

5 Things You Should Never Listen To

My favorite Christian author, British preacher Charles Spurgeon, always told his Bible college students that a minister must never allow people's opinions or attitudes to distract him from God's holy assignment. Spurgeon urged his disciples to adopt what he called "one blind eye and one deaf ear" so they would not allow people to hinder them from fulfilling their mission.

Spurgeon wrote: "We cannot shut our ears as we do our eyes, for we have no ear lids, ... yet it is possible to seal the portal of the ear so that nothing contraband will enter."

I have learned over the years that there are certain conversations I must shut out. Words have the power to inspire, but the wrong kind of words can also derail us. And in this era of Facebook outrage—where everyone feels they must inject themselves into every argument—we must learn to switch our ears off so we don't get pulled into a fight that's not ours.

Today, streaming TV, unlimited texts and tweets, polarizing political debate and endless communication is shaping a generation of overreactors. But not everything requires my response. Here are five things I'm learning to tune out:

1. Other people's offenses. Some people who were offended 25 years ago will never rest until they see justice served—and they will ask you to take sides in the trial. Stay a mile away from any such dispute, or you will get pulled into it like quicksand. Proverbs 26:17 says: "He who passes by and meddles with strife not belonging to him is like one who takes a dog by the ears." You are not the jury, and you do not have to make a ruling on this.

2. Idle gossip. I am amazed when Christians who have experienced the forgiveness and love of Jesus rudely dissect other people with their words. When the Bible refers to “malicious gossips” (1 Tim. 3:11), the Greek word is *diabolos*, which is actually a name used for Satan because he accuses man to God. Gossip is the work of the devil, but the knives he uses to cut people into pieces look very religious!

Churches can be torn apart when people make up lies about each other, misread motives or harbor suspicions they share as “prayer requests.” Gossips are always ready to drop a hint—about where they saw the youth pastor last weekend, about Mrs. Jones’ divorce, about Mr. Smith’s reputation or about why the pastor’s wife didn’t smile at them last Sunday. Don’t even taste the juicy morsel that a slanderer tries to serve you; tell him or her that gossip is not on your diet.

3. Secondhand criticism. I’ve tried to stay open to criticism, and my door is always open if someone needs to point out my flaws. But if I hear through the church grapevine that Mrs. Rogers didn’t like my sermon, or that Mr. Williams thinks I am too harsh, I don’t give it another thought. For one thing, the report is probably not true, and secondly, if these people want to criticize me they can do it to my face. Otherwise I don’t need to worry about every comment someone makes about me.

Years ago, revivalist Steve Hill prayed for me to have what he called “alligator skin,” because he knew I would be criticized for the things I write. Ever since then I have tried to let people’s opinions and comments roll off me, as if I had waterproof reptilian scales. You can do the same. Don’t spend a drop of emotional energy worrying about what people think about you; instead be more concerned about pleasing God.

4. False accusations. If you are in ministry, chances are you will be skewered sooner or later by someone who feels it is their spiritual duty to destroy your reputation. I have many

pastor friends who have had to endure character assassination—either by Sauls (insecure leaders), Absaloms (unfaithful subordinates) or Shebas (rebellious critics). Still, I don't feel it is my responsibility to track down every person who has a low opinion of me.

In the case of David, he trusted God to deal with those who opposed him. He did not prosecute his enemies. Don't have such a fragile ego that you have to hunt down those who don't like you. Take the high road and let God use even your enemies to build your character.

5. Exotic but fruitless teachings. Finally, I have learned that I must turn a deaf ear to a great deal of popular Christian chatter that is disguised as truth. People often ask me, "What do you think of So-and-So's prophecy about Donald Trump?" or "Did you hear the new revelation about Russia's plans to invade Israel?" or "How do you feel about the return of the Nephilim from Genesis 6?" I always change the subject.

I'm not interested in getting on anyone's spiritual bandwagon, and I don't waste my breath talking about speculations, conjectures, unfounded revelations or spooky visions that have no biblical basis. Let's keep the main thing the main thing. If it's not about taking the gospel of Jesus to lost people, I'm shutting my ears. If we would focus on what really matters, and tune out the distractions, we'd reach the world for Christ so much faster. {eoa}