

a community called ...

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HOW TO HEAR.

BY ADAM CLARKE, LL.D.

YOU will readily grant with me, that if the people do not hear in a proper spirit, the most eminent and faithful ministers may preach in vain. Let it ever be remembered that the great Bishop of souls, the Lord Jesus, who had every ministerial qualification in absolute perfection, preached the everlasting Gospel to many who were not profited by it; and that he departed from a certain place in which he could do no mighty works, because of the people's unbelief. Matt. xiii, 58. In this case it is manifest that the fault could not be

in the *preacher*, nor in the *matter* of his discourse, but in the *hearers* only. The grand business, therefore, of the people is, to inquire in the most serious manner how they are to hear so as to be saved.

1. Endeavor to get your minds deeply impressed with the value of the ministry of God's word. One of the most terrible judgments which God ever inflicted on the unfaithful Jews was hiding their preachers in a corner, and producing a famine of the bread of life. See Amos viii, 11-13.

2. If possible, get a few minutes for private prayer *before* you go to the house of God, that you may supplicate his throne for a blessing on your own soul and also on the congregation.

3. When you get to the church or chapel, consider it as the house of God, the dwelling-place of the Most High: that he is there to bless his people, and that you cannot please him better than by being willing to receive the abundant mercies which he is ready to communicate.

4. Mingle all your hearing with prayer. When the preacher mentions any of the threatenings of God's law, beg the Lord to avert them; when he mentions the promises, pray God instantly to fulfill them. When he describes what a Christian should be, determine to set out afresh; and let your heart immediately purpose, in the strength of God, to give up every evil way, and to follow Jesus.

5. Hear with faith. Receive the Scriptures as *the words of God*; and remember that you are not to come to the chapel to reason about them, but to credit them. God speaks, and his own authority gives absolute credibility to all that he says. Whatever he promises he is able and willing to perform; and if the blessing promised be requisite to you *now*, why now, this moment, is the time in which God is ready to give it; here nothing can hinder, nothing injure you, but your unbelief.

6. Receive the preacher as the ambassador of God, sent particularly to *you* with a message of salvation. Listen attentively to every part of the sermon; there is a portion for *you*

somewhere in it · hear *all*, and you are sure to discern what belongs to yourself.

7. Don't suppose that you know even all the outlines of the plan of salvation : there is a height, length, breadth, and depth in the things of God of which you have as yet but a very inadequate conception. Every sermon will be a means of discovering more and more of the wonders of God's grace to you if you hear it in a proper spirit.

8. Do not think that this or the other preacher cannot instruct *you*. He may be, comparatively speaking, a *weak* preacher ; but the meanest servant of God's sending will at all times be directed to bring something to the wisest and holiest Christians which they have not fully known or enjoyed before. You do not depend upon the man's abilities ; if he be a preacher of God's making, he is God's mouth ; and by him the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of unerring counsel, of infinite wisdom, and eternal love, will speak to you.

9. Never absent yourself from the house of God when you can possibly attend. Remem-

ber, it is God that invites you, not to hear this or the other man, but to hear *himself* through his messenger that you may be saved. Therefore, go to hear God speak; and let who will be the preacher, you shall never be disappointed.

10. Consider how great the blessing is which you enjoy. What would a damned soul give for the privilege of sitting five minutes in your place to hear *Jesus* preached, with the same possibility of being saved?

11. Don't divide the word with your neighbor; hear for yourself: share your clothes, money, bread, etc., with him, but don't divide the word preached; it belongs to you; it belongs to him; every man may have his part by himself, but no man can hear for another. It is your enemy who says to you, "That suits such and such persons." It suits *you* perhaps more than them: if they are present, let them take it to themselves; you are not your brother's keeper; if they are not present, you have no business with them.

12. Consider, this may be the last sermon

you shall ever be permitted to hear ! There fore, hear it as if it were your last ; and you will hear it then to your unspeakable profit. O hear for eternity at all times ; remember the eye of God is upon you !

13. Consider, your being *blessed* does not consist in your remembering heads, divisions, etc., but in feeling the divine influence ; having your eyes enlightened to see more of the worth of Christ, and the necessities of your own soul ; in having your heart invigorated with divine strength, and your soul more determined to follow on to know the Lord.

14. Don't despise or reject the ministry because it is not so excellent in every respect as you could wish. Be thankful that God gives it to you such as it is ; and remember, if he gave blessings according to *your deserts*, and according to your *improvement*, they would be such as would scarcely deserve to be sought for, or retained when found.

