

Jas08 – Listen More, Talk Less James 1:19-21

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Open your Bibles. Title of the message this morning, “Listen More, Talk Less.” We’re going to James chapter 1. We’re still in James chapter 1 and will be still for awhile. WE are doing verses 19-21. With this message we begin a new section in James, after six messages on trials and temptations which we are making into a mini-series, because that is such a big area to really grasp the Word of God. Please order by seeing Pam at wordbymail or go to wordbymail.com.

As we’ve seen James do so many times, he’s going to take all of that teaching on trials and bring it into this next section in verses 19-21. One of the major themes in the book of James is the danger of the tongue. And James makes his first major assault on the danger of the tongue in today’s message. His first command on the major theme is that we open our ears more and open our mouths less. That’s it, pretty simple.

Two scholarly issues. (It’s important that I address them.) Number one, the first Greek word in verse 19 is either an imperative as in “Know this!” or “Understand this!” with an exclamation point that begins a critical new subject. Or, it is a “So then” or “Therefore.” That might sound like a minor deal, but it’s really not. King James and New King James choose the “So then” or “Therefore.” Honestly most scholars lean the other way to the “Now this!” “Know this!” “Understand this!” It’s like a clear, critical change in thought. That’s one opinion.

Second opinion, will probably blow your mind. There is actually a large percentage of scholars, at least half, that believe that in the context – remember how James is written kind of staccato, kind of like Proverbs, it’s not really simple to follow his flow of thought – when James says in verse 19 when James says be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger that he is actually referring to how Christians should interact with the Bible, with God’s Word. That we should be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger in regards to how we interact with the Bible, God’s word. Other scholars believe that James is referring to how we are to interact with other people in our lives.

I believe this command, be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, applies to every possible area of our lives. And like I do in most scholarly debate issues, I say to both sides, you’re absolutely right. Listen, when you’re dealing with the Word of God you should be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. And when you’re dealing with other people in your life, we certainly – if we’ve been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit – we certainly need to learn how to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. So, it’s true in both side of that debate.

Let's pray. *Heavenly Father, please, what we want is for your living Word to be what it is in our lives. To be sharper than a two edged sword, to divide our lives, to discern our thoughts, to pierce our hearts, to transform us by the renewing of our mind. What we want Lord, is we want it to be real. We want your Word to really, genuinely change our lives. And so Lord, we lay ourselves open as we are, we receive that we are naked and open to the eyes of those to whom we must give account, that you know us Lord. That we have come to you just as we are, that you've received us just as we are through our faith, and Lord you desire to change us from who we are to more of who you are. And so we pray you would use your living Word by the power of your Spirit, continue to transform us as we behold your glory, to transform us from glory to glory, into the very image of you Jesus. By the power of your Spirit. And we pray in this critical area, Lord, you would do it and do it today. Keep our minds focused, pierce our hearts. Convict us, encourage us, break us and support us. In Jesus' name, amen.*

This is a new thought here in verse 19, and it is still connected to the six messages we just did on trials, tribulations and difficulties. Why? Why is it still connected? Because so often, when we are in the midst of our trials and tribulations, the pressure of those things causes us to do just the opposite of what God calls us to do. Those pressures cause us to do the opposite of what we even know God calls us to do. It's our sin nature.

When the pressures of trials and difficulties press down on our sin nature, so often we refuse to listen to anybody. Including God. Have you ever done that? You know what you're about to do is wrong, the Holy Spirit is screaming at you like a foghorn, and you do it anyway. That is being slow to listen, the opposite of what God calls you to do.

Next, our sin nature, inflamed by our pressures and trials cause us to just snap at everybody. We're just quick with the sharp tongue with everybody which is the exact opposite of what we know God calls us to do.

And the sin nature, pressure by our trials and our troubles and our difficulties cause our anger to have such a short fuse it doesn't even take a match to blow us up. Right? You know that's true. And that is including even at God. We are the opposite of what James is about to tell us to be.

That's a problem, isn't it? If you are a Christian today, if you are a Christ follower, it's a problem to be opposite of what James is calling you to be. It's really a symptom of a greater problem, when we are actually slow to hear and quick to speak and quick to anger. God has caused you to be born again. He has begotten you again, not for you to continue to live a life of slavery to sin but instead to live a life of slavery to

righteousness. Where you are bound to live a life to righteousness, bound to live for his glory, and in his image. This is a huge issue all through James. If you're saying that you're following Christ, this is what it looks like, and we love James for that, because we can kind of "get it." We can understand it.

So here's what I'd like to do. As we prepare our hearts to hear this word from James, can I lay a foundation through proverbs for you? Write these verses down in the margin of James. (Please have your Bibles with you, please write in them, because the Holy Spirit will bring into remembrance what God is about to do in each of our lives.) I'm going to read these verses, you write them in the margin next to verse 19, and let's just prepare our hearts before we hear from James.

