

HOW IS YOUR HEARING?

(James 1:19, 20)

INTRODUCTION:

How is your hearing this morning?

A Christian periodical told of a workman who was working on a high wall of a building and his ladder fell down. He knew he had to get a message to someone on the ground to help him. There was so much noise on the street that it was futile to call to the people down below. So in order to get the attention of a passerby, he dropped a coin in front of him, but the pedestrian picked it up and kept on walking. He tried again but his second attempt was met with the same response. Finally he dropped a stone-- not a large one, but one heavy enough to achieve the desired result. It struck a man, hurting him just enough to cause him to look up. Now the workman had someone's attention, and he could drop a note that contained his message.

God is has some great things He wants to say to us but first He must get our attention. The connection between these two verses and verses preceding is this: "since God is the only source of good; since he tempts no man; and since by his mere sovereign goodness, without any claim on our part, we have had the high honor conferred on us of being made the first-fruits of his creatures, we ought to be ready to hear his voice, to subdue all our evil passions, and to bring our souls to entire practical obedience."

James writes:

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

In this brief passage James gives us a bit of practical wisdom. This wisdom has to do with our hearing, our speech, and anger. Let's look at these three areas to see how we are to be wise.

YOU SHOULD BE QUICK TO LISTEN

The first bit wisdom James sets before us in verse 19 is that of **being quick to listen**. Jewish tradition says that nothing is better for the body than silence; that if a word is worth one shekel, silence is worth two.

Listening is a skill which many of us need to develop more fully. We need to always be ready to listen to others, to God, and to God's Word.

There are different types of listening. In counseling sometimes three levels of listening are taught. There is level of listening for content, i.e. listen to hear what the person is saying. A person needs to know that you are hearing them. Too often we don't really hear what the other person is saying fully because we are concentrating on what we are going to say, or emotionally responding to what the person is saying. We need to learn to listen for content.

Sometimes we're like the couple who were with some friends and the subject of marriage counseling came up. Tom said, "Oh, Mary and I will never need counseling. We have a great relationship. She was a communications major in college and I majored in drama. She communicates real well and I just act like I'm listening."

Another level is listening is to listen for what the person is feeling. This is empathy. This lets the person know that you understand them. Then there is the level of interpretative listening. This lets the person know that you have some help for them.

But James is not necessarily talking about any of these types of listening. He probably has more in mind the Old Testament emphasis on listening to God and to Godly counselors. The book of Proverbs is filled with passages about the need to be quick to listen.

Proverbs 1:5 "A wise man will listen and increase learning and a man of understanding will attain wise counsel."

Proverbs 19:20 "Listen to counsel and receive instruction, that you may be wise in your latter days."

Proverbs 22:17 "Incline your ear and list to the words of the wise, and apply your heart to m y knowledge."

A primary task as a Christian is to tune your heart to hear the Word of God. You are to listen to God's Word in your private Bible reading and also in teaching setting. When you are in your Sunday School class are you listening for God's Word. When you are in the worship service are you quick to hear God's Word?

A visiting preacher came to an all black church one Sunday. Just prior to the time when he was to deliver his sermon, he noticed a strange noise in the congregation. It began as a low mumble and then slowly began to increase in volume. The people were almost chanting. They were saying, "Yes Lord, Yes, Yes Lord Yes..."

The visiting preacher ask the pastor what i the world they were doing. He responded by saying, "These folk believe that when God's Servant comes to bring them God's Word, that God really does have a word for each of them. And they come every Sunday with prepared hearts, expecting to hear from God as His Word is preached. And when they say, "Yes, Lord Yes..." they are telling God in advance that they will do whatever he tells them to do today even before He says it.

Did you come to church this morning expecting to hear a word from God?

Our pride often becomes a major hearing blockage to us. We are not quick to listen to others because we want other to think we've already got all the answers. Someone once said there are two perfect ages: 4 and 14. At 4, you know all the questions. At 14, you know all the answers!

When we refuse to seek and listen to Godly counsel or to God's Word itself we are being spiritually unwise. A mark of spiritual wisdom is to be quick to listen to God.

