

## SERMON FOR SUNDAY - 6TH SEPTEMBER, 2009

**TEXT: James 1: 19-20** My beloved, let everyone be swift to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

### Are you Listening?

#### PEOPLE WHO LOVE OTHER PEOPLE MAKE THEM FEEL EXPECTED AND ACCEPTED BY LISTENING.

This passage is about the importance of our behavior showing our beliefs. James gives us two tools that are essential and necessary for life and trials. One is listening and the other, anger management! James seeks to get our attention and then cuts to the crux of the matter of how we are to behave by telling us directly to be good listeners, and to control our tongue and our temper. When we do such things, we are able to put others first in our lives. We can minister to their needs and, if others are also doing these simple and necessary precepts, have our needs met, too. These are the principle and essential elements of relationships and community. You cannot have a quality dialogue with another person if they are not listening to you or if you are not listening to them. The words become stray balls on the court of life, without substance or meaning, while our minds fill with the racket of our desires. The same is with anger that is not bridled and tempered.

The apostle James wants to make sure we are not only good listeners, but that we also listen to God, His precepts, and call. We cannot put our faith into practice unless we are listening. Listening is essential to relational development and personal growth. For us to adhere to God's truths, we must be willing and able to receive them, and we receive them by listening! This makes us fruitful and brave.

It is an exhortation for us to hear God's call, obey His most holy word, which in effect makes us victors. We can adhere to His call by imitating great men of old in the bible and put it into practice.

We must remember that the book of James is about the application of our faith, so we can apply our Christian conduct on how we treat others.

The phrase – Let everyone be quick to listen means we all fall under this imperative, there are to be no slackers! This means we are all to prepare ourselves so we can learn and have no excuses. As we learn, we can respond to God's will and work together as sons of God

- *We must be swift by* not wasting time—just “do it!” It is a command to be obeyed. Offer no excuses, no buts, no coming up with reasons, no backtalk—just do it, as Deborah -the great woman of God and Barak listened to God and to each other. In turn, they won the battle, for God fights for us when we listen to his command. – (Judges Ch: 4)! Samuel also listened from his infancy, (1 Sam Ch: 3: 4-11). etc.
- *Listen* means to pay attention, to open our ears and hear. If we are reluctant to listen, then we will also be reluctant to learn, grow and mature. When we listen, we open our minds and hearts to the Truth of our Lord. We can hear what others are saying to sharpen us and we will know when there is error. The person who listens is the one who is of good character and exhibits godliness. This truth transitions into the other verses to *be doers of the Word*. So listening enriches us to take the right action.

- *Slow to speak* means to keep our talking or mind under control, like bridling a farm animal (Prov. 16:32; 19:11).
- We are being called to restrain our speech. This means we have to shut our mouths before we can engage our ears and open our hearts; if not, we cannot hear God, understand His Way, or apply His precepts. For we must continually, hear God or others.
- *Ch:1 Vs. 20 talks about the other tool which is wrath or Anger.* The bible says it produces not the righteousness of God. James is condemning acts of violence and uncontrolled and unrighteous anger. Violence starts with aggressive mind! *Anger* here is imperative and God is demanding us to control our anger. Why? Because it incites violence, it destroys relationships, community, the church and it does not solve problems. It closes off our minds and hearts from God and others, and keeps us from seeing and understanding God and His instruction. It does not portray God's love which is the only bridge that binds us together. Anger defiles us for words uttered in anger destroy us. This we see in Mark's gospel Ch 7: 18-23. Also (Prov. 14:29, 15:18; 16:32; 29:11; 22; Eccles. 7:9;21 Rom. 1:18).

Under careful examination, this theme is really a connection between the passages in Mark 7: 18-23 about what defiles a man. What goes inside but what comes out of our hearts defile us, and the passage on being a person who practices the Word and faith (James 1:2-18; 21-27). The connection? These are the qualities that are essential in trials, how we are to go through life, trials, and temptations. We cannot learn and grow if we are not listening. To mature, we must be listening to God's correction and discipline, listening to godly advice, and listening to others to see their point and concerns. We cannot learn if we are doing all the speaking, because all that comes from that is ourselves, all that we have thus far in life, and not the necessary information we need to grow and move forward in faith and maturity. When all we do is speak, we create a vacuum that is empty of the tools and precepts necessary to handle life and trials. Thus, we become frustrated and angry.

The Word of God cannot take root in us when we are full of the toxic waste of anger and pride! The spirit of revolution was in the midst of Jerusalem. The *Zealots*, a Jewish militant group, were gaining popularity then. They advocated violence and were known for not caring about facts or the opinions of others, and were very argumentative. As they struck against the Roman vassals, they caused the loss of welfare for their fellow Jews and the problems just escalated. Thus, they were not able to understand others or seek information to provide the real help needed, but only throw stones, kill, and cause disruptions. They thought they were acting as agents of God. However, in reality, they were the tools of the devil. They caused the city to be in total disarray. The consequences caused the total destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of Israel for the Jews for nearly two thousand years. Hence, the warning from James is not to do as the Zealots, but rather do as the character of our Lord. Be ye imitators of Christ. (Eph 5: 1-2).

