

INTRODUCTION

Have you heard the expression, “God gave you two ears and one mouth for a reason”? What does that statement attempt to communicate?

Tell about the most recent time you asked someone if he or she was listening to you or paying attention to what you were saying.

When was the most recent time someone asked that of you?

What happens when we fail to listen to what another person says to us?

It is not enough to hear God’s Word (James 1:19-27), we must hear it, understand it, and then put it into action, otherwise our spiritual lives will stall out and cease to grow. Similarly, listening is an essential element of apologetics. If we hope to live on mission for Christ, we must learn to listen, not only to God but to others around us.

UNDERSTANDING

When two pieces of iron are rubbed together, one shapes and sharpens the other. In the same way, interaction between people keeps us sharp. This principle operates in almost every area of life—business, intellectual, physical, and spiritual. In fact, the Hebrew literally says that one man sharpens the face of another; the benefit can even show up in their appearance!

READ [PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4](#)

How does this verse reflect the need for listening skills?

The second reason given to develop listening skills is because of what we know of human nature. How does your experience with human nature point out the need for listening skills?

If you have developed strategies or approaches to help you “intend to listen” when someone else is speaking, what are those?

Paul pointed to Christ’s love for others and His obedient service to God as examples for his Philippian friends. We are to live with an attitude of humility as we relate to others. With a healthy and balanced view of ourselves, we neither think too highly nor too little of ourselves. With that wholesome attitude, we can serve others in the church and point people outside the church to Christ effectively.

READ [ROMANS 7:14-23](#)

Based on this passage and Philippians 2:3-4, how does our sin nature interfere with our abilities to listen to others?

How is our struggle with sin actually an indication of spiritual growth?

Unfortunately, becoming a Christian doesn’t completely destroy the sin natures we were born

with. Through His death and resurrection, Jesus delivered us from the penalty and the power of sin, but not sin's presence. Until we get our glorified bodies in heaven, we won't be free from sin's presence. Being aware of sin is only the first step. We do not want to stay at awareness only. We must take actions to confess, to repent, and to limit circumstances that lead us to sin. In this way we can increase our availability to God and become ever more useful to Him.

The third reason given to develop listening skills is because of what we might be missing. Have you ever assumed you understood what was being asked or stated and responded before the other person finished—only to discover you had completely missed the point? What results in a situation like that?

APPLICATION

Following the instruction of Paul in [Philippians 2:3-4](#), how can you grow in humility and considering others more important than yourself so as to improve your listening skills?

Do you feel any tension between the need to be confident in what you believe while being called upon to exercise humility in faith discussions with unbelievers? If so, how can you reconcile those?

PRAYER

Patient Father, we confess that far too often we are more interested in determining what we want to say than in paying attention to what others are saying to us. Jesus put our needs above His own desires and went to the cross for us. Help us to put others' needs to be heard above our own desires to speak.

COMMENTARY

PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

2:3. After revealing the positive way for believers to behave toward one another, Paul gives negatives to avoid. Unity in love means selfish ambition and vain conceit have no place in the Christian life. Such characteristics rise from pride, not from love. Instead, humility is to characterize the Christian. We are not to exalt ourselves above others.

You are probably thinking that this is easier said than done. Yet, Jesus, himself, said: “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. All men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35). Biblical love is selfless. The opposite of this kind of love is selfishness. Humility does not mean putting ourselves down but rather lifting others up.

2:4. Looking out for our own interests comes naturally. We need, and receive, no instruction for that. We are instructed to look out for the interests of others. We are to keep an eye out to discover ways we can help others even when they do not see they need such help. The apostle stated in Galatians 6:2: “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

ROMANS 7:14-23

7:14-17. Paul begins his shift in emphasis from the past tense to the present tense in this verse. In this entire section (7:14-25), he says the same thing in several different ways (it is sin living in me, v. 17; “it is sin living in me,” v. 20; “the law of sin at work within my members,” v. 23). Like a prism, he splits a ray of truth into its component parts, allowing the whole to be seen in light of its parts. If Paul’s point in this section were to be summarized in one verse, Galatians 5:17 would likely be it: “For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want.” As we have already seen, the Spirit is absent from this discussion save for the reference in verse 6 where Paul contrasts the era of the written code with the new way of the Spirit. That conflict continues to be his theme in the remainder of Romans 7.

At the outset, it must be noted that, just as the debate was joined in 7:7-13 concerning the identity of the “I” in those verses, so the debate rages on here. The primary thorn in the flesh of interpreters is verse 14 itself, where Paul says he is unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. After all, was not the point of Romans 6 to say that the believers “used to be slaves to sin” but were now “slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6:17-18)? Verse 14, along with verses 18 and 24, make it difficult for many to believe that Paul is describing his experience as normative for the Christian life.

Some interpreters see Paul writing as a believer, but as an Old Testament, or pre-Pentecost, believer who does not have the benefit of the Holy Spirit’s presence and power. Still others reject the notion that Paul is writing from the perspective of spiritual regeneration; that 7:14-25 describes the experience of an unregenerate person.

Appealing once again to the plainness of Scripture, it is entirely credible to take Paul’s words at face value in describing his present Christian experience (and thus what is likely to be the experience of all believers). The key to understanding Paul’s perspective is the ability to hold in tension seemingly conflicting points of view in the present eschatological age in which we live. What is true positionally for the believer may not always be true practically in his or her experience. Seemingly, if we are no longer slaves to sin, we would never sin again; perfectionism would be achieved.

But in all the times when Paul chastised sinning believers such as the Corinthians and the Galatians, he never accused them of not being Christians. He called them weak, immature, childish—but not unregenerate. Paul understood the tension between positional truth and practical expression. Thus, in his own life, he could bemoan the intense realization of the pull of sin and its constant assault on the members of his body and its use of the law to provoke him to sin, while at the same time confess that “in my inner being, I delight in God’s law” (v. 22). No unbeliever delights in God’s law. According to

Paul, unbelievers view God's truth as foolishness, not a source of delight (1 Cor. 1:18-27; 2:14).

Consistent with Jewish thought, Christian eschatology recognizes that the present age is not the age to come; there is a difference between the two (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:21; 1 Tim. 4:8; Titus 2:12). One does not begin when the other ends; rather, they overlap. George E. Ladd's writings on the kingdom of God best illuminate the "tension" in which we now live (see, e.g., his *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1959, esp. ch. 2). The inclusion of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of Satan vis-a-vis the ministry of Jesus has created conflicting kingdoms for a period of time until the kingdom of God is consummated and fills the earth. It is the conflicting period of time that accounts for the tension between the desire to do right and the temptation to do wrong. We do not achieve on earth the perfection we will enjoy in heaven.

7:21-23. Here Paul uses the law motif to illustrate from another angle the conflict he experiences. Two laws are mentioned: the law of my mind (his desire to obey God's law), and the law of sin (that which wars against the law of his mind). He states a principle by which these two laws conflict with one another: when I want to do good, evil is right there with me. All of us can identify with the apostle's succinct summary of the spiritual experience.

Not only Paul, but all believers, have "left undone those things which we ought to have done." And as the Anglican confession rightly concludes ("there is no health in us"), Paul is about to explode with his own spiritual diagnosis.8:37-39; 1 Corinthians 15:57).