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Receiving God's Word

JAMES 1:19-21

Introduction

1. Many of us can perhaps remember a time in our lives when someone — perhaps a parent, a grandparent, or some other adult in our lives gave us some advice or perhaps even confronted us about something we were doing that was inappropriate.
2. How did you respond?
 - a. Did you listen and follow their advice or perhaps apologize for what you had done wrong?
 - b. Did you ignore them and continue to do whatever it was that you were doing?
 - c. Did you become angry and say some inappropriate things before storming out?
3. I think all of us at one time or another have had an experience like this.
4. James, in his letter to the Jewish Christians who had been dispersed through Asia Minor and beyond because of persecution, addressed the need for God's people to humbly receive God's Word which as he told them "is able to save your souls."
5. Tonight, as we look at this portion of his letter, I would like for us to think about our own lives and how well we listen and respond to what God tells us.

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A. THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING RECEPTIVE TO GOD'S WORD

"This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger;" (James 1:19, NASB95)

1. A number of our English translations stress the importance of knowing

what James is about to say:

- a. "This you know, my beloved brethren" (NASB95)
- b. "Know this my beloved brothers" (ESV)
- c. "My dear brothers, take note of this" (NIV84)
- d. "My dearly beloved brothers, understand this" (HCSB)

2. He further emphasizes what he is saying with these words:

- a. "Everyone must be . . ." (NASB95, HCSB)
- b. "Let every person be . . ." (ESV)
- c. "let every man be . . ." (NKJV)
- d. "Everyone should be . . ." (NIV84)

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3. What is it that James calls us to be?

- a. "Quick to hear (listen)"
 - 1) All of us have been part of conversations in which it is evident the other person is not listening.
 - 2) To be fair, that person may be us.
 - 3) We do not hear either because we are distracted or our attention span has been shortened.
 - 4) The average TV commercial lasts 30 seconds with commercial breaks in a show lasting 2-4 minutes.
 - 5) The length of time between these commercial breaks is 7-10 minutes for 30 minute sitcoms and 10-12 minutes for one hour dramas.
 - 6) Added to this are various pop-up ads which occur on our phones.
 - 7) The result is that we are losing our ability to concentrate on something for an extended period of time.
 - 8) If we are going to be "quick to hear" we need to practice what God

tells us to do in Psalm 46:10, "Be still, and know that I am God."

- 9) Like young Samuel we must say to God, "Speak, for Your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).
- 10) We must take time to read God's Word for an extended period of time.

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b. "Slow to speak"

- 1) In James day, it was not unheard of for someone to interrupt the speaker as he was presenting a message from God's Word.
- 2) This happened to Jesus when, in the midst of His teaching on one occasion, someone in the crowd suddenly said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me" (Luke 12:13).
- 3) This prompted Jesus to respond, "Man, who appointed Me a judge or arbitrator over you?" (Luke 12:14) and then proceed to tell the parable of the rich fool.
- 4) The apostle Paul was often interrupted in the different cities on his missionary journeys where he preached the gospel (Acts 13:45, 50; 14:2, 19).

[Pisidian Antioch] "But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming." (Acts 13:45, NASB95)

[Iconium] "But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren." (Acts 14:2, NASB95)

- 5) It was the ancient philosopher, Zeno, who said, "We have two ears and one mouth, therefore we should listen twice as much as we speak."
- 6) It was Solomon who wrote in Proverbs 10:19, "When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is

wise.”

- 7) We never have to take back something which we don't say.

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c. “Slow to anger”

- 1) There are times when the preaching or teaching of God's Word hurts.
- 2) This is because of the nature of God's Word (Hebrews 4:12).

“For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12, NASB95)

- 3) How do you and I respond when this happens?
- 4) Do we become angry, resentful, do we lash out?
- 5) When we do not take the time to truly listen, but find ourselves speaking without thinking, anger is not far behind.
- 6) In moments like these, we may seek to justify our anger and allow it to become sin.
- 7) Our present day society encourages us to express our feelings, whether those feelings are good or bad, regardless of whether they promote peace or inflame others.
- 8) In his letters to the saints in both Ephesus and Colosse, the apostle Paul addressed those sins which fall under anger's umbrella.

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.” (Ephesians 4:31, NASB95)

“But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth.” (Colossians 3:8, NASB95)

- 4) Solomon also had something to say about our anger:

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“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city.” (Proverbs 16:32, NASB95)

“A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back.” (Proverbs 29:11, NASB95)

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“for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” (James 1:20, NASB95)

1. Simply put, our anger “does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (James 1:20, NIV84).
2. Or again, our anger does not produce behavior that is pleasing to God.
3. It was Elihu, one of Job's friends who said, “For anger slays the foolish man, and jealousy kills the simple” (Job 5:2).
4. Likewise, Solomon wrote, “An angry man stirs up strife, and a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression” (Proverbs 29:22, NASB95).
5. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus traced the act of murder back to the internal attitude behind it.

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“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ “But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell.” (Matthew 5:21–22, NASB95)

“But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.” (Matthew 5:22, ESV)

6. “. . . becoming angry and assuming a position of superiority over another by calling him a derogatory name (i.e., “Raca,” “You fool”) demonstrates sinfulness of heart.
7. If we are quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger we will point others to a life which is pleasing to God.

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C. A FINAL COMMAND ON THE RECEPTION OF GOD'S WORD

“Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” (James 1:21, NASB95)

1. Finally, there is a positive response which encourages in our lives, which if practiced will bring about the salvation of our souls.
2. The command which James gives us is preceded by a prerequisite.
3. First, you and I must put “all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness.”
4. What James is saying is this:
 - a. If we are slow to listen, quick to speak and quick to anger, we open the door to “moral filth” and “evil” taking root in our lives.
 - b. Before we can God's Word can take root in our lives, we must first get rid of all the moral filth and evil which resides within us.
 - c. We call this repentance.
5. Consider the example of David.
 - a. In 2 Samuel 11, we read of how David committed adultery with Bathsheba.
 - b. In an attempt to cover up his sin, he eventually orchestrated the murder of her husband Uriah.

- c. For several months he refused to acknowledge his sin until the day when the prophet Nathan said to him, "You are the man!" (2 Samuel 12:7).
 - d. In Psalm 51, we find David confessing his sin to God and pleading for God to cleanse him and renew a steadfast spirit within him.
6. Only after we have done this in our own lives can we humbly receive God's Word which is able to take root in our hearts and accomplish God's purposes.

Conclusion

- 1. How many of us here tonight can honestly say that we are "quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger?"
- 2. Is it possible that we each need some improvement in one or more of these areas?
- 3. God's Word when firmly planted within our hearts is able to bring about the salvation of our souls
- 4. However, if like some of the seed in Jesus' parable of the soils it cannot find good soil in which to grow, it will not thrive.
- 5. Tonight, if you need to repent of a life which has been unreceptive to God's Word and His will in your life, we invite you to come to Him.