

CHAPTER TEN

A HEARING OF FAITH

—ἀκούω—

By the time he arrived at Chapter 4 in Hebrews, the Apostle Paul made an interesting point. Appropriating the people of Israel as his example, he combined two very important concepts. First, he used the verb “evangelize” (εὐαγγελίζω). Then to that he added the verb “hearing” (ἀκούω), the noun “hearing” (ἡ ἀκοῆς), and the noun “with faith” (ὁ πίστις):

For indeed we were evangelized [εὐαγγελίζω], just as they; but the word of their hearing [ἡ ἀκοῆς] did not profit them, not being mixed with faith [ὁ πίστις] in those who heard [ἀκούω] (Hebrews 4:2, translation mine).

The order can be considered as follows:

They were evangelized

Their hearing was unprofitable

Their hearing was not mixed with faith in those who heard.

The subject of the last phrase is “the hearing” of the middle phrase. Hence, there is something important about “the hearing.”

While evangelizing and believing (faith) are individually very important concepts, this chapter explores components that link these two together, the principle of *hearing*. *Hearing* is closely linked to the concept of evangelizing. In fact, the absolute necessity of *hearing* the gospel is the focal point of Evangelicalism. People need to “hear” prior to their responding to the gospel. So also, there is the proper type of *hearing*. This *hearing* stands independently of the efforts, effectiveness, and persuasiveness of the proclaimer. There is a spiritual quality in the *hearing* that transcends mere natural *hearing*. Hebrews 4 combined and

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explained the order and importance of each of these components: evangelizing, hearing, and faith.

Six deductions may be derived from the “Us-Them” comparison-contrast of the author of Hebrews:

1. Evangelized (εὐαγγελίζω)—the same method of communication was made to two groups, “We” and “They”:
 - a. In other words, the evangelist evangelized wielding the same introduction, content, conclusion, and call to commitment.
 - b. The human side of the communication was identical.
2. The word (ὁ λόγος)—the identical message was communicated to both groups:
 - a. There was no variance in the verbal, cognitive, or emotive elements of the message.
 - b. They both heard identical words with similar analogies and emphases.
3. Of their hearing (ἡ ἀκοῆς)—both groups did in fact have an adequate hearing of the message—“in those who heard”:
 - a. It was not a partial or incomplete hearing for either group.
4. Hearing (ἀκούω)—the author described two separate means of hearing (or ingesting the message)—unprofitable and profitable:
 - a. There were two (and only two) ways listed of absorbing the properly and fully communicated message into their minds and souls.
5. Profit (ὠφελέω)—two opposite results sprung up from how the message was heard—unprofitable and profitable:
 - a. The passage later explained that the product of the unprofitable hearing was not entering the promised rest.
 - b. The outcome of a profitable hearing was entering that rest.

6. Blending (συγκεράννυμι)—the author clearly defined the distinction involved:
 - a. The need for a proper mixing of both hearing (ἀκούω) and faith (ἡ πίστις).

Here is a restatement of this important verse:

For indeed we were evangelized, just as they; but the word of their hearing did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard (Hebrews 4:2, translation mine).

The Apostle Paul addressed a parallel principle in Romans, reversing the order of “hearing” and “faith.”

So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

From the standpoint of Romans, Paul explained that *hearing* must precede faith. He explained that faith emanates from or flows from *hearing*. Thus, faith (or believing) finds its origin in a prerequisite *hearing*. God has so constructed His divine plan of salvation that He uses the *hearing* of the word of God as the trigger for faith to be quickened in the heart of man.

These verses highlight two different aspects related to the origination of faith. In Romans 10, Paul underlined that faith detonates in the human soul through the literal hearing of the words of God. In Hebrews 4, Paul emphasized that a profitable hearing occurs only when faith already exists within the person—blending the hearing with the faith that is already there. So then, there seems to be two sides of the same coin. As far as the principle of believing the message of salvation, faith and hearing are simultaneous ideas. Faith and a hearing of faith are both dependent upon hearing.

In Hebrews 4, Paul focused on the co-mingling of faith and hearing that takes place during the hearing. This mixture blends into a profitable result within the hearer. In the context of Romans 10, Paul addressed the absolute necessity of a person to hear in order to respond with faith. The issue at stake lies between a carnal hearing and a spiritual hearing. In a carnal hearing, the ear is deaf to spiritual truth. In a spiritual hearing, the ear is awake to spiritual truth.

