

The Importance of Hearing

by

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I was always under the impression that the only point most denominations disagreed with the church of Christ regarding salvation was baptism. That is, that everyone mostly agreed that hearing, faith, repentance and confession were necessary; but that the disagreement was whether prayer or baptism was the final step.

It seems, though, that I was mistaken in that impression. Most religious groups do agree on faith, repentance and confession. But it has recently been brought to my attention that not all denominations agree with us on the importance of hearing in the process of the salvation of the sinner.

Through some discussions our younger brethren have had with peers and adults at school, as well as different writings, it seems that some believe that God and the Holy Spirit work directly on a sinner's heart, converting and saving him. This is an idea that we wish to study and challenge in this article.

We will begin by examining this argument (as well as I understand it), then in contrast build the argument for Hearing as the means by which faith (and ultimately salvation) comes. Next we will see how the Spirit works in the process of hearing and salvation. Then we will close by noting briefly that Hearing is vital after one is saved as well as before.

I want to be careful not to misrepresent anyone's beliefs. On the other hand, I want each one of you to be prepared to defend the faith against this doctrine if you encounter it. So please simply allow me to present their argument to the best of my understanding of it.

The argument seems to be that God and/or the Holy Spirit reveals the plan of God for salvation to a sinner directly. God has to reveal the knowledge of Jesus, and his saving power, because by our nature we are sinners. Here are a couple of scriptures they present as proof.

Rom. 3:10-11, "*As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.*" The result drawn from here is that if none are seeking after God, then the Spirit is seeking after them.

1 Cor. 2:14, “*But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*” The result drawn from here (as I understood it) is that the Spirit has to reveal salvation in order for a person to be saved and become spiritual so they can understand the things of the Spirit.

Now, the scriptures such as these that are presented are perfectly good scriptures. They are scripture. They are truth. It is the results drawn from these scriptures that are untrue. People are simply trying to put things into these verses that are just not there.

In fairness, I have not heard or read anyone deny the importance of a preacher or of hearing. But if the Holy Spirit reveals Jesus and His salvation to a sinner directly, hearing is naturally omitted.

So, let’s present now the argument for the importance of hearing in the salvation of a sinner. Then we can come back to these scriptures, and see how they truly fit in.

First we need to establish how very necessary faith is to be saved. Eph. 2:8, “*For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.*”

It is through hearing God’s word taught by men who are already Christians that a person receives faith.

Note the beauty and simplicity of this truth shown to us in Rom. 10:13-17, “*For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Calling on the name of the Lord is done in baptism - see Acts 22:16.) How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? (A natural, scriptural progression of thought.) And how shall they preach, except they be sent? As it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? (The result being -) So then **faith** cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”

We do not question the ability of the Holy Spirit. It is just that God’s plan is that Christian men teach sinful men the gospel, not that the Holy Spirit reveals it directly to sinners.

Matt. 28:18-19, “*And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*” Since Jesus has all power doesn’t it make sense to do things His way? And His will is that men hear the gospel from us. Why would we teach if people are not supposed to hear?

In John 6:45 Jesus says, “*It is written in the prophets, And they shall all be taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*”

1 Cor. 15:34, “*Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.*” This is your shame, not the Spirit’s.

2 Cor. 4:6-7, “*For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*” The gospel (the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ) is the treasure. We are the earthen vessels into which this treasure is entrusted.

And so we emphasize Rom. 10:17, “*So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*”

So how does the Spirit work in the process of hearing and salvation? The Spirit works through the preacher.

In the 8th chapter of Acts we have a Christian preacher, Philip. We have an Ethiopian eunuch, not yet a Christian, but interested in serving God. Note who the Spirit works through.

Acts 8:29-31, “*Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.*” From there Philip goes on to preach Jesus to him and convert him. The Eunuch believed, confessed his faith, and Philip baptized him. The point we want to note especially here is that the Spirit worked through the preacher, Philip. The Eunuch did not understand or believe, and was not saved from his sins until he heard.

Does this point contradict any scriptures? No, not at all. The Eunuch was lost in sin before he heard, so Rom. 3:10-11 is not contradicted. He didn't understand the things of the Spirit of God until he heard, so 1 Cor. 2:14 is not contradicted.

Let's develop this point a little further. Not only do we not have the word revealed by the Spirit without hearing. But we in fact do not receive the Spirit until after we hear, believe, and through faith are ultimately saved from our sins and become children of God.

We make this point by first connecting Gal. 3:26-27 with Gal. 4:6. Looking first at Gal. 3:26-27, *"For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ."* One of the blessings we then receive is the Spirit, Gal. 4:6, *"And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father."*

See, we become God's children through faith (which comes by hearing) and baptism. God then gives us His Spirit.

Eph. 1:12-13, *"That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. (That would be the apostles.) In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise"*.

Finally, brethren, don't stop hearing after becoming a Christian. God gave us two ears and only one mouth for a reason. Hearing is just as vital for Christians as it is for sinners.

Remember how Jesus sent preachers to teach and baptize sinners in Matt. 28:18-19? Teaching (and thus hearing) is also important after sinners are saved, as we see in Matt. 28:20, *"Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."*

James 1:19, *"Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath."*

Rev. 3:22, *"He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the Churches."*

Offered in the name of Jesus, Bro. Terry Warford

