

# How to Listen to a Sermon

by George Whitefield

## Keys for getting the most out of what the preacher says

Jesus said, 'Therefore consider carefully how you listen' (Luke 8:18). Here are some cautions and directions, in order to help you hear sermons with profit and advantage.

**1. Come to hear them, not out of curiosity, but from a sincere desire to know and do your duty.** To enter His house merely to have our ears entertained, and not our hearts reformed, must certainly be highly displeasing to the Most High God, as well as unprofitable to ourselves.

**2. Give diligent heed to the things that are spoken from the Word of God.** If an earthly king were to issue a royal proclamation, and the life or death of his subjects entirely depended on performing or not performing its conditions, how eager would they be to hear what those conditions were! And shall we not pay the same respect to the King of kings, and Lord of lords, and lend an attentive ear to His ministers, when they are declaring, in His name, how our pardon, peace, and happiness may be secured?

**3. Do not entertain even the least prejudice against the minister.** That was the reason Jesus Christ Himself could not do many mighty works, nor preach to any great effect among those of His own country; for they were offended at Him. Take heed therefore, and beware of entertaining any dislike against those whom the Holy Ghost has made overseers over you.

Consider that the clergy are men of like passions with yourselves. And though we should even hear a person teaching others to do what he has not learned himself, yet that is no reason for rejecting his doctrine. For ministers speak not in their own, but in Christ's name. And we know who commanded the people to do whatever the scribes and Pharisees should say unto them, even though they did not do themselves what they said (see Matt. 23:1-3).

**4. Be careful not to depend too much on a preacher, or think more highly of him than you ought to think.** Preferring one teacher over another has often been of ill consequence to the church of God. It was a fault which the great Apostle of the Gentiles condemned in the Corinthians: 'For whereas one said, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos: are you not carnal, says he? For who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but instruments in God's hands by whom you believed?' (1 Cor. 1:12; 2:3-5).

Are not all ministers sent forth to be ministering ambassadors to those who shall be heirs of salvation? And are they not all therefore greatly to be esteemed for their work's sake?

**5. Make particular application to your own hearts of everything that is delivered.** When our Savior was discoursing at the last supper with His beloved disciples and foretold that one of them should betray Him, each of them immediately applied it to his own heart and said, 'Lord, is it I?' (Matt. 26:22).

Oh, that persons, in like manner, when preachers are dissuading from any sin or persuading to any duty, instead of crying, 'This was intended for such and such a one!' instead would turn their thoughts inwardly, and say, 'Lord, is it I?' How far more beneficial should we find discourses to be than now they generally are!

**6. Pray to the Lord, before, during, and after every sermon,** to endue the minister with power to speak, and to grant you a will and ability to put into practice what he shall show from the Book of God to be your duty.

No doubt it was this consideration that made St. Paul so earnestly entreat his beloved Ephesians to intercede with God for him: 'Praying always, with all manner of prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and for me also, that I may open my mouth with boldness, to make known the mysteries of the gospel' (Eph. 6:19-20). And if so great an apostle as St. Paul needed the prayers of his people, much more do those ministers who have only the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit.

If only all who hear me this day would seriously apply their hearts to practice what has now been told them! How ministers would see Satan, like lightning, fall from heaven, and people find the Word preached sharper than a two-edged sword and mighty, through God, to the pulling down of the devil's strongholds!

*This excerpt is adapted from Sermon 28 from The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield. Published by E. and C. Dilly, 1771-1772, London. George Whitefield (1714-1770) was a British Methodist evangelist whose powerful sermons fanned the flames of the First Great Awakening in the American colonies.*