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As to the reality that all men do not believe equally upon hearing the gospel, Paul quoted Isaiah 53:1 in Romans 10:16 (one verse prior to the verse cited above):

But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our report?" (Romans 10:16).

Reminiscent of God explaining to Isaiah, "Keep on hearing, but do not understand" (Isaiah 6:9), Isaiah in Chapter 53 used a universal interrogative, "who?" Paul interpreted Isaiah's question, providing him an answer:

Isaiah: Who has believed our report?

Paul: Not all have obeyed the gospel.

In classic understatement Paul responded, "not all," to Isaiah's query. "Not all" who hear the gospel will obey it. The differentiation between the "wide road" and "narrow road" as explained by Jesus becomes apparent in evangelism.

Even the verb "obey" in the phrase "they have not all obeyed the gospel" is a contraction from the verb "to hear" (ἀκούω). In the case of "obey" in Romans 10:16, the verb ὑπακούω literally means "harken, listen to, yield to, surrender to, obey." It combines the preposition for "under" (ὑπὸ) with our theme verb for this chapter (ἀκούω). The resulting combination (ὑπὸ + ἀκούω) corresponds to "coming under the authority of what is heard." So, not everyone who hears the gospel will respond positively to it by obeying its mandates to repent and believe.

Nevertheless, the New Testament confirms the importance of a proper "hearing" to lead to a positive response to the gospel. The theme verb for this chapter, ἀκούω ("hearing") and its cognates, are used 466 times in the New Testament—a nice-sized pool of uses from which to make firm conclusions as to the meaning of the verb. This chapter will unpack the concept of "hearing" in the Bible, showing its necessity in the work of the gospel.

The Need to Hear

Paul brought out the need “to hear” the gospel in his classic sequence of rhetorical questions in Romans 10:14-15:

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard [ἀκούω]? And how are they to hear [ἀκούω] without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news [εὐαγγελίζω]!” (Romans 10:14-15 ESV).

Here Paul used an inverted chronology of the evangelizing process by starting with the beginning of salvation, “calling on Christ,” and working his way back to the preacher being sent out. In this reverse chronology, we find these points being made by Paul:

- Sending out precedes preaching
- Preaching results in hearing
- Hearing results in the heart believing
- Believing leads to the voice calling out.

It must be noted that the word “preacher” in verse 14 comes from the verb “to preach” (κηρύσσω) in a participle form, clearly translated in the ESV, “And how are they to hear without someone preaching?” The difference lies in the meaning of the text. Verse 14 does not focus on the person preaching, the preacher, but rather the verb or the act of preaching.

However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is important to note the pivotal importance of the verb in the middle of this sequence—*hearing* (ἀκούω). After a person is sent out to preach, and after the preaching is done, then there is a certain kind of “hearing” that must take place for the word to be planted, received, and bear fruit in a person’s soul. In this sequence by Paul, the proper response is flagged by the word “believe.” Believing is then followed by a verbal calling out to the Lord for salvation. The Scripture that initiated Paul’s series of rhetorical questions was from Joel 2:32, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.”

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The main ministry of those who are called to obey the Great Commission is to cause people to hear the gospel that they may have the opportunity to “call upon the name of the Lord to be saved.” It all begins with the necessity of hearing to believe and obey the gospel. A pivotal tenet of evangelism is the necessity of verbally “hearing” the gospel.

Hearing in John

The idea of hearing and believing is found sprinkled throughout the four gospels. In the Book of John, a classic verse on hearing and believing is found in John 5:24:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears [ἀκούω] my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24 ESV).

In this verse, Jesus combined the circumstance of a person hearing His word and simultaneously believing. Once these two conditions had been met, then he was to receive “eternal life.” Building from John 1:11-13, the condition of receiving and believing could not be met by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but only by God Himself. Therefore, in the supernatural interaction described in John 5:24, while an evangelist is necessary for someone to hear the gospel, only God can give a “hearing with believing,” and only God can give “eternal life.” Of necessity, for God to act, the only condition to be met is the necessary “hearing” of the word of God!

