an increase of that, and of every other grace, are by means of it (Phil. 1:25). 5f. Comfort is had by it; he "that prophesieth," or preacheth, "speaketh to comfort," (1 Cor. 14:3) the end and use of the gospel ministry is to comfort those that mourn; the commission given by Christ to his ministers, is to speak comfortably to his people (Isa. 40:1, 2, 61:2). 5g.

The knowledge of Christ, and an increase of it, are the fruits and effects of hearing the word, when blessed (2 Cor. 2:14). 5h. Love to Christ is drawn forth, and glowing affection to him raised by means of it (Song 1:3; Luke 24:32). 5i. Food and nourishment, in a spiritual sense, are by the word; it is found and eat, when heard, and souls are nourished with the words of faith and good doctrine, even with the wholesome words of our Lord Jesus Christ. 5j. Hearing seasons are sometimes sealing ones (Eph. 1:13).

Besides public hearing the word, there should be a private reading of the scriptures, which should be searched to see whether what is heard be true or not (John 5:39; Acts 17:11), and they should be read in families, for the instruction of them in righteousness; and hereby even children may come to know the scriptures early in life (2 Tim. 3:15, 16; Eph. 6:4). ENDNOTES:

[1] Apolog. 2. p. 98.

[2] Deut. Anima, c. 9.

[3] exekremato "pendebat," Vatablus.

[4] "Pendentque iterum narrantis ab ore," Virgil.

[5] pararruwmen, "perfluamus," Vatablus.

[6] Vid. Amesium de Casibus Conscientiae, l. 4. c. 11. p. 187.

[7] ytbvyw ytdmx.

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