Proverbs 17:27–28 (NLT)

*27 A truly wise person uses few words; a person with understanding is even-tempered.
28 Even fools are thought wise when they keep silent; with their mouths shut, they seem intelligent.*

Proverbs 13:3 (NLT)

3 Those who control their tongue will have a long life; opening your mouth can ruin everything.

Proverbs 29:20 (NLT)

20 There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking.

Proverbs 10:19 (NLT)

19 Too much talk leads to sin. Be sensible and keep your mouth shut.

Does that kind of help lay the foundation for us to build these verses on?

James 1:19 (ESV)

19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

Know this! It's a startling imperative. Understand this, all you Christians! Be quick to hear. Be anxious to hear. Proactively listen. It implies a genuine desire to hear, an eagerness to truly listen with understanding. We're not talking about an auditory response but about genuinely receiving what is being said. The emphasis is not on the quantity of listening but on the quality of how we are listening. Do you care enough to genuinely, pro-actively listen in order to truly receive what is being said? *let every person be quick to hear*

Then, *let every person be . . . slow to speak*,

The idea here is be inactive in preparing what you are going to say. Don't be so quick to think about what you're going to say. Just shut your mind down for a minute before you speak. Don't be loading your guns while the other person is still talking. We talk a lot about this in our Marriage Series, as you can imagine.

be . . . slow to speak

Allow yourself time to address God before you speak, to thoughtfully evaluate what you've heard and to ask God to lead you in how to respond. Here's the simplicity of it: *The more you keep your mouth shut, the less you put your foot in it.* Far too often we speak before we even begin to fully comprehend what is going on. So listen more, talk less. *let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak*

And finally, *let every person be . . . slow to anger*

It means to be inactive in preparing your anger. How long does it take most of us to prepare our anger? Well, it often depends on how much trials and difficulties we are carrying in our own flesh. If we are carrying serious trials and difficulties in our flesh, the chances of us walking in the door and kicking the dog just cause he's there are very high. But you have not been born again, to kick the dog, or (figuratively) the people around you. You have been born again to honor God in how you respond to the trials and difficulties in your life. And you can begin to honor God in your trials by being quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

It is so important we learn to pray, NOT JUST "Lord get me *out* of this trial" But "Lord help me *honor you* in my *response* to this trial. Lord give me the power to crucify the flesh and respond in the spirit while I am going through this trial."

King David, in a time of intense persecution and difficulty wrote Psalm 141. And regarding Psalm 141, Charles Spurgeon in his famous "Treasury of David" writes:

[This is] David under suspicion, . . . David slandered and beset by enemies,

And at that point, David wrote in Psalm 141:3-4:

Psalm 141:3-4 (ESV)

3 Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!

4 Do not let my heart incline to any evil . . .

King David wanted not only to be delivered *by* God; he was just as worried about being righteous *for* God *while* he was going through his difficulties. He didn't just pray that God would deliver him. He prayed that he would honor God *in the midst of his trials*.

And so it is for you and I. The exact moment when we must lie out this truth from God is the moment when we are in the most trying of circumstances and the most difficult of trials. That is when we must respond this way – be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

Do you know the fire drill, “Stop, drop and roll?” That’s how I see this command in James *stop – drop – and roll*.

First, stop speaking. Just “zip it” a bit

Second, drop your own opinion. Stop defending yourself.

Third, roll onto your knees (in prayer.) Until the anger is gone.

Stop – Drop – Roll

STOP SPEAKING

DROP your self-focused opinion

ROLL onto your knees until the anger is gone.

Why? Why is it so important we develop this Godly approach especially in regard to our anger? Because the next verse in James says:

James 1:20 says (ESV)

20 for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

The anger of man and the righteousness of God are in 180⁰ direct contrast. The anger of man cannot produce the righteousness of God. And the way the Greek’s written this righteousness is referring to our “right living” not our “salvation righteousness. This righteousness is about how God has called us to live because of our Salvation. And James says very clearly, very directly ***the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God***

A person acting in human anger (in any way) does not (cannot) produce the righteousness of God that we are called to live in. We need to get this really, really clear. We need to accept that this is true and confess that it – any human anger – is a sin in our lives.

Over the years I’ve had so many conversations with Christians about anger and specifically about them being angry. And many Christians, when this subject comes up, rush to a defensive statement like this... “Well anger is not always a sin, there is

righteous anger.” And every time I have had the opportunity to prod a little deeper into that defensive “smoke screen” I find out that Christian is angry about something, or they’ve been angry and they are not repentant about it. Most often that Christian is positively certain that their anger is definitely not sinful anger, but is righteous anger. And they usually bring up the example of Jesus in the Temple turning over table and thereby compare their anger to the Son of God.

There are Christians who’ve been angry at me for many years and genuinely “wish the worst” on me and on this church. And as far as I know, every one of them believes that their anger is as pure as the driven snow and perfectly righteous. But they are in such deep danger.