And yet John 5:24 does not stand alone as far as hearing. In John 1, the disciples of John the Baptist hear Jesus and they immediately follow Him (John 1:37, 40). In John 4:42, we have the astonishing statement of the people of Sychar:

Then they said to the woman, “Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard [ἀκούω] Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

This verse also combines hearing (ἀκούω) and believing, along with a testimony of Jesus as the Christ. In verse 39 the townspeople believed “because of the word of the woman.” Then in verse 42 they believed because of His words. Later Jesus drew a line in the

sand. The line of salvation depended upon a proper hearing of His words, both positively, as well as negatively:

“It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Therefore everyone who has heard [ἀκούω] and learned from the Father comes to Me” (John 6:45).

“He who is of God hears [ἀκούω] God’s words; therefore you do not hear [οὐ + ἀκούω], because you are not of God” (John 8:47).

There is much more in John about a proper hearing. For example, consider Jesus’ teaching on being the good shepherd in John 10:

- *The sheep hear his voice (v. 3)*
- *And the sheep follow him, for they know his voice (v. 4)*
- *All who ever came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them (v. 8).*

Likewise, just prior to His death, Jesus said to Pilate, “Everyone who is of the truth hears [ἀκούω] My voice” (John 18:37).

Several Case Studies in John

John’s gospel is filled with interesting examples of understanding and misunderstanding. The following are several case studies to whet the reader’s appetite. These case studies portray the centrality of a proper hearing, as well as diversity in hearing.

Nicodemus in John 3

When Jesus mentioned the unalterable necessity of being born again to enter the kingdom of God, Nicodemus answered with two somewhat sarcastic questions:

Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” (John 3:4 ESV).

Through these questions and one found in verse 9, “How can these things be?” Nicodemus showed that he had a carnal hearing. Yet if we continue to read the Gospel of John, we find Nicodemus joining Joseph of Arimathea in removing the body of Jesus from the cross

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(John 19:38-42). His original carnal hearing was transformed into a spiritual hearing.

The Woman at the Well in John 4

The Samaritan woman that Jesus met at the well of Sychar asked Him several questions which displayed that she did not have spiritual comprehension at first:

The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"
(John 4:11 ESV).

In the course of the conversation, this woman who at first did not have a spiritual understanding of "living water" was granted a spiritual understanding. Many in her city believed in Jesus because of the word that she surmised, "Can this be the Christ?" (John 4:29 ESV).

The Crowds in John 6

The crowds in John 6 wanted to use force to make Jesus their king. Jesus, wise to their superficial delight from receiving a free meal from Him, departed from them. They displayed their lack of a "hearing of faith" in their response to Jesus:

Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat'" (John 6:28-31 ESV).

In this very sad interchange, Jesus urged the crowd to "believe in Him." They, however, having hardened and blinded hearts, only wanted more food as a sign—even after He had just fed them—5,000 people—the day before. The ongoing blindness of this crowd was proven at the end of Chapter 6, when all of them departed from Jesus, save the twelve apostles. Peter spoke for the twelve when Jesus asked them, "Do you also want to go away?"

But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and

know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”
(John 6:68-69).

Peter and the other disciples had a “hearing of faith.” Although Jesus qualified His statement with regard to Judas saying, “one of you is a devil” (John 6:70). Even among the twelve there was diversity in hearing. On another sad note, none of those who experienced the miracle of Jesus received a hearing of faith through the miracle. One hundred percent—5,000 out of 5,000—of those who fed their stomachs with the bread and fish turned from Jesus. None of them responded in faith by Jesus’ obvious miracle. Likewise today, even miracles cannot open the heart and bring the greater miracle of a hearing of faith.

It is the words of Christ that are powerful unto salvation. It is these same words that are powerful unto rejection and persecution. These case studies from John show the complexity of a hearing of faith. In the case of Nicodemus and the Woman at the Well, both started with a carnal hearing, but were granted a spiritual hearing during or after their conversations with Jesus. On the other hand, the crowd in John 6, although they had seen miracles of Jesus were not granted a hearing of faith. Just as “hearing” [ἀκούω] is important in the Book of John, so it is also important in the other Gospels.

Hearing in the Other Gospels

The principle of hearing is taught and exemplified in the other Gospels as well. Jesus taught the absolute necessity of hearing to believe. He also affirmed that there were variations in hearing. In His Parable of the Sower, Jesus considered four distinct ways of hearing. We begin by looking at the need to hear in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

Four Opportunities to Hear

In the Parable of the Sower, there is one condition that is met by all four soils. Prior to displaying their distinctive features, all four of the soils had the same opportunity to “hear”:

“All who hear [ἀκούω] the word of [God’s] kingdom...”
(Matthew 13:19, translation mine).

