

WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

Life Application Sunday School Class

Book of James - Session 6

February 24, 2002

READ James 1:19-27

19 My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life 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.

We have been studying the book of James, and specifically looking at trials and temptations in the Christian life. Last week, we looked at the anatomy of a temptation. Especially in times of trial and hardship, we are tempted to stray off the path and wander into temptation and sin. The battle begins in our minds. The strategy of the enemy is to get us to doubt God's word and His integrity. If we start to listen to his lies, and begin to doubt God's goodness, wisdom, or sovereignty, we become vulnerable to our desires. If we choose not to follow God's wisdom, which is His Word, then we will follow our desires. Once our desires are in the driver's seat, we are headed for trouble.

This next section in James begins to deal with some interferences that hinder us from receiving God's wisdom in time of trial. When in the midst of trial, we are tempted to talk too much, listen too little, and get angry.

Let's think about what it means to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry. In time of trial, we need God's wisdom to know the way of escape from temptation that we might be able to persevere. This wisdom is attained by us when we ask God for it in faith. After asking, we need to be listening, as opposed to talking. As our desires attempt to rise to the surface and take over, we need to be still, and listen for God's instruction. That wisdom will identify what we need to get rid of, and what we need to accept. Remember, one of the purposes of trials is to purify us. God uses times of adversity to reveal impurity and moral weakness that obscures the image of Christ. As this purification process unfolds, we need to be teachable and humble; good listeners. Our attention needs to be on God's agenda. We need to be seeking to know what He is attempting to change our lives so that we might better glorify Him. The trials work to expose and push impurities to the surface, and God's word gives us an accurate diagnosis and remedy for our shortcomings and weaknesses.

Another reason we should be slow to speak and slow to wrath, especially in times of trial is this: Anger and speaking are generally directed toward others. Especially in trials that involve relationships with others, we are tempted to give our attention to the faults and weaknesses of everyone else. In reality, we need to be examining our own lives, and leaving the correction of others in God's hand. Our anger is not going to produce God's righteousness in another person. Anger, resentment, and our agenda for "justice" in the situation only serve to obscure God's agenda of purifying and strengthening us. According to verse 21, we are to be ridding ourselves of our moral failures and evil so that we might be able to receive God's wisdom. The greek word for "moral filth" in verse 21 was the word used for ear wax. In order for us to hear God, we need to get rid of the nasty stuff in our life that is blocking out the instructions we need to save us.

Look at Luke 15:1-2:

Luke 15: Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Jesus certainly had the words of eternal life. As Jesus proclaimed the truth, we see two responses. What were the tax collectors and sinners doing? They were listening to Jesus. What were the Pharisees doing? They were talking against Jesus.

Look at Acts 13:42-45

Acts 13: ⁴² As Paul and Barnabas were leaving the synagogue, the people invited them to speak further about these things on the next Sabbath. ⁴³ When the congregation was dismissed, many of the Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who talked with them and urged them to continue in the grace of God.

⁴⁴ On the next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord. ⁴⁵ When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying.

Again, notice two groups of people. How did those that were following Paul and Barnabas respond? They invited them to speak to them, and gathered to hear the word of the Lord. How did the unbelieving Jews respond? They were jealous and talked abusively against them.

Especially when facing trials, we need to listen to godly wisdom and teaching, and be very slow to speak. Ecclesiastes 5 gives us some very good instruction in this area:

Eccl 5: Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. ² Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. ³ As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words.

When we approach God for wisdom, or whenever we submit ourselves to instruction, we need to minimize our speaking. The desire to speak and straighten everyone else out is an evidence of pride. We need to recognize that we don't have all the answers. Listening is a sign of humility, and God imparts His wisdom and help to the humble, to those who recognize their need, and resists the self-righteous.

When we talk too much, we can actually convince ourselves that we aren't so bad, and that we know what is best, and that we are able to take care of our problems, and that everybody needs to listen to us, and that we basically have it together, and why can't everybody follow our advice, and if people would just listen to us, everything would work out, and on and on we go. Proverbs 10:19 says that when words are many, sin is not absent. Proverbs 8:32-36 says we are blessed when we listen to God's wisdom, when we listen to instruction, when we listen to God, when we watch daily at wisdom's door, but that if we fail to find wisdom we harm ourselves and if we despise God's wisdom we love death.