Ecclesiastes 7:9 (ESV)

9 Be not quick in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.

And sometimes it can lodge there for the rest of your life.

How about you? What are you angry about? Who are you angry at? And if you are a Christ follower, have you convinced yourself that your anger is right and pure and righteous, even like Jesus himself? Do you really believe that you are that righteous?

Is there “theoretically” a righteous anger that is not sin? Yes, “theoretically.” The anger (wrath) of God is righteous but it is not connected in any way to the anger or wrath of man, which is sinful.

So what are the chances that your anger is the truly holy, righteous anger of God? The chances are extremely minute, almost nil. And I know someone will get mad at me about saying that and convince themselves it is righteous anger.

Even the verses that angry Christians use to justify their sinful anger are not in any way supporting human anger.

Ephesians 4:26–27 (ESV)

26 Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and give no opportunity to the devil.

How many of you have used the verse to justify your anger? “See, I can be angry as long as I don’t sin...” Unfortunately for you, the NLT nails the correct thought.

Ephesians 4:26–27 (NLT)

26 And “don’t sin by letting anger control you.” Don’t let the sun go down while you are still angry, 27 for anger gives a foothold to the devil.

Both James and Ephesians are saying the same thing. It is a mathematical equation:

ANGER + SPEAKING = DEFINITE SIN.

Because the number one way we seek vengeance when we're angry is by the use of our tongue. Which James is going to say in chapter 3 – *the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness . . . and is set on fire by hell itself*

Okay, enough about the sin of anger. So, what do we do about this critical command to be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger? How do we become transformed to the point that we can be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger? Well the answer (as always) is in the next verse.

James 1:21 (ESV)

21 Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

Another simple contrast verse. Reject sin – receive the Word. Both are purposeful, intentional actions to purposefully, pro-actively reject the sin of this world and to purposefully, pro-actively receive the Word of God.

I believe that most of us when we are responding in anger, we actually know in our hearts that we are in sin. But instead of crucifying that sin and rejecting it, we defend and justify our sin of anger. James says put it away. Crucify it. Look at how the NLT puts it:

James 1:21 (NLT)

21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

Acknowledge the sin in your life, including anger and get rid of it and ***humbly accept the word God has planted in your heart.*** We must make the choice over and over and over again to put off our anger, and put off our sin and to put off being quick with a sharp tongue instead of slow to speak the truth in love. We must continually crucify our sinful tendencies and truly receive the implanted Word of God, until it actually changes how we react and respond to the trials and difficulties in our lives.

And notice verse 21 says in the NLT: ***humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts***

James is talking to Christians and he says the Word has already been planted in you. Now you just need to humbly accept it. The ESV says: ***receive with meekness the implanted***

word. It means truly accept it, make it real in your life. Have it actually impact your responses and reactions.

Guys, our sin nature to be quick with a sharp tongue and quick to anger, it comes naturally and easily. But truly receiving the implanted Word of God, that takes time and effort. If you are a Christian today, God has given you his Holy Spirit and he's given you his living Word inside you. But it takes effort and commitment to turn away from the wickedness of your sin and be transformed by the implanted Word of God. We've seen it happen over and over again, right here. But it doesn't happen without real effort and commitment.

We must consistently feed the nature we want to win. If you want your sinful anger to control your life, then feed it with more anger and more anger. If you want your new nature to control your life, then feed it with more of God's living Word.

Romans 12:2 says:

Romans 12:2

Be Transformed by the Renewing of your Mind

And God has given you his living Word and power of the Holy Spirit to transform you by renewing your mind, and you need to find someone to help you learn how to do that. We must be transformed by the renewing of our mind using God's living Word and the power of the Holy Spirit.

I would encourage two series from wordbymail, our Bible teaching outreach ministry.

The Fundamentals

Abide

So let's review to close.

Know this! Let every Christian be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger. Because human anger does not and cannot produce the righteousness of God. So put away, tear off, crucify all evil and wickedness in your life and humbly receive with meekness, the life transforming already implanted Word of God which has the power to save your soul.

Let's pray. *Lord we pray that you would do that. Through your living Word and by the power of your Holy Spirit we surrender to you. We pray you would put us in a discipling relationship that would genuinely transform our lives. May we meet with you daily on*

this Lord. And may you, and we behold your glory, transform us from glory to glory into your image, by your Spirit. We say come Lord Jesus do your work.

Repent where you're at. You know that sin that's been in your heart this whole message. And you've been justifying it and arguing in your mind and have been convincing yourself it's not you .Repent.

God I'm sorry. I repent, Lord. I turn from that sin. I turn to you. Please forgive me Lord, restore me. Return me to a right relationship, God. Set my path before me; baptize me in your Holy Spirit for the power to be transformed. In Jesus' name, amen.