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“Is he who hears [ἀκούω] the word and...” (Matthew 13:20, 22, 23).

All four soils heard, and all four soils heard the same message—that is, the word.

This same Parable with a similar emphasis is also recorded in Mark 4 and Luke 8. In these and other places Jesus further accentuated the theme of “hearing” in a declaration repeated eight times:

“He who has ears to hear [ἀκούω] let him hear [ἀκούω]” (Matthew 11:15; 13:9, 43; Mark 4:9, 23; 7:16; Luke 8:8; 14:35, translation mine).

For emphasis, Jesus employed a double use of the verb “to hear” (ἀκούω): “to hear” + “hear!” Therefore, “He who has ears to hear let him hear” (Ὁ ἔχων ὦτα ἀκούειν ἀκουέτω). In Mark, then, Jesus added a warning to this declaration:

Then He said to them, “Take heed what you hear [ἀκούω]. With the same measure you use, it will be measured to you; and to you who hear [ἀκούω], more will be given” (Mark 4:24).

In this context, the treasure gifted by God consists not of material things, but of verbal things. This statement runs parallel with the teaching in the Psalms and Proverbs that the word of God values far more than silver or gold. Mark ends his Chapter 4 with the winds and the waves “harkening” unto Jesus’ words:

And they feared exceedingly, and said to one another, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey [ὕπακούω] Him!” (Mark 4:41).

The word “obey” is literally “to listen with attention” or “to submit,” hence to obey.

Considering the Prominence of a Carnal Hearing

In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus built on His theme of “having ears to hear.” He differentiated the miracle of hearing with understanding with that of hearing without understanding. In an interlude spoken only to His disciples (Matthew 13:10-17; cf. Mark 4; Luke 8), Jesus explained a two-tier hearing: a hearing

with understanding and a hearing without understanding. The point of Jesus was this: not everyone had or has a hearing with understanding. To affirm this point Jesus cited Isaiah 6:9-10:

And he [the Lord] said, "Go, and say to this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; keep on seeing, but do not perceive.' Make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isaiah 6:9-10 ESV).

God sent out His prophet Isaiah to His own people—that is, to the circumcised people of Israel—preparing Isaiah that they would hear His message but not comprehend it. They would see but would not perceive. Lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent to be saved. God did not give Isaiah the positive side of hearing, only the negative—the positive must be deduced as the opposite of the negative. The circumcised people of Israel would not be receptive to God's message through Isaiah. Jesus applied this Old Covenant commissioning of the Prophet Isaiah to the New Covenant evangelist spreading the word of the gospel. The general population would be like the circumcised people of Israel in the time of Isaiah. They would hear but not understand (cf. Matthew 7:13-14).

Isaiah responded, "How long? O Lord" (Isaiah 6:11). Jesus answered this question in the Parable of the Sower. As the gospel of the rule (kingdom) of God over individual hearts was to go forth, only a small percentage would respond positively with a hearing of faith, repentance, and belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. God answered Isaiah's question, the one Man—Jesus—was the coming Root of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1, 10). This Jesus would be the Savior of His remnant, His tenth, His terebinth, His portion, His holy seed (Isaiah 6:13).

The general population will always remain without understanding. Likewise, God gifts only a predetermined percentage from every tribe, tongue, and nation with a hearing of faith. This mysterious design of God has caused consternation among the people of God for centuries. Furthermore, Satan has

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used this principle to further his schemes of “dividing brothers” (Proverbs 6:19). Yet, even with this discord, God’s purposes are being perfectly accomplished—nothing happens outside His sovereign will! And the Parable of the Sower teaches how God sovereignly designates four kinds of hearing among the peoples of the world.

Types of Hearing

There are four receptions of the gospel foretold in the Parable of the Sower. First, there is the wide road with no understanding. Jesus said that the Wicked One snatches the seed out of the heart before it is sown (Matthew 13:19). Is this not the spiritual battle displayed when the word of the gospel goes forth? Evangelism attracts the birds of the air to come. Satan himself lurks about to snatch the seed from a person’s heart before it can take root. Is this not the carnal or natural hearing?

