

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org
Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts January 2019

Listening to God's Word in the Church

By: Jonathan Leeman



If spiritual life comes through the Word of God ... why not skip church with all its hassles and just devote yourself to studying the Bible? Think of the time you would save, not to mention the relational trouble.

Or, better, why not download the three best podcast preachers every week and listen to them? Chances are that they are better preachers than old Pastor Bob down the street anyway. Can I get an "Amen"?

I suspect most Christians would have a vague sense that there is something wrong with this counsel. But the fact that we expect so little from our preachers in terms of biblical exposition, the fact that precious few seconds are devoted

to actually reading the Bible in our weekly gatherings, the fact that we give scarcely a thought to not staying up late Saturday night so that we're not drifting off in the middle of Sunday's sermon all suggest that we don't really apprehend the tight link between listening to the Word in church and our individual and corporate growth as Christians.

For starters, God's Word creates the church, not detached Christians. It creates a group of believers who are covenantally united in one Lord, faith, baptism, and remission of sins. ... God's Word actually creates local churches. It unites you and me to other Christians, and the local church is the place on planet earth where we demonstrate and practice our Word-created unity.

... Bible understanding and Bible living work best in the context of church membership. Here are seven reasons our growth should be centered on listening to God's Word in the context of the local church:

1 FOR THE SAKE OF OBEDIENCE. The author of Hebrews tells his readers, "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another" (Heb. 10:24–25). How do we stir up and encourage others when we gather? With God's Word. This is what we see the early church doing—gathering to listen and encourage: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship" (Acts 2:42).

2. FOR THE SAKE OF RECEIVING JESUS' GIFTS. Paul tells us that after Jesus ascended, He gave the gifts of pastors and teachers to His church (Eph. 4:8– 11). Your elders are gifts. ... these gifts will build up you and your brothers and sisters in Christ until you reach maturity, unity, and Christ-likeness (vv. 12–14). Think about it: Jesus loves you so much that He has grabbed a bunch of men by the collar, pulled them off their career tracks, and told them to

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devote their lives to serving you and your favorite Christian friends by studying the Bible and explaining it to you—every week. Are you not amazed? ...

3. FOR THE SAKE OF LIVE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE WORD.

Paul writes, “Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil. 3:17; 2 Tim. 3:10–11). Paul wants Christians to have words and live illustrations of those words. We need a church community around us to exemplify the message. Pastors, especially, must watch their life and doctrine.

4. FOR THE SAKE OF GODLY FRIENDSHIPS.

We imitate and follow our friends, adopting their language and life patterns. We spend money where they spend money. We raise our children like they raise their children. We pray like they pray. Friends are surely valu-

able outside the local church, but friends within a church will be formed by the same ministry of the Word, giving them the opportunity to extend that ministry more carefully into one another’s lives throughout the week.

5. FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING HOW TO ALIGN OUR HEARTS TO GOD’S HEART THROUGH SONG.

Singing is one activity in which God’s Word grabs hold of our hearts and aligns our emotions and affections with His. Therefore, a church’s songs should contain nothing more than the words, paraphrases, or truths of Scripture. Churches sing together because it helps us to see that our hearts’ praises, confessions, and resolutions are shared. We’re not alone.

6. FOR THE SAKE OF LEARNING HOW TO PRAY.

If God aligns our affections and emotions to His Word through song, He teaches us to align our wills and ambitions to His Word through prayer. Hearing older saints pray is how we learn to pray biblically. Christian praying increasingly conforms to the intentions of God’s

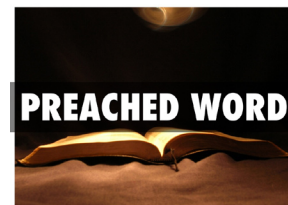
Word. So we will adore, confess, give thanks, and ask for those things that His Word reveals.

7. FOR THE SAKE OF NON-CHRISTIANS AND THE GOSPEL.

Ask any non-Christian who has attended a church gathering what happened there, and (hopefully) he or she will report that God’s Word was discussed, and maybe that conviction came (see 1 Cor. 14:24). Paul reminds the Galatians that they had received the gospel when Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified through preaching (Gal. 3:1). The Word-centered gathering is where God has placed an embassy among the nations to declare: “Jesus is Lord. Turn to him.”

So listen attentively on Sunday. Take notes. Discuss the passage with your family afterward. Let your prayers be guided by the preacher’s main points for the rest of the week. Encourage your elders with prayer. And then thank God for His Word, His church, and His ministers. What remarkable gifts.

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