



Listening and Doing

¹⁹ My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.

²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

²² Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³ Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴ and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵ But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. ²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Let us pray.

For the last few weeks we've talked about how we are to be better listeners, slower speakers, and never are we to default to anger to express ourselves or get our own way.



Listening

I remember when I was a young man my mother told me, "The best thing you can do to be a good husband is to be a good listener." I think mother was right. The Bible has much to say about being good listeners. [Proverbs 12:15](#)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice. .

[3Proverbs 18:15](#) If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame.

Listening to others is difficult. We all have plenty to say, and what we have to say seems

so important when it's fighting to get out of our mouths. The good Lord gave you one mouth and two ears so that should be a clue. Listen. Digest. And listen again. It is the way of the wise. One of my favorite verses in the Bible says, "Even the fool when silent is considered wise." (Proverbs 17:28)



Speaking

By default, if we put our mouths into gear, it is hard to stop them. That is because our flesh wants to be heard. It says whatever it can say so that we will be loved and accepted and have value and worth. We want to "fit in" so we talk desperately looking for some acknowledgement that we're fitting in. We should grow in humility to the point where we are secure in the Lord, and we don't have to speak on every matter. *Proverbs 10:19 reminds us that in an abundance of words sin is unavoidable.* [Proverbs 21:23](#) *ESV Whoever keeps his mouth and his tongue keeps himself out of trouble.*



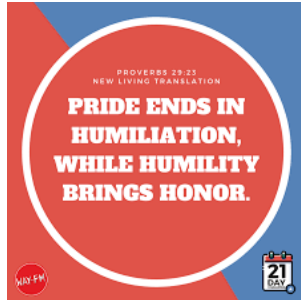
Anger

Lastly, James tells us that anger does not produce the righteousness of God. I would add that anger NEVER produces the righteousness of God. The Greek here, *kikaiousunen theou*, can also be translated "the right life that God desires". So the right kind of life that God desires cannot be accomplished by human anger. This verse should be convicting to all of us. We all feel a flash of anger just a little too often. Anger is a destroyer. It takes us out of control, putting the flesh in control, and it works against the Holy Spirit within us. Anger must be ruled out of our lives whether we're dealing with each other or with God.

James uses a sort of metaphor here of taking off and putting away soiled dirty clothes. Anger is nothing more than dirty clothes that need to be taken off and put away for good. Doing this sort of thing is NEVER natural. Why? Because Christian behavior is never natural. It requires intent. Our default is the flesh. We want to react in anger when we are threatened or feel stupid about ourselves. It is also a way that endomorphins get released into our body, so some people literally become addicted to anger. They have an anger fit and then afterwards they have a euphoric feeling of relief. Don't fall for it. TAKE IT OFF and PUT ON the mind of Christ.

Malicious speech should never enter into conflicts between believers in the church, and we must all guard against it. When we put these things off (anger and vile attitudes) we're allowing ourselves to have the Word of God planted within us. And James tells us

here that it takes humility to subject oneself to the Word of God. If we allow this to be “planted” in us with humility, we will experience “salvation” in the Hebrew sense of the word which is “deliverance”. We experience real deliverance from real human problems, and spiritual problems. James says, that letting the word be humbly planted within you “can” (*dynamai*) – like dynamite “be able” to transform you totally. We can humbly receive the word. A person who is humble is a person who has Humility. Humility is the opposite of pride. It is having a modest view of our own importance.



One Wednesday night, we looked at 10 characteristics of an humble person. Please don't confuse humiliation with humility. Humiliation is when you feel hurt or put down by another, or you put yourself down. Humiliation is wallowing in shame perhaps over something you've said or done. Satan works with the tools of humiliation and shame. God takes someone who walks in true humility and lifts them up. (James 4:10 paraphrase)

So briefly, a person with humility is said to be humble. In a nutshell, what we studied on Wednesday was that being a humble person includes such qualities as: being teachable, being at peace with oneself and others. Humble people are grateful and they are slow to offend and quick to forgive. They also know how to ask for forgiveness when they wrong others. Humble persons are able to ask others for help, and they treat others with dignity and respect. My dad was an humble person, and he used to tell me, “Every human encounter is an opportunity for courtesy or conflict. Son, choose courtesy.” Humble people realize they are flawed, and they don't get easily frustrated with the flaws of others. Humble persons are always about lifting others up and celebrating when others do well. And most of all, a person with humility is desirous of a deep relationship with Jesus.¹