The last reception Jesus mentioned is the “good soil.” This soil represents a person who hears the word, understands it, and bears fruit. Here we find a picture of the profitable or spiritual hearing as described in Galatians 3:2 and 5 (considered below). Theirs was the “hearing of faith.” This hearing represents the good soil.

There is another type of hearing taught in the Parable of the Sower, someone who hears and then turns back. The shallow soil, we are told in Matthew, “hears the word and immediately receives it with joy” (Matthew 13:20 ESV). This representative group of people produce no root. **The location of their deficiency is within themselves.** They have the same opportunities as the other soils: same message and same messenger. Yet, tribulation and persecution drive them to denounce the same word that originally brought them joy.

The weed-infested soil is the third soil. This group of people receives the word, but never bears fruit. They have beautiful stalks and leaves, but they bring no fruit to maturity. Theirs is also a deficiency in hearing with faith.

What can be learned from these soils? There are a variety of responses to the hearing of the gospel. It is not the evangelist’s fault if seed does not fall on good soil. Not everyone is good soil.

The wise evangelist will test the soil to discern its receptivity (soils 2-4) or its unreceptivity (soil 1). If it is receptive, he should share the gospel and bring them to as immediate a response as possible. It will take time for the qualities of soils 2-4 to differentiate.

Strong opposition comes to the Christian who holds to the absolute necessity for hearing prior to believing. Although it is clearly taught by Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, other forms of sharing the gospel and responding to it have been formulated. These comments may prepare the evangelist for pushback against the doctrine of “Hearing Alone.”

Pushback to Hearing Alone

There exists significant pushback against the doctrine of “Hearing Alone” on three levels:

1. On the absolute need to hear the gospel to respond
2. On the prominence of a carnal hearing
3. On the reality of a differentiated or segmented hearing.

These points have been addressed above. The issue of “hearing” is under attack in other ways. As sometimes happens, pragmatics can trump doctrine. New methodologies are developed which are considered “effective.” Being “wise as a serpent” (Matthew 10:16) encourages the Christian to examine everything:

But test everything; hold fast what is good
(1 Thessalonians 5:21 ESV).

Once something is found to be “good,” then we can firmly cling to it. Four methodologies have diminished the absolute necessity of “hearing” and responding to what is heard to be saved.

Evangelism by Exemplary Lifestyle Alone

Contemporary culture asks the question: Is there not some other way for a person to be saved other than hearing and believing? The answer to this rhetorical question, to which many contemporaries may desire an affirmative answer, is, “No!” There is no other way. Paul’s propositional statement has no wiggle

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room, “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

While seeking to live an exemplary life is quite laudable, it cannot communicate man’s total depravity and the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation. Jesus Himself, who lived a perfect and sinless life, was poorly received in His hometown. Mark 6 recounts that after hearing (ἀκούω) Jesus, those in Nazareth were astonished, offended, and unbelieving (Mark 6:2, 3, 6). If Jesus’ perfect lifestyle did not open the hearts of those who knew Him best, surely we cannot be “greater than our Master”? (John 15:20).

In fact, even the miracles of Jesus did not tenderize people’s hearts to His message. Consider this interesting interchange in John:

“I and the Father are one.” The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God” (John 10:30-33 ESV).

So, here in John 10, their opposition to the words of Jesus was so strong that they were ready to kill Him, even after He raised Lazarus from the dead. It was not the miracles of Jesus that opened their hearts, rather His words and teachings resulted in the Jews hating Him!

Salvation Merely by Good Works

A number of scenarios may be presented to prove that it is not necessary to limit ourselves to the Pauline “hearing and believing.” Posited conceptions include:

- Those who have responded to the Light through general revelation planted in their hearts by God
- Those who have dreams about God, Christ, or a messenger of Christ coming to them
- Those who have responded to crumbs of “truth” about God from within their false religions
- Those who have never heard the gospel.

Those never having the opportunity to hear the gospel cannot be condemned to an eternal hell, can they? The answer to this question cast the Apostle Paul on a lifelong journey of evangelism. It is laudable and necessary to desire that as many people as possible be saved. But the answer to this dilemma lies not in changing one's doctrinal convictions, but in changing one's practice to conform to the biblical pattern. When the biblical boundaries of hearing and believing are lost, total depravity and total inability are likewise jettisoned—and with them every other major doctrine of biblical Christianity.