In times of trial, we need to remove everything that hinders us from hearing and receiving the Word of God. Hindrances include any known sin, such as pride and self-righteousness and the resulting anger toward others. We need to beseech God to search our hearts for any wicked way that may be hindering our relationship with Him. And when He answers that prayer, we need to forsake wickedness and sin so that we might have a free and clear path to our hearts to receive the wisdom and Word that we need to keep us on the right path through the trial. Psalm 66:18 says that "¹⁸If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me:" Unconfessed sin forms a communication barrier between us and God. He doesn't hear us, and we can't hear Him. So in times of trial, we need to confess our sins to God, and ask in faith for the wisdom we need. And then we need to listen. But listening is not the end of the road.

READ James 1:22-25

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 a man 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 the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

Once we quit talking, and start listening, and have confessed and forsaken the know sin in our life that has hindered us from hearing God, God will begin to show us ourselves with the mirror of His Word. When God, through His Word, reveals a blemish, we need to take immediate action. We must listen with a humble heart to recognize our faults. But just seeing our faults is not the ultimate goal. Godly change is the goal.

Perhaps one of the greatest dangers we face as active members of this church is right here. Verse 22 says that we can deceive ourselves by only listening to the Word and not putting it into action. Verses 23 and 24 say that when a person hears the Word, it is like he looks into the mirror, and he sees himself, and recognizes where he has erred and fallen short. Whenever we truly see God's standard clearly, we will see our failures and shortcomings. At this point in the process, we can be deceived if we think that we have accomplished the will of God. I think most of us realize how important it is to listen to the Word of God. We should avail ourselves to every opportunity to hear the Word of God. We have seen time and time again how important it is to allow God's Word to be planted within us, so that we might have the truth to lead and guide our lives. I trust that we are all have a burning desire to learn God's Word. But those who have heard God's Word face a grave danger. If we do not take action based on what we have heard, we deceive ourselves. It is a deception to believe that we are spiritual and pleasing to God just because we know His Word and can recognize and define our problems.

Think of this analogy:

Let's say you are driving to see a friend that lives in another unfamiliar city. As you approach the outskirts of the city, you realize you need to find his house. You have no idea where you are in relation to his house. You could be proud at this point, and believe that you could find your way by just driving around and wasting time and gas. The result is that you would probably get more confused and lost. What you really need to do is to recognize your need of directions, and get some help. You have come the point that you are willing to receive the direction you need to get to your destination. So you find a detailed map of the city, and study it. After several minutes of looking at the map, you find the location of your friend's house, and you see your current location. This information brings you great relief, because you are no longer lost. You understand where you are, and can see the direction you need to go to get where you want to go. However, if you put the map away, and forget what you have learned, and think that you are ok just because you recognized where you are, you are still in big trouble. You need to continue to look at the map, and follow the directions, and drive according to that map until you reach the destination.

Friends, we haven't fulfilled the will of God by just understanding where we are and where we need to go. We need to change our direction and actions in accordance with what we have learned, and then continue to look at that map to make the corrections necessary to keep us on the right road, so that we can reach our destination.

It is not only hearing the Word of God that sets us free, but continuing in the Word. Jesus said it this way at the conclusion of His most famous discourse; Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had

its foundation on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

READ James 1:26-27

26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his 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.

If we just hear God's Word, and talk about God's Word, but don't put God's Word to practical use in our lives, then our religion is worthless, and we are deceived. If a person has the outward appearance of being religious, and yet his words are uncontrolled, in anger, in criticism, in gossip, in false doctrine, in unkindness, then the religion he has is useless, of no benefit, and in fact, serves to deceive him. He thinks that he has something that he does not have. If a person has the real thing, it will show up in his speech and his actions toward others, especially toward those who cannot reciprocate. This is true Christian, sacrificial love – giving where nothing will be expected in return. The grace of God in a person's life produces a change. That change shows in the way that he talks, the way that he relates to others, and his relationship with the world. He will not look like and act like the world – in his speech, and in his actions, in his manner. He will be characterized by compassion, mercy, goodness, and display a selfless love and concern for those in distress, especially those who cannot help themselves.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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