

# The Family at Church

## **FAMILY GUIDANCE SERIES**

By Joel R. Beeke

The church must maintain the divinely ordered role of the family to establish a godly heritage. In this ongoing series, Dr. Joel R. Beeke offers pastoral insight and biblical direction for building strong Christian families.

Books in the series:

*Bringing the Gospel to Covenant Children*

*A Loving Encouragement to Flee Worldliness*

*Family Worship*

*The Family at Church*

# The Family at Church

## Listening to Sermons and Attending Prayer Meetings

*Joel R. Beeke*



REFORMATION HERITAGE BOOKS  
Grand Rapids, Michigan

*The Family at Church*

© 2004, 2008 by Joel R. Beeke

**Reformation Heritage Books**

3070 29th St. SE

Grand Rapids, MI 49512

616-977-0599

e-mail: [orders@heritagebooks.org](mailto:orders@heritagebooks.org)

website: [www.heritagebooks.org](http://www.heritagebooks.org)

*Printed in the United States of America*

21 22 23 24 25 26/11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

---

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beeke, Joel R., 1952-

The family at church : listening to sermons and attending prayer meetings / Joel R. Beeke. — 2nd ed.

p. cm.

Includes index.

ISBN 978-1-60178-043-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Prayer meetings. 2. Family—Religious life. 3. Worship (Religious education) 4. Preaching. 5. Public worship. 6. Church attendance. I.

Title.

BV285.B35 2008

264'.7—dc22

2008027886

---

*For additional Reformed literature, both new and used,  
request a free book list from the above address.*

For

**Henry and Lena Kamp**

the world's best in-laws  
godly, gracious, giving, and grateful



# CONTENTS

## **Listening to Sermons**

1. The Importance of Preaching . . . . . 3
2. Preparing for the Preached Word . . . . . 9
3. Receiving the Preached Word . . . . . 15
4. Practicing the Preached Word . . . . . 25

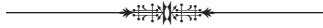
## **Attending Prayer Meetings**

5. The Need for Prayer Meetings . . . . . 39
  6. The Biblical Warrant for Prayer Meetings . . 41
  7. The History of Prayer Meetings . . . . . 47
  8. The Purposes of Prayer Meetings . . . . . 61
  9. Implementing Prayer Meetings . . . . . 67
  10. The Importance of Prayer Meetings . . . . . 73
- Scripture Index . . . . . 79





# Listening to Sermons



*“Take heed therefore how ye hear.”*

— Luke 8:18



# The Importance of Preaching 1

John Calvin often instructed his congregation about rightly hearing the Word of God. He taught them how they should come to public worship and how to hear the Word of God preached. Calvin wanted parents and children to grasp the importance of preaching, to desire preaching as a supreme blessing, and to participate actively in the sermon. Calvin said listeners should have the “willingness to obey God completely and with no reserve.”<sup>1</sup>

Calvin stressed listening to the preached Word for two important reasons. First, he believed that few people listen well to sermons. More than thirty times in his commentaries and nine times in his *Institutes*, Calvin referred to how few people receive the preached Word with saving faith. He said, “If the same sermon is preached, say, to a hundred people, twenty receive it with the ready obedience of faith,

---

1. Leroy Nixon, *John Calvin, Expository Preacher* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 65.

while the rest hold it valueless, or laugh, or hiss, or loathe it.”<sup>2</sup> If proper hearing was a problem in Calvin’s day, how much more is it so today, when ministers have to compete for the attention of people who are bombarded with various forms of media on a daily basis?

Second, Calvin stressed proper hearing because of his high regard for preaching. Calvin viewed preaching as a means God used to bestow salvation and benediction. Calvin said the Holy Spirit is the ‘internal minister’ who uses the ‘external minister’ of the preached Word. The external minister “holds forth the vocal word and it is received by the ears,” but the internal minister “truly communicates the thing proclaimed, [which] is Christ.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, God speaks through the mouth of His servants by His Spirit: “Wherever the gospel is preached, it is as if God himself came into the midst of us.”<sup>4</sup> Faithful preaching is the means by which the Spirit does His saving work of illuminating, converting, and sealing sinners. Calvin said, “There is...an inward efficacy of the Holy Spirit when

---

2. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.24.12.