- *The anger or wrath of man works not or produces not*, is the negative of learning and growing in God. Anger and the lack of listening come from a heart that is not humble; when we are not humble, we are full of ourselves and not God. When we are full of ourselves, we cannot receive His call or learn and grow (1 Pet. 5:6-11). Anger does not produce righteousness, or the good life we are called to lead for others and His glory. When they see us unconcerned with truth and displaying little or no love, they are distracted from seeing God as Truth and Love.
- *Righteousness of God*, The goal of the Christian life is to pursue righteousness, our character, and maturity, all of which we get from the workings of the Spirit in us. When we do not, we are arguing with God or seeking loopholes away from our responsibility and making God a liar.

As followers of the Lord and under one banner, both the leader and all have to listen to God's Word, and to the people in our world to help us be supportive to each other and progress in spiritual growth. How we listen shows where our interests and our capabilities as a friend and as Christians of distinction are. Are we mirroring Christ's character and grace or just our personal needs? We are servants and soldiers. The fruit that flows from listening is the growth and spiritual maturity that leads to godly action and then creates friendships and real fellowship. These are the tools that will take us through both the pleasures and the travesties of life as victors, glorifying our Lord.

From birth to death, we have the need to be heard. Each of us has a deep need to have others listen to us, whether we admit it or not. It can be a casual conversation or a deep therapy session; if you feel that person is not listening, then you feel they do not care. Being listened to is a lot like being loved; so, we must take this manner seriously and grow in this skill. Listening is not just hearing, it is actively participating in the conversation with your full attention, putting your response on hold. Listening is something we all can do and are called to do, even if we are deaf. Listening is a natural ability and a skill that can be improved on; all it takes is the will to turn it on and let it work by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Anger is also a valuable commodity when it is controlled and directed, so do not lose it! Anger can move the passion of a person in motivation. But uncontrolled anger and not listening gives people a false impression of God and has an extreme negative impact on others for the faith (Col. 3:8; James 3:18; 5:7). The Bible tells us that it is OK to be angry, but not to allow it to cause anyone to sin! Let not the sun set on it. (Eph. 4:26-27) Anger can be a solution or a real problem, depending on how you handle it. Anger can also become evil. Anger hardens our hearts and causes us to become people who do not forgive, filled with resentment, contempt, defensiveness, bitterness, pride, critical nature, and withdrawal. It kills, causes wars and hatred, and destroys relationships and society, and put an end to our effectiveness in being a reflection of Christ's character and call. Temper is the steel containment vessel for the sinful nature we all have. The Holy Spirit will restrain us but only in the parameters of our will to control it (Rom. 8:11) Remember, temper is a valuable commodity that we are called to cultivate and care for; so, do not lose it but control it!

Why are you Not listening? Why do you always have anger? These are sure ways to keep people and care away from you. They prevent people from showing you love. What else can you do to make friends? *Listen!* What can you do to control your anger? *Listen!* What can you do to help you grow spiritually and physically? *Listen!* What can you do to help your church grow? *Listen!* The lack of listening and the abundance of anger, especially when it is out of control, will create a very negative atmosphere for the Christian and the Church, giving false impression of God's love to humankind.

Finally, we can conclude by asking ourselves some questions to help us grow:

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. How does this apply to me and what will I do about it?
4. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there anything in my life for which a turn over is needed?
6. How can I be changed so I can learn to listen and grow to reflect God's love?
7. How is this affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me and what will I do about it?
9. What does God want me to share with someone?
10. How do I listen to God's correction and discipline, or listen to godly advice?
11. How do you feel when someone takes the time to listen to you?
12. What prevents you from doing this for others?

***Additional Questions:***

1. How well do you control your temper?
2. Do you believe that you cannot have a quality dialogue with other persons if they are not listening to you, or you are not listening to them?
3. When all we do is speak, we create a vacuum that is empty of the tools and precepts necessary to handle life and trials. So, why do so many Christians only have their mouths open and not their ears?
3. Do you understand why you become frustrated and angry?
4. What blocks you from adhering to God's truths?

5. What excuses and reasons can you come up with not to listen to God or godly advice? Which of these reasons are right and tangible? Do you believe we just need to listen and forget about making excuses?

6. How does anger and not listening give people a false impression of yourself?

7. How can I be a better listener?

Our Lord, Jesus Christ listened to His Father and even us as we pray through Him. Do you also listen to His voice saying, Come unto me, all who labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest? Do you listen to the answers to your prayers? Do you feel God listens to your prayers?

Stop, hold on, wait, be still and feel God's presence in His answers to your prayers.

Do you believe we just need to listen and forget about making excuses.

In the quietness of your heart listen to that still small voice talking to you.

### **ARE YOU LISTENING?**

God bless you all. AMEN!