State Religion

A third reason for significant pushback comes with the notion that a human governmental system should preside over the conscience of man. To optimize such an arrangement, a number of doctrines must be tweaked. Foremost among these is forecasting a general or universal salvation. Jesus' teachings about the many and the few became an overstatement by the Master:

“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

For state religion, these words of Jesus must be reversed: “Enter by the wide gate,” says the state-church, “for the gate is narrow that leads to destruction, and there are only a few who go by it.” Everyone born in a country where there is a government-monopoly state-church is expected to “hear and understand” the gospel. The “few” become those who do not submit to the state-church interrelationship for one reason or another. These “few” are the problem people needing to be silenced into submission to the majority religion.

Infant Baptism

Closely on the heels of a state-church arrangement is the need for a mechanism to enter every citizen into a relationship with the church. For this to take place, another doctrine of Jesus must be tweaked—the doctrine that blood, the will of man, and the will of

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the flesh have no part in man's spiritual "new birth." This threefold denial of human intermediacy in genuine conversion must be reshuffled to allow man to be the authorizing agent in salvation:

He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God (John 1:11-13).

Whereas the Gospel of John clearly states that God's children are born "not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man," a state-run church necessitates human leverage in the conversion process. Government-approved personnel (priests or pastors) must be deeded with the human authority to make a divine third-party decision on behalf of the spiritual rebirth of others. Enter infant baptism. The following is Article 27 of the 1572 Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England related to baptism (with modernized spelling):

XXVII. Of Baptism.

Baptism is not only a sign of profession, and mark of difference, whereby Christian men are discerned from others that be not christened: but it is also a sign of regeneration or new birth, whereby, as by an instrument, they that receive baptism rightly, are grafted into the Church: the promises of the forgiveness of sin, and of our adoption to be the sons of God, by the holy ghost, are visibly signed and sealed: faith is confirmed: and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

The baptism of young children, is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the institution of Christ.

The reader will note, that for this Protestant church, infant baptism retained some of the Sacramental notions that had evolved within Roman Catholicism. They emphasized human priests and pastors initiating babies into the church by baptism, while offering these babies all the doctrines associated with conversion and justification in the New Testament. These novel notions of third-party baptism developed from the state-church partnership going back to Constantine the Great (fourth century A.D.).

Meanwhile, the biblical verbs related to the Great Commission have received minimal attention in Early Church creeds, Medieval Councils, and Confessions of Faith. The pushback against solely “hearing and believing” for salvation is longstanding and deeply entrenched. Fortunately, Luther revived the need to hear with “Scriptures alone.” Yet the pre-Reformation theology has influenced textbooks in systematics, Greek Lexicography, Bible translation, and even original language texts. Amazingly, it was not until the late nineteenth century that Acts 8:37 (exemplifying a verbal response prior to receiving baptism) was removed from “critical edition” Greek texts. Meanwhile, salvation has not changed one iota, “faith still comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”

Hearing in the Book of Acts

Acts is a book about making the word of God heard and responses to this word as it is heralded. In a narrative section at the end of the first sermon of Peter in Acts 2 Luke used three verbs:

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”
(Acts 2:37 ESV).

Here are the three verbs:

- Hearing (ἀκούω)
- Being cut (κατανύσσω) to the heart
- Saying (λέγω), “Brothers, what shall we do?”

Upon hearing, the two-edged sword did its work, and some of the listeners were “cut to the heart.” Further, they initiated the follow-up question related to receiving salvation, “Men and brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter followed up with his first piece of advice for those who in all ages are cut to the heart by the word of God:

And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone

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whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2:38-39 ESV).

And it was all initiated through the preaching of Peter being “heard” (ἀκούω).

Luke used another set of verbs to describe the response of the crowd after they heard the sermon of Stephen in Acts 7:

- Hearing (ἀκούω)
- Being cut (διαπρίω) to the heart
- Gnashing (βρύχω) their teeth at him (Acts 7:54).

It is clear that “hearing” does not always elicit the same response!

The focal point of the 93 New Testament uses of the verb “to hear” and its cognates in Acts is found in Acts 15:7-11. “Hearing” (ἀκούω) appears only once in this passage. But like Romans 10 and Hebrews 4, “hearing” was the spark that burned salvation within the hearts of the Gentile hearers in the home of Cornelius:

And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:7-11 ESV).