3. John Calvin, *Tracts and Treatises*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 1:173.

4. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 3:129.

---

he sheds forth his power upon hearers, that they may embrace a discourse [sermon] by faith.”<sup>5</sup>

Like Calvin, the Puritans had a high regard for preaching. As lovers of the Word of God, the Puritans were not content with merely affirming the infallibility, inerrancy, and authority of Scripture. They also read, searched, preached, heard, and sang the Word with delight, seeking the applying power of the Holy Spirit that accompanied the Word. They regarded the sixty-six books of Holy Scripture as the library of the Holy Spirit. For the Puritans, Scripture was God speaking to His people as a father speaks to his children. In preaching, God gives His Word as truth and power. As truth, Scripture can be trusted for time and eternity. As power, Scripture is the instrument of transformation used by the Spirit of God to renew our minds.

As twenty-first-century evangelical Protestants, we must combine our defense of biblical inerrancy with a positive demonstration of the transforming power of God’s Word. That power must be manifest in our lives, our homes, our churches, and our communities. We must show that, though other books may inform or even reform us, only one Book can transform us, conforming us to the image of Christ. Only as “living epistles of Christ” (2 Cor. 3:3) can we hope to win the battle for the Bible in our day. If we spent most of our energy on knowing and living the

---

5. *Commentary* on Ezekiel, 1:61.

Scriptures, how many more people would fall under the sway of its transforming power?

The Puritan movement teaches us much about cultivating the transforming power of the Word. Puritan preachers clearly explained how the Word effected personal transformation. They offered practical direction on how to read and listen to God's Word.<sup>6</sup> The Westminster Larger Catechism summarizes such Puritan advice in Question 160: "It is

---

6. Samuel Annesley, "How May We Give Christ a Satisfying Account [of] Why we Attend upon the Ministry of the Word?," in *Puritan Sermons 1659-1689, Being Morning Exercises at Cripplegate* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1981), 4:173-98; David Clarkson, "Hearing the Word," *The Works of David Clarkson* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), 1:428-46; Thomas Manton, "The Life of Faith in Hearing the Word," *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet, 1873), 15:154-74; Jonathan Edwards, "Profitable Hearers of the Word," *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: Sermons and Discourses 1723-1729*, ed. Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven: Yale, 1997), 14:243-77; Thomas Senior, "How We May Hear the Word with Profit," in *Puritan Sermons*, 2:47-57; Thomas Watson on hearing the Word effectually, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), 377-80; three short pieces by Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston* (Wheaton, Ill.: Richard Owen Roberts, 1980), 2:427-54; Thomas Shepard's "Of Ineffectual Hearing the Word," *The Works of Thomas Shepard* (Ligonier, Penn.: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 3:363-84.

Several nineteenth-century sources stand in the Puritan tradition: a letter by John Newton entitled "Hearing Sermons," *The Works of John Newton* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 1:218-25; an essay by John Elias entitled "On hearing the Gospel," *John Elias: Life, Letters and Essays* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973), 356-60; and the most thorough and helpful

---

required of those that hear the word preached, that they attend upon it with diligence, preparation, and prayer, examine what they hear by the Scriptures, receive the truth with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind, as the word of God; meditate, and confer of it in their hearts, and bring forth the fruit of it in their lives.”<sup>7</sup>

In conjunction with Luke 8:18, “Take heed therefore how ye hear,” I will offer some Puritan teachings along with my own observations on listening to God’s Word, dividing the subject into three thoughts: how to prepare for the preached Word, how to receive the preached Word, and how to practice the preached Word. While studying each point, we should ask ourselves: Am I really hearing the Word of God? Am I a good listener of the proclaimed gospel, or am I only a critical or careless hearer? Do I realize, as Charles Simeon said, that every sermon “increases either our salvation or condemnation”?<sup>8</sup> Am I teaching my children how to be good listeners?

---

treatment, Edward Bickersteth, *The Christian Hearer* (London: Seeleys, 1853).

7. *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1997), 253.

8. Charles Simeon, *Let Wisdom Judge: University Addresses and Sermon Outlines* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1959), 19.