YOU SHOULD BE SLOW TO SPEAK

The next bit of wisdom James gives us is to be slow to speak. This is related to being quick to listen. You cannot be quick to speak and quick to listen at the same time!

*A young man approached Socrates, the eminent philosopher of his day, and told him he wanted to pay him to teach him the gift of oratory which Socrates possessed. And yet from the time he was introduced to Socrates until quite some time later there was an incessant stream of talk from this young man. Socrates silenced him by placing his hand over his mouth and saying "My young friend, I will teach you the gift of oratory, but it will cost you double" The man asked "Why?" Socrates replied, "Because I must teach you two skills. First I must teach you the skill of **HOLDING YOUR TONGUE**, and then I can teach you the skill of the wise way of using it!"*

James says that the marks of spiritual maturity is quick to hear and slow to speak.

James is not referring here to slowness in your speaking, but to the manner in which you speak. He is referring here to the need for you to restrain hastiness when you speak. It's a call for caution. A call to think before you speak.

Again James is likely drawing from the Old Testament book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 17:27 "He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.

Proverbs 17:28 "Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive."

The apostle Peter was a man not known for being slow to speak. In Matthew 17 we are told of the time when Peter had that glorious opportunity to witness the Transfiguration of Jesus. Just after seeing Moses and Elijah and Jesus all appearing together in a glorified state on the mountain, Peter immediately burst out, "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters--one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." Of course the immediate response came from heaven... which in essence should be translated, "Peter, shut up."

In Matthew 16 when Jesus was teaching the disciples about the necessity of His death, Peter blurts out, "Far be it from you Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Jesus had to sharply rebuke him by saying, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." Peter had a problem of speaking before thinking.

In John 13 we are told that as the Lord was washing the disciples feet, it was Peter who blurted out impetuously, "No....you shall never wash my feet." Peter had obvious struggles in this area. He was rash and impetuous.

It was Zeno, the founder of the Stoic philosophy, who pointed out that human beings have two ears but one mouth so that they might hear twice as much as speak.

If we are to grow in wisdom, we must be slow to quick to hear and slow to speak.

YOU SHOULD BE SLOW TO ANGER

The third bit of wisdom James passes on to us is to be slow to anger.

Winston Churchill was known at times to be very quick to become angry. One of his more famous blowups was with Lady Astor who was seeking to become the first woman of Parliament. Churchill violently opposed her on this. And in one of their more heated exchanges, Lady Astor blurted out "Winston, if I were married to you, I'd put poison in your coffee." And Churchill responded, "And if you were my wife, I'd drink it."

Again the book of Proverbs underscores the need to be slow to anger. (Prov 29:22 NKJV) **"An angry man stirs up strife, And a furious man**

abounds in transgression.” As James puts it in verse 20: **“for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”** You cannot be pleasing to God if you are angry all the time!

Don't misunderstand James here. He is not saying that all anger is always wrong. Jesus expressed righteous anger.

The problem is that we too often identify the passion of our wounded pride and self esteem with righteous anger. Throughout the New Testament uncontrolled anger is seen as the source of much evil. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount taught:

But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment (Matt 5:22)

Paul taught that you anger and prayer do not go together:

Therefore I desire that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting (I Tim 2:8)

In another place Paul writes:

Be angry, and do not sin, do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil (Eph 4:26, 27)

Anger or wrath does not produce the righteousness of God.

CONCLUSION:

In the context of being quick to listen to God's Word, slow to speak, and slow to anger we have a very good example in Jesus' day of some people getting angry at God's word to them. Luke 4:

(Luke 4:17-21 NKJV) And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: {18} "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; {19} To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." {20} Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. {21} And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Then in verse 28: **So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,**

Can it be that we would act like this towards God? It may be when we hear God rebuke us for our sins. If you read or hear God's Word and it never rebukes you, are you really listening? When we hear or read God's Word and it rebukes us or tells us something we don't want to agree to, are you slow to speak against it? Do we get angry at sin being pointed out in our life? Then we need to take account of our life and repent, because God is telling us this morning that we are to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

Amen? Amen!