

Listening versus Listening

We've heard and read much lately about the importance of "listening." Indeed, listening to God is always vital; and listening to others can be important too. It is often and well said that most of us "listen" in order to respond rather than to truly understand. Such certainly inhibits both our comprehension of another's viewpoint as well as our ability to effectively respond. However, if we really *listen* to God, He tells us **not to listen** to everyone:

- Proverbs 17:4, *"An evildoer listens to wicked lips, A liar pays attention to a destructive tongue."* Indeed, as Jesus would later warn, *"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves... you will know them by their fruits,"* Matthew 7:15-20.
- 1Timothy 4:6-7, Paul encourages Timothy and us to be *"constantly nourished on the words of faith and of sound doctrine"* but says to *"have nothing to do with worldly fables"*- thus, *listen* to the former but shun the latter.
- 1Timothy 1:3-7, Paul again encourages us to give heed to *instruction* that produces *"love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith,"* but discourages listening to *"myths and endless genealogies"* that *"give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering God's provision which is by faith."* Thus, listen to those who speak *God's word* but refuse to hear those who just want to be heard despite the fact that *"they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions."*
- Titus 3:9,23, *"But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene... refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels."*

As much as we ought to *listen to* and *really hear and heed* God's word and those who speak it, we are also commanded to *avoid, shun, and refuse to listen, hear, or heed* those who speak contrary to it.

However, we must also remember that *"the Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition; if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will,"* 2Timothy 2:24-26.

It certainly goes against societal wisdom, but God's wisdom says that NOT everyone deserves to be heard. My brethren, we are *"as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves"*... especially in regards with to whom you listen! *"The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. Because God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil,"*

Ecclesiastes 12:11-14. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org; email to mrpcstrong@hotmail.com)