

## Romans 10:17 (DT) 69230

Bible Treasury: Volume 18, Hearing and Faith (10:17)

“ Faith Cometh by Hearing, and Hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17).

This is God's order, not man's. The word “hearing” in this verse is not a verb but a substantive. If we read it as a verb, we lose much of the meaning. We speak of a man who has become deaf as one who has lost his “hearing.”

First then “hearing [cometh] by the word of God.” That is to say, the word of God finds its way into the heart and gives “hearing,” or, in other words, the ability to hear.

Then this “hearing” is the channel for the formation and growth of faith.

Of course this has nothing to do with natural hearing. It applies as much to the naturally deaf as to those whose natural hearing is perfect. It is spiritual hearing, and who can spiritually hear that has no spiritual life? The links of the chain in their order are: the word of God; hearing; faith.

First of all you have a dead soul. The word of God enters the heart and imparts the spiritual hearing; and hearing the word gives rise to faith.

The thought must not be allowed that the word of God is at the first applied to a soul that can already hear; for as we have seen, “hearing cometh by the word of God.” His word is the living seed, which, entering into the heart, brings forth life in that which was before dead.

It is very important to grasp this truth in its simplicity.

“ The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:14). What then is the use of preaching the word to those who do not receive it?

This is the question so important to be clear upon. To all human reasoning it would be of no use at all. But in truth it is what God has appointed, this “foolishness of preaching”; sowing the seed, the living and life-giving word, into hearts that are dead. The evangelist does not go forth endeavoring to coax or press the natural minds of the unregenerate into receiving the word of God. He knows that it can never be done so for good. The object before his mind is, by the Spirit, to sow, as it were, the word of God into the hearts of those whom he addresses. Now the word of God is not only seldom but never truly received by the natural heart, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom. 8:7). I may call on a friend, who gives me his hand and receives me into his house. On the other hand an officer of the law may call at a criminal's house, and the criminal resists to his utmost by trying to keep the door shut. Nevertheless as the officer by strength prevails and enters the house, the criminal could not be said to receive the officer into his house. On the contrary, he did what he could to resist the officer.

Now the word of God, though not received by the natural man, finds its way by God's grace into the heart, reveals Christ, and quickens. The new life is capable of receiving the things of the Spirit of God. Thus “hearing” is the channel for the formation and growth of faith. Many seem to have the erroneous idea, that the natural heart, before the new birth takes place within it, has faith which it can exercise in hearing the word, the seed of life. In this case faith would not be by hearing, for it would exist before the hearing; which directly contradicts the truth. According to such a notion faith, at least at its commencement, would be an act of the old Adam nature. It could not well be strained to support the idea that after the new birth faith passes over from the old to the new nature. “The dead hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear live.” Faith characterizes those who are born of God, born of water and the Spirit. So it is at the first, and so it continues to the end. It is interesting to note how the order we have been considering is kept up throughout scripture. It is not the Spirit's motive everywhere to bring before us every link; but we never find Him contradicting Himself by reversing the order. For example, “He that heareth My word and believeth (on) Him that sent Me hath everlasting life etc.” (John 5:24). Again, “In Whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth” ( Eph. 1:13). Of course none can hear the word, but they who have God's word applied to their souls by the Holy Spirit. In the two verses just quoted the first link is not given, but the order is as elsewhere, hearing; believing, etc. Indeed we in scripture mostly find the life-giving (and consequently the power to hear) by the word spoken of as a very distinct thing, a passing from death unto life; as John 5:24 says, He that heareth and believeth hath passed from death unto life. He could not hear otherwise. The recognition of the truth, as conveyed in the words at the head of our paper, enables the evangelist to go forth in simple dependence on God; fully confident, knowing that by the Spirit he handles the one and only means of giving life, namely, the word of God. And on the other hand he is nothing discouraged by outward appearances, knowing that all to whom he is sent are alike dead and devoid of hearing, and that the success of his ministry depends not on those whom he addresses, but on the word as applied by the Spirit. Like his Lord Whose life animates him, he speaks (if we may so say) as one that hath authority and not as the scribes. Matt. 7:29. D. T.