In this passage, we find numerous doctrines important to the Protestant Reformation, a passage to which Luther and Calvin were drawn because of Paul’s words in Galatians 1:8-9. The doctrines enclosed in Acts 15 are:

- A Necessary Evangelist: “God made a choice among you, that by my mouth”
- By Hearing Alone: “the Gentiles should hear [ἀκούω]”
- By Scriptures Alone: “the word of the gospel”
- By Faith Alone upon Hearing the Word of the Gospel: “and believe”

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- The Seal of the Holy Spirit: “And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us”
- The Cleansing of Hearts in True Salvation: “and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts”
- Purification by Faith Alone: “by faith”
- Salvation Not by Works: “Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?”
- By Grace Alone through Christ Alone: “*But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as [in the same manner as] they will*” (Acts 15:7-11 ESV).

It is amazing to see such a wonderful salvation accomplished for men and so clearly laid forth. A similar outlining can be applied to Romans 3:19-26 to great effect.

The sequence of salvation is initiated when the God-appointed evangelist opens his mouth and begins to verbally declare the word of the gospel. And once the evangelist speaks God’s words, then—just like pulling the trigger of a machine gun—it leads to a divinely ordered series of sequential actions. The Book of Acts exposes numerous such salvific series of actions. For example, in Acts 18 we find another sequence of verbs painting God’s method of salvation:

When Silas and Timothy had come from Macedonia, Paul was compelled by the Spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus is the Christ. ... Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were baptized (Acts 18:5, 8).

Consider these verbs:

- Compelled (συνέχω)
- Testified (διαμαρτύρομαι)
- Hearing (ἀκούω)
- Believed (πιστεύω)

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- Were baptized (βαπτίζω).

After Paul had reasoned in the synagogue, and having persuaded both Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4), then Silas and Timothy came. This arrival spurred the series of verbs above, used by Luke to canonize Paul's ministry methodology. He was (1) compelled by the Spirit, he then (2) testified about Jesus, this allowed that (3) many of the Corinthians heard, and as it turned out, (4) many of them believed, who were thereupon also (5) water baptized.

Central in these five verbs is the verb "to hear" (ἀκούω). Hearing is the glue between evangelizing and believing. And as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, there are two kinds of hearing, one that does not profit, and one that is mixed with faith. In order to develop this idea, let us consider hearing in Paul.

Hearing in Paul's Writings

Whereas Paul argued for the essential nature of hearing in Romans 10, in other contexts, Paul discussed different types of hearing. There is a type of hearing that does not profit the hearer, this can be called a "carnal" or "fleshly hearing." It is hearing that does not comprehend the spiritual dimensions of what is being said. Much like the early hearing of Nicodemus or the Woman at the Well, while Jesus was making spiritual application, His hearers heard in a carnal sense.

Paul differentiated between a carnal hearing and a hearing of faith in Galatians 3. He spoke of a carnal hearing as related to seeking to obey the letter of the Law. And he spoke of a hearing of faith as providing justification apart from the Law. In Galatians 3:1-5 Paul asked the Galatian Christians at least six rhetorical questions. In so doing, he was challenging the Galatian church to contemplate the core cause of their salvation. The fount of their salvation sprang from "a hearing with faith."

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey [believe] the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? Have you

*suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?
Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles
among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the
hearing of faith?—just as Abraham “believed God, and it was
accounted to him for righteousness” (Galatians 3:1-6).*

By the way, what did Abraham believe as recorded in Genesis 15:6? He believed the word of the Lord: “And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: ‘This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir’” (Genesis 15:4 ESV). When he heard (ἀκούω) that “word of the LORD,” then Moses wrote, “And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6 ESV).

So, in Galatians 3, Paul was juxtaposing “a hearing of faith” with “the works of the Law.” In Hebrews 4:2 was juxtaposed “a hearing mixed with faith” and “a hearing that did not profit them.” In 1 Corinthians 1:18 Paul described the message of the cross as “foolishness to those who are perishing,” but as the power of God “to us who are being saved.” In 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, Paul described the gospel as “the aroma of death” to those who are perishing, but “the aroma of life” to those who are being saved. Oh, the unfathomable designs of God’s mercy and grace. Everything He does is right, and all His works shall praise Him.

Other Verbs Directly Related to Hearing (ἀκούω)

The Bible uses several other verbs with the stem “to hear” (ἀκούω). Each of these verbs fills in the doctrinal and methodological importance of hearing.