V.22-25 James goes on to tell us that if we don't listen to the Word and do what it says, we're like a man who looks in a mirror and then forgets what he saw. That means the word takes no root in such a man's heart. This echoes back to his statement of being a “double-minded” man or woman who is unstable in all of his or her ways. Let's don't be double-minded people, rather let's “fix our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). We do this by asking the Holy Spirit to rule in our souls. James summarizes that contrasting way to live when he says, ²⁵ *But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.*

¹ <http://craigfinnestad.com/?p=1738>

That perfect law that gives freedom is nothing less than looking to Jesus as your guide, your measuring stick, your inspiration, your model, your Savior and Lord. He says DON'T FORGET WHAT YOU HEARD, BUT DO IT! Unlike the "double-minded" man or woman who is unstable in all of their ways, James says that the person that looks into the "perfect law" will be blessed in what they do. Jesus didn't come to destroy the law, but to complete it. He made it perfect. (Matt 5:17) Do you want to be blessed? Then seek first the Kingdom of God and HIS righteousness and you will be blessed. (Matthew 6:33)

v. 26-27 James continues to tell us about the contradictory nature of the tongue. "



Tongue is another area in which we get involved in self-deception. One of the main ways double-minded people show emptiness in their spiritual life is by deeds they do to appear righteous. They are usually very conscious of what the "do for the church". What always matters is the motivation behind why we do the "religious" things that we do. A person can look like they're serving God with all of their hearts, when in reality they are serving themselves.

I want to add that I don't like the terms "religion" or "religious" very much. A teacher one time told me, "Religion" is man reaching up to God, and Christianity is God reaching down to man. But James uses the word *θηρασκεία*, *ας f; εὐσέβεια^a, ας f; θεοσέβεια²* that means "appropriate belief and devout practice". It means believing the right thing and doing the right thing.

James goes on to try to explain the kind of thing that is appropriate belief and devout practice. He mentions looking after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep yourself unspotted from the world. So what does this mean and how do we apply it? I think it talks all about motivation and the kind of needs we are to look to fill.

I would propose to you that "widows and orphans" are classes of people that have needs that they are unable to fill themselves. In my mind, widows are men or women who have found themselves alone at a time in their life when they are vulnerable. They might be vulnerable emotionally, financially, and perhaps physically. This might be someone who has lost a spouse through death or even divorce. If a woman loses her husband in death that is easy to see, but many woman (and men) have lost a husband or a wife in a divorce, and the result is the same as death. They are alone. They need community and we are called to assist in giving them community and support. This might

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). [Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains](#) (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 530). New York: United Bible Societies.

be helping them with their meds or helping them with their light bill. It might even include just being a listening ear. People get very lonely, and God often uses others to help with that loneliness. If God prompts you to help, then obey and understand you are doing something very near to the heart of God.

James also lumps orphans into this category. So what is an orphan? In the literal sense, an orphan is someone who loses their parents to death when they are yet a child. But, like the term widow, I believe this extends to those who had bad parents who gave poor instruction. Some were birthed who never enjoyed the steady, wise directing hand of Holy Spirit filled parents. They are spiritual orphans. They may be young, middle aged, or even older people. James is saying that true "belief and devotion to God's work" involves giving a bit of your heart and hand to those who had no direction. And guess what "widows and orphans" have in common? They usually have nothing materially to give back to the giver. That is REAL GIVING. That is GOD GIVING. That is agape giving. That is loving God with all of your heart, soul, and mind, AND loving your neighbor like you love yourself.

So in review today, let's each be doubly determined to listen to each other. Let's be doubly determined to slow down our immediate inclination to blab about ourselves and all of our accomplishments. Let's be doubly determined to put our desire to become angry in subjection to our Lord Jesus Christ. After all, like James, we are His bond-servants. Then get rid of moral filth that resides in your heart and ends up coming out of your mouth. Don't be a double-minded self deceiver. Don't be like that person that looks into a mirror, turns away, and forgets what you were looking at. Instead be focused, fixing your eyes on Jesus who is the perfect embodiment of what God's law truly is.

Live out this gospel, this deliverance, this salvation. Not only are we saved from sin, but we are also saved from self. Put God's law, His Word into practice. The pure thing has a look to it. It is giving without expectation. There is no score-keeping in true "religion" which in James' vocabulary meant knowing the will of God and doing it.

Now.....let's go and do likewise.

Let us pray.

