

## **Hearing but Not Believing**

One of the frustrations experienced by preachers is knowing that the Gospel has been taught, and yet, there have been no responses of obedience by the hearers. This may occur when sinners refuse to obey the Gospel of Christ or when members of the church fail to comply with the teaching of Christ to mature in the faith. There can also be puzzlement in the teacher's heart when one family obeys and another family rejects the same teaching, while being instructed privately in their homes. The same Gospel is being taught, but it results in different responses. It is easy to become discouraged, blaming oneself for the failure to convert all the people being taught the way of salvation.

We must understand and come to realize that not all who hear will believe and obey the Gospel. The hearer has a responsibility in the process of conversion. This principle is clearly taught in the Parable of the Soils presented by our Lord and recorded in Matthew 13:1-23. In the usage of the words of Isaiah, Jesus mentioned that there were those who would hear but not understand. The apostle Paul referred to this prophecy of Isaiah on various occasions in his work when the Jews would not respond to the teaching of this inspired man (Acts 28:25-29; Romans 10:16-21).

While it is true that faith is produced by the hearing of the Word of God (Romans 10:17), there are times when the Gospel is heard but obedience to Christ is not the end result. Why? The answer can be found in the example of so many Israelites who failed to enter the Promised Land. The writer of the Book of Hebrews informed us that the glad tidings had been preached to the children of Israel "but the word of hearing did not profit them, because it was not united by faith with them that heard" (Hebrews 4:1-3). Earlier, we learned that the reason why some did not enter into that rest was because of unbelief (disobedience) (Hebrews 3:18-19). Had they not heard? Yes, but the Word of God had not been united or mixed with faith on the part of the hearers. Without faith, a person cannot please God (Hebrews 11:6).

Indeed, the hearer of the Gospel has a great responsibility. If the heart is not receptive, there cannot be any faith. As food eaten cannot benefit the body if it is not digested, neither can the Gospel of Christ save individuals unless it is united with faith. We are exhorted to "receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls" (James 1:21). It is only then that the desired results will occur.

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