Refusing to Listen (παρακούω)

An interesting Greek word found in the New Testament several times uses the root word for “to hear” (ἀκούω). The preposition παρά (meaning beside, toward, or against) is added to the beginning of the word—which alters its meaning. The verb, “to refuse to listen” (παρακούω) is found twice in the New Testament related to seeking to restore a brother living in sin:

*If he refuses to listen [παρακούω] to them, tell it to the church.
And if he refuses to listen [παρακούω] even to the church, let him*

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be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector”
(Matthew 18:17 ESV).

Though not used in the context of evangelizing, it is used in the difficult context of seeking to restore a brother. Likewise, sometimes people refuse to listen to the gospel.

Listening Attentively (ἐπακούω and εἰσακούω)

It also happens in witness that certain persons listen attentively. Sometimes prepositions added to the root “to hear” (ἀκούω) intensify its meaning. Two of these are: ἐπακούω and εἰσακούω. The word εἰσακούω is used five times in the New Testament, four times in the context of God hearing prayer and once where man does not listen to God. This last example is found in 1 Corinthians 14:

In the Law it is written, “By people of strange tongues and by the lips of foreigners will I speak to this people, and even then they will not listen [οὐδέ + εἰσακούω] to me, says the Lord”
(1 Corinthians 14:21 ESV, citing Isaiah 28:11-12).

God was said to have listened attentively to men praying, “Zacharias, your prayer has been heard [εἰσακούω]” (Luke 1:13). Yet, as Isaiah noted, God’s own people didn’t have the same regard to listen to Him as He did listening to them!

But even more stunning, God especially hears us as we call on Him for salvation:

For he says, “In a favorable time I listened [ἐπακούω] to you, and in a day of salvation I have helped you.” Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation
(2 Corinthians 6:2 ESV, citing Isaiah 49:8).

It appears from these verses, as God’s evangelists are faithful in giving the gospel call to all men, God has chosen the perfect time (καιρῷ δεκτῷ) for that gospel call to be sown into the hearts of the elect—“whom we know not except by the event” (paraphrasing John Owen). God Himself inclines His ear from heaven, waiting for His own to respond to that gospel call, so that He can save in the day of salvation.

Hearing to Obey (ὑπακούω)

The verb meaning “harken,” “listen to obey,” or “hearing to obey” is the Greek verb ὑπακούω. In an unusual way, this verb bridges the gap between a “hearing of faith” and obedience. Often the order of salvation is that we are saved by obeying. However, built into this verb is the need to hear first, to hear attentively, and to obey that which is said.

The word is derived from combining “to hear” (ἀκούω) with the preposition for “under” (ὑπό). The implication is as follows: a hearing with understanding is confirmed by obeying what is said. Therefore a “hearing of faith” precedes “obedience of faith.”

It is used of inanimate objects, such as the winds and waves obeying the command of Jesus to be still. It is used of demons obeying Jesus as He said, “Come out.” It is used of obeying parents and masters. It is used of being “obedient” to righteousness (Romans 6:16-18). But it is also used of “obeying the faith”:

And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priests became obedient [ὑπακούω] to the faith (Acts 6:7 ESV).

It is also used of those who “don’t obey [μὴ ὑπακούω] the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thessalonians 1:8).

Evangelicalism is centered on the need to hear the gospel and to believe. Salvation does not come through the Sacraments. Salvation does not come by acts of love, charity, or mercy. Salvation does not find any human activity in its incipient moment, in its mid-point, or in its culmination. Salvation rests solely on the grace of God who gives a hearing of faith to some. The only human element necessary to salvation is a proclaimer of the gospel.

God requires all men to hear and submit to His voice as He speaks through His holy word by His messengers speaking that word:

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Romans 10:17).

And how will they hear without someone preaching? (Romans 10:14 ESV).

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God grants a hearing of faith to some, whereas others continue with a carnal hearing. Some have a spiritual hearing. Those on the wide road hear with their temporal ears. The Christian sows the seed of the gospel into the souls of others, and the Holy Spirit cooperates with the gospel, wooing all who are willing to listen by His still small voice, guiding them to a hearing of faith. Two conclusions are clear from this study:

1. It is the Christian's responsibility for all people to hear the gospel
2. It is only God who can give a hearing of faith.