

Listening to God: Why Is This Subject Important?

Introduction:

- I. The question of our title may seem unnecessary.
 - A. Surely, anyone who believes in God will understand why the subject of listening to Him is important.
 - B. However, the question emphasizes the fact that not everyone who claims to listen, really does listen.
- II. This series is about “Authority” — There’s a word you won’t find in common use in religion today.
 - A. That would be fine, if the concept were fairly foreign to God’s word, and His desires for His people.
 - B. As we are about to see, the concept of a need for authority runs deeply through every page of Scripture.
- III. Do people deny a need for “authority” in religion?
 - A. The answer is “yes,” and “no.”
 - B. Generally, people who see little need for authority in religion see a great need when they don’t like someone else’s practices.
 1. Why quote John 3:16, if it is not being used as an authoritative statement of who will be saved?
 2. Quoting scripture becomes an end to argument, even for those who claim they don’t believe one needs authority for ending arguments!
 - C. Personal preferences become a righteous call for God’s will on a matter (*illustr. – drums in the Christian Church*).
- IV. On the surface, people may not see a great need, but God’s word is the best judge of what God expects.

Body:

I. **Authority Never Seems To Be Important Until People Need It...**

- A. People have a tendency to want everything their own way.
 1. This presents a problem, as people are taking advantage of you by getting things their own way.
 - a. You expect to get a gallon of gas at the price of one gallon, but the owner wants to give you a half-gallon. We call upon government agencies to exercise authority, and regulate the industry.
 - b. You expect people to be authorized to travel in our country, but terrorists want to go wherever they please. We call upon the TSA to make sure everyone getting on the plane we board is safe.
 2. We don’t like it when people take advantage of us. In fact, we become downright angry about it, and it is then that we become lovers of “authority.”
- B. This presents a double standard, where people want to take advantage of God, but don’t look at it that way.
 1. We tend to think that our innovations in religion are better than God’s original ways.
 2. **Isa 55:8f** “*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’*”

II. **We Must Listen to God...**

- A. The word “listen” has two senses:
 1. That of audibly hearing something — **Gen 18:10** The Lord told Abraham, “*I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son.*” And Sarah was **listening** at the tent door, which was behind him.”
 2. That of obeying what is heard — **Gen 21:12** “*But God said to Abraham, ‘Do not be distressed because of the lad and your maid; whatever Sarah tells you, **listen** to her, for through Isaac your descendants shall be named.’*”
 3. In order for the word to be used of anyone, the first sense must first be true, for one cannot obey what they have not heard.
 4. The Lord doesn’t just want us to audibly hear, he wants us to obey.
- B. This was clearly laid before Israel of old:
 1. **Dt 6:3** “*O Israel, you should **listen** and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.*”
 2. **Dt 7:12** “*Then it shall come about, because you **listen** to these judgments and keep and do them, that the Lord your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers.*”
 3. **Dt 8:20** “*Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not **listen** to the voice of the Lord your God.*”
 4. **Dt 18:18f** Regarding the coming Messiah: “*I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. ¹⁹ And it shall come about that whoever will not **listen** to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.*”

- C. For us, this all becomes a point of importance in the New Testament:
1. **Heb 1:1** “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”
 2. Why did God speak through His Son? Was it just to give us general information?
 3. **Heb 2:1ff** “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, ³ **how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, ⁴ God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.”**
- D. That anyone reads their Bible, and knows what is in it, does not necessarily mean they are “listening” to God.
1. Listening in this sense refers to complying with, or yielding to the words presented.
 2. Surely everyone understands that they must “listen” to God by yielding to Him.

III. What Does God See in How We Listen?...

- A. Listening to God is only “difficult” when He tells us what we don’t want to hear. This current discussion is actually introducing what we will talk about in the next hour.
1. Doing it the hard way.
 - a. **Gen 1:16f** Not doing it should have been easier than doing it.
 - b. **Mt 25:14-30** Surely, it would have been easier to invest the money than bury it.
 2. God told Israel to go up and take the land. They were unbelieving, and the Lord rejected them. **Then** they “obeyed,” but it was too little, too late.
 - a. **Dt 1:41-43**
 - b. Obeying an **old** command that has been revoked, or abrogated, is not **listening, nor is it obedience**. Compare this to keeping the Old Testament law today.
 3. Is our service from the heart?
 - a. **Mal 2:1f** “‘And now, this commandment is for you, O priests. ² If you do not listen, and if you do not take it to heart to give honor to My name,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them already, because you are not **taking it to heart**.’”
 - b. Notice the progression in the Lord’s statement: Listen — take it to heart — give honor to His name.
 - c. Let’s keep in mind that we, as Christians, are priests unto our God (**I Pt 2:4f**).
 4. Is God treated as holy?
 - a. **Lev 10:1ff** No matter the sincerity or intention of Nadab and Abihu, their disobedience disrespected God.
 - b. We cannot set God apart as our creator while subjecting Him to the whims of the creature.
- B. Obeying what we don’t like, or when it doesn’t make sense to us, is the true test of listening to God.
1. Doing what God says is the true test of our **trust** in Him.
 2. Sadly, what He says doesn’t always make sense to the hearers, because they listen selfishly, or don’t like it.
 - a. **Ex 32:1-6** (incident of the golden calf at Sinai) The people could have argued that they didn’t forsake serving God, but they did turn it into what they preferred.
 - b. **Num 21:4-9** (v9 – “Then they set out from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; and the people became impatient because of the journey.”)
 - c. **II Sam 6** Why carry a heavy chest covered with gold, when you could put it on a cart drawn by oxen?
 3. It’s all a question of listening to, and trusting God, not our own “wisdom.”

Conclusion:

- I. If people who did not listen to the words of the law were severely punished, then how must greater will be our consequence when we do not listen to God’s own Son?
- II. Why is this subject important? — Because it is about our salvation.
 - A. It is about eternity.
 - B. It is about heaven and hell.
 - C. It is about our souls.
- III. Why is this subject important? — Because people oftentimes disobey while they believe themselves to be listening.