15. If you believe the preacher to be a holy man of God, don't find fault with him ; you may depend upon it he feels his soul at stake .

and while he is in that awful place, the pulpit, strives with all the sincerity of his heart to do that solemn work in the very best way he can, and to the uttermost of his power.

16. After the sermon is over, get as speedily home as you can, and spend a few moments on your knees in private, earnestly beseeching God to write indelibly on your heart what you have been hearing.

17. Meditate on what you have heard ; at first divine ideas may be but slightly impressed ; a little meditation often serves to deepen this impression ; therefore, do not immediately begin to talk with any of your friends and acquaintance ; the mind that was before collected in itself, to meditate on what was heard, becomes hereby distracted, and the fowls of the air pick up the good seed.

18. As your preachers have many trials peculiar to their work which you cannot *know*, and probably could not *bear*, were they laid upon you, take heed how you increase their load. Satan will harass them sufficiently ! O let not God's people join issue with the great

adversary, to distress the hearts of their teachers!

19. They have left *all* for your sakes, and for the sake of the Gospel; and if this *all* were only the anvil, the plow, the fishing-boat, or the carpenter's bench, it was their *all*, and the all they got their bread comfortably by; and he who has nothing but a net, and leaves that for the sake of doing good to the souls of men, leaves *his* ALL: and remember that, in becoming the servant of all for Christ's sake, he often exposes himself to the want of even a morsel of bread. Let the *proud* and the *profane* exult and say, "Such preachers cannot be much injured by their sacrifice of secular property; though they have left their *all*, that *all* was of little worth." Stop, friend, and take this maxim with you, that it may moderate your glorying that man forsakes *much* who reserves *nothing* to himself; and who renounces all expectations from this world, taking what *you* would not trust to God *alone*, for his *portion*. It is readily granted that the preacher is a poor man, and you are rich. But

did he not enter into the world with as good *prospects* as you had? and has not God furnished him with as much common sense, sound judgment, and other necessary *accomplishments* for *business*, as *you* have ever possessed? Had these been employed in *trade*, is there not a million to one he had been this day as rich as *you* are? And had God honored *you* with *his vocation*, and you had been as faithful and upright in it as he has been, would not you have been the *poor man* which to-day you *despise*? Think of this, and be humble.

20. Pray for your preachers, that God may fill them with the unction of his Spirit, and make them messengers of peace to you. While Aaron and Hur held up the hands of Moses, the Israelites prevailed over their enemies.

21. Before I conclude, shall I be permitted to add one thing more? Perhaps it may come better from one who has served you long, and who has never been chargeable or burdensome to that good cause for which he has labored;

and who has reason to believe, from his increasing infirmities, that he shall not long be permitted to be either a blessing or a burden to mankind. Then, I say, make your preachers comfortable. Men who have taken the other world for their inheritance will expect no more than the bare necessities of life in this. Let the stewards of every society examine the provision which is made for their preachers and families; let them consider the *time* in which it was fixed, the *depreciation* of money, and the enormous *advance* in every article of consumption; and by comparing the requisite expenditure of the family in question with that of their *own*, allowing for the descending or ascending proportions, let them determine on such a provision as their prudence and piety may dictate. From a pretty general acquaintance with the Methodists, I can confidently assert that wherever there is a deficiency of support for the preachers and their families it is where the societies are utterly ignorant of the matter; for, wherever such grievances are brought before them, they

are instantly redressed. There are very few preachers who will complain, let them suffer what they may : the societies commit the business into the hands of the stewards ; they should not wait for complaint or information from the preacher, but investigate every circumstance themselves. To such I say, and to all who are concerned with them, Never suffer through your neglect worldly cares to intrude themselves into the closet and hearts of the men who are laboring for your salvation. How can he preach comfort who is not comforted ? And how can he be comforted who has pressing wants in his family which he has no power to relieve ? Give his children bread, and the man of God will cheerfully lay down his life in his work ; and when he is gone to his God and your God, you will be enabled, without compunction of heart, to say, He who preached unto us JESUS, by whose ministry we were blessed, and to whose necessities we have had the privilege of contributing, is gone ! gone to live with God ; and we shall soon rejoin him, where the whole heavenly family

shall know each other in the light of their God. Even so Lord Jesus! Amen.

That we may all so *preach* and *hear* as to glorify God and be finally saved is the sincere prayer of your affectionate servant in the Gospel of Christ.

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No. 13