

Teaching #1574 - Sunday, July 15th, 2012, 10:00 a.m.

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LISTENING TO THE WORD IN FOUR STEPS (continued)

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Last week we began examining the *fourth* step in Biblical listening. Paul describes this final stage as *training in righteousness* - the Word is profitable for *teaching*, for *reproof*, for *correction*, and now finally, for *training in righteousness*. But before we launched directly into this stage we took one teaching to analyze some misunderstandings about the different ways that word "*righteousness*" is used in the Scriptures. After all, if we're going to study the idea of "*training in righteousness*" it's critical to define and understand exactly what kind of righteousness we're talking about.

And the righteousness Paul's talking about isn't a *saving works righteousness*. He's not talking about training ourselves in righteousness so we can merit saving grace. And he's not talking about the *dead righteousness* of moral effort that leaves no place for the atoning work and imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. No. He's writing Timothy about the growth of love and humble reliance on the power of the Word and the Holy Spirit that looks with confidence and gratitude to a finished, supplied, saving righteousness grounded in the atoning death and resurrection of our Lord and Redeemer.

So now we're in a position to wrap up this series on expository listening. We've come to the final question and teaching point for this message on *training in righteousness* - the righteousness of daily sanctification and the development of the life of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

1) HOW DOES THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF SANCTIFICATION GROW IN MY LIFE?

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, [17] that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work."

Remember, in moving on to this fourth step, Paul is assuming the proper place has already been given to the first three - *teaching*, *reproof*, and *correction*. The word translated *training* is *paideia*. It's the word Paul uses when he talks about bringing up children in the "*discipline and instruction of the Lord*" (Ephesians 6:4). And the idea in that passage is children won't make it with instruction alone. There must be *structures* and *patterns* and *practice* in the ways of the Lord.

The child's learning requires more than just *information*. That's because whatever you want to put into a child's life, you are working against something else. The Bible says "*Foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child.*"

In just the same way, none of us is going to be *totally inclined* to growth in righteousness just because we know the truth. We will all love righteousness in *principle*. But when the pursuit of righteousness begins to cost our own personal pride or pleasure at some point, growth in holiness can get costly. Listening to God's Word isn't always easy.

That's why Paul wraps up this process of ingraining God's Word the way he does. Whatever God reveals of His truth - whatever He exposes of our sin - whatever He speaks of His correction - we will have to go into *training* to make it happen consistently. We need "*training in righteousness*" (3:16).

That means nothing is fully learned in the Sunday service. Hopefully, we're *exposed* to the truth on Sunday. We will, if we're wise, make the *decision* to obey the truth on Sunday. We should always decide to act on the truth *right away*, before we *forget* what we've heard. But those initial responses only lead up to the *personal training in the habits of holiness*. Nobody can do that for you.

Many people *quit too soon* in their spiritual endeavors. Many people make the mistake of assuming that because *imputed righteousness* was freely given apart from their own works, *sanctifying righteousness* will come the very same way. But it won't.

In any area of sanctified living, we must, with the help of the Holy Spirit, train in the specific area of righteousness until a *holy habit* gets fully formed. That's where the idea of *training* in righteousness comes in. And, even secular experts tell us, it takes about forty days to ingrain a habit.

All our habits are like this. Those of you who smoke can look back on how awful your first cigarette tasted. But, unfortunately, you stayed with it until you were hooked. You probably didn't think much about putting the toothpaste on your toothbrush the last time you brushed. It's just a natural habit. But have you ever watched a three- year-old try to do it?

Imagine what this world would be like if people quit building other habits in life like they gave up on their training in righteousness. We'd live in a world where nobody would know how to tie his own shoes, or drive a car, or operate a computer.

Hear this final word from Paul: **1 Timothy 4:7** - **“But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”**

That word discipline is **gumnazo**. It’s where we get the word **gymnasium**. And make no mistake about it. That’s the only way sanctifying righteousness comes. You’ve got to get into God’s gym. You don’t **receive** a prayer life. You **build one** like you build muscles. You don’t **receive** discernment. You **build it** as you study the Word (**teaching**), hear its **reproof**, replace error with **correction**, and then exercise and use the truth you know (**training in righteousness**).

So the next time someone asks you to help out in the church in some area, get your runners on and follow Jesus to the gym. He wants to make a really great Christian out of you.

Let me tell you something Christians are far too slow to learn. You have to **do** something for the Lord to grow as a Christian. And I mean really **do** something. You read your Bible. Good. You pray. That’s good. You go to church. Excellent. Certainly you can’t grow in Christ without these basics. But none of these is **doing something for Christ**.

It’s important to have a huddle in a football game. But you can’t just huddle. You have to snap the ball and move down the field. Many Christians never grow in sanctification because they never involved themselves in **high stakes Christian service**. Spiritual lethargy comes from straying too far from the front lines of actual ministry.

Remember, you don’t just **pray** for righteousness. You **train** in righteousness.

2) **FINALLY, WE NEED TO REMEMBER TO WHOM WE MUST NOT LISTEN EVER AGAIN**

Having gone through twenty weeks of study on the subject of listening to God’s Word, I need to wrap up with a quick look at another **“word”** that speaks to all of us. And the deceitfulness of this word lies in the way it claims more authority than it actually has. Here’s how Paul warns us about this other **“voice”** - **Romans 6:12** - **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions.”**

Several thoughts here. Sinful desires are **speaking** desires. Paul says they try to make us **“obey their passions.”** So obviously there’s a sense in which these aren’t our true selves. Sin works in the Christian as an **alien** power. That means we give sin more power than it deserves when we treat its desires as our rightful masters.

That’s the next thing Paul says in this verse. Sin tries hard to **“make you obey...”** Sin gains power by **deceiving** us into thinking we have to do its bidding. But Paul is calling us to remember that this really isn’t true. Sin’s desires only **feel** like they must be obeyed.

This is easy to prove. Picture a man - perhaps in his forties. He’s sitting in his basement surfing pornographic sites on his computer. And he’s sitting there **hating himself**. But he keeps going. He keeps going because he **feels** he is powerless to stop. But he can stop - and stop quite easily.

Imagine as he hears his young daughter’s footsteps bouncing down the stairs. He has only twenty seconds. Without even pausing to think about it, he clicks the mouse and closes the site. And it wasn’t hard at all. What seemed impossible to do two minutes ago was a breeze to do twenty seconds ago. There was no actual **power** holding him to those images. They were no match for his desire to protect his reputation before his daughter.

And what I want to say in closing is **get ready**. Sin is going to talk to you this week. That’s for sure. It’s not **if**, but **when**. And the Devil always lies to you through these desires. Your inward desires are going to tell you they’re your boss when they aren’t. If you believe them, you’re doomed.

Look at how Paul pleads for Christians to recognize their full redeemed capacity to **not** listen to the fake boss of sin - **Romans 6:12-14** - **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. [13] Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. [14] For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.”**

So here’s the final thought in this extended series on **hearing God’s Word like your life depended on it**. It’s not only important what you listen **to** (God’s Word). It’s important what you **refuse** to listen to. Here this Word from the Lord with all your hearts - **“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions!” (Romans 6:12).**

Fill your mind with the greatness of Christ and His promise. Starve out the crud and emptiness of the mindless media of this age. Let gratitude and love for Christ direct your listening. Yes, you **can** give sin dominion over you if you choose. But why choose that? Give your full attention, with all the things we’ve covered these past twenty weeks, to listening with faith to the Word of God. Let it bear its precious fruit of Christlikeness. You don’t have to listen to anyone else.