

Clarity Trumpet

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 3

LISTENING TO GOD

For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. — First Corinthians 14:8–9

The last verse of the Book of Judges gives the stark and sad commentary of the low, floundering spiritual state of Israel during that time of her history. It says, “*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes*” (21:25).

As I travel, speaking from place to place, it seems that churches and believers all over the world are doing what is “right in their own eyes.” While ignoring clear Bible principles, they seem to run the gamut from being stuck up to their ears in the quagmire of unbending tradition (“business as usual” with no attempt to relate effectively to the culture around them), to an obsession with “trendiness” (flip-flopping from one new fad to another, believing that being state-of-the-art is the ultimate tool to church growth and outreach).

Few are taking the time to seriously investigate Scripture’s guidelines for life and ministry. And if we push aside God’s Word in favor of the insights of our favorite spiritual or church growth gurus, we are not *listening* to God. *We’re not even giving Him the opportunity to be heard.*

There are some pretty serious and weighty statements in the Bible on the importance of listening to God, and of the far-reaching, devastating consequences of not listening. Please “listen” to the following from God.

Revelation, Chapters 2 and 3. In the second and third chapters of Revelation there are recorded seven letters to seven churches. Though the message to each church is different, there are marked similarities in each letter. For instance:

- Each letter addresses the church by name in this way: “*To the angel (messenger) of the church of...*” Ephesus (2:1), Smyrna (2:8), Pergamos (2:12), Thyatira (2:18), Sardis (3:1), Philadelphia 3:7), and Laodicea (3:14).
- The message to each church begins by identifying the Sender who, in each case, is the Lord Jesus Christ. The identification always starts with, “*These things says He who...*”
- Immediately upon identifying the Sender of the letters, each letter contains the statement, “*I know your works*” (2:2,9,13,19; and 3:1,8,15).
- Each letter then has a message that is appropriate to the particular church.
- Finally, each letter ends with this important admonition: “*He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches*” (2:7,11,17,29; and 3:6,13,22).

God knows what we do and why we do it, and He fully expects us to listen to His message to us. If the seven churches are indicative of the general condition of churches in every era, then we need to heed those messages today. See if you recognize yourself or your church/ministry in this list. If you do, will you *listen* to what God is telling you to do?

- To loveless Ephesus: *Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works*— 2:5.
- To persecuted, fearful Smyrna: *Be faithful to death*— 2:10.
- To compromising Pergamos: *Repent*— 2:16.
- To corrupt Thyatira: *Repent...Hold fast what you have till I come*— 2:25.

LISTENING TO GOD, Continued

- To spiritually dead Sardis: *Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain...hold fast and repent* – 3:2, 3.
- To faithful Philadelphia: *Hold fast what you have, that no one may take your Crown* – 3:11.
- To lukewarm Laodicea: *Be zealous and repent* – 3:19.

Five of these seven churches were told to repent – to reconsider, to think differently – concerning their actions, behavior and/or attitudes. The two who were not rebuked and told to repent were Smyrna, the church suffering severe persecution; and Philadelphia, about which nothing negative was revealed. In fact, the message to it was “you have kept My command to persevere” (3:10).

If God is still urging the majority of churches and Christians to repent, are we listening? Are we honestly examining our own lives and ministries to see if anything needs changing? Or are we, as so many, still on the treadmill of comparing ourselves to others and concluding that “we’re not so bad after all” – a very bad practice according to Second Corinthians 10:12.

Isaiah 66:1–4. After listing Israel’s sinful practices, God summarizes their problem and tells what He intends to do to remedy the situation. We pick it up in the middle of verse 3:

Just as they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations, so I will choose their delusions, and bring their fears on them; Because when I called, no one answered, when I spoke they did not hear; but they did evil before My eyes, and chose that in which I do not delight.

Did you catch the heart of their problem? “*When I spoke they did not hear*” – they were not listening! Their choice of that in which God did not delight was a direct result of refusing to hear – not listening.

Jeremiah 16:10–13. God said this to the prophet:

And it shall be, when you show this people all these words, and they say to you, “Why has the LORD pronounced all this great disaster against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God?” then you shall say to them, “Because your fathers have forsaken Me,” says the LORD; “they have walked after other gods and have served them and worshipped them, and have forsaken Me and not kept My law.”

Stop here a minute and consider what the Israelites might have been thinking at this point. It would have been quite human to react with, “Why should we suffer for what our fathers have done?” Now go on to verse twelve:

“And you have done worse than your fathers, for behold, each one walks according to the imagination of his own evil heart, so that no one listens to Me. Therefore I will cast you out of this land.”

What was the problem? “*No one listens to Me!*” Go back through the horrible list of what their fathers had done and let it sink in that God says *their failure to listen to Him was worse* than anything their fathers had done.

Are you listening? If you are God’s child and do not spend *daily* time in His Word to feed your soul, to gain instruction and wisdom, you are not listening to God either!

Proverbs 1:20–32 gives a vivid description of the people of God of that day not heeding (listening to) God’s warnings and admonitions. Beginning in verses 28 God says, to those who wouldn’t listen, “*Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently, but they will not find me....But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure without fear of evil*” (v. 33). How important, then, to be listening to God every day!

*What you act upon is what you really believe;
Everything else is just so much religious talk!*