
Into Thy Word Bible Study in James

Into Thy Word Ministries www.intothyword.org

James 1: 19-20: Are you Listening?

General idea: 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.

Vs. 19: The Greeks and educated Jewish aristocrats considered the eloquence of speech the most important thing a person could do. James switches the focus from eloquent speech to eloquent listening. James wants to make sure we are not only are 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 quintessential 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!

- *So then or take note of this* is a call to attention, a call to "listen up". It is an exhortation for us to hear God's call. Because of the previous passages, we can adhere to His call and put His precepts into practice. Remember, James is a book about the application of our faith, so we can apply our Christian conduct in how we treat others!
- *Let everyone* 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 (Matt. 13:9; Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18; Col. 1:10).
- *Swift* refers to not wasting time—just "do it!" Offer no excuses, no buts, no coming up with reasons, no backtalk—just do it, as David's men did (2 Sam. 23:13-17)!
- *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 and grow. 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 following verses to *be doers of the Word*.

- *Slow* means to keep it under control, like bridling a farm animal (Prov. 16:32; 19:11).
- *Speak*, when we talk continually, we cannot hear God or others. 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. (More on this in chapter 3.)
- *Wrath or Anger*. James is condemning acts of violence and uncontrolled unrighteous anger. Violence starts with aggressive rhetoric! *Anger* here is an imperative in grammar; thus, God is demanding us to control our anger. Why? Because it incites violence, it destroys relationships and community, 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 (Prov. 14:29, 15:18; 16:32; 29:11; 22; Eccles. 7:9; Matt. 18:15-17; 21:12-13; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 4:25-27).

This passage seems to come from nowhere, out of place and context—two sentences of miscellaneous exhortations that do not fit. It has given some Christians the excuse that since they do not fit, I can acquit myself from obeying them. How sad that is! But, under careful examination, it is really a connection between the previous passage on enduring temptations and the following 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, as the Jews were at this time.

Vs. 20: 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, and set a course for severe repercussions. A few years later, these Zealots caused the Romans to march in full force with the consequences being the total destruction of Jerusalem and the loss of Israel for the Jews for nearly two thousand years—until 1948! Hence, the warning from James is not to do as the Zealots, but rather do as the character of our Lord.

- *For* means the reason—the why and outcome of the argument that has been presented.
- *Not produce* is learning and growing in Him; here, it is in the negative—not learning. 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 (Matt. 7:16-18; John 15:4-8; Gal. 2:22-23). When we do not, we are arguing with God or seeking loopholes away from our responsibility (Luke 10:29; James 4:1).

The early Christian community, as it was facing persecution, knew that to be supportive and lead, it must listen so it could progress in spiritual growth; the Christian and, especially the leader, must be willing to listen. As followers of the Lord and relationship builders, we have to listen to His Word, and to the people in our world. 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? 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. We can also learn techniques to improve our abilities.

Anger is a valuable commodity when it is controlled and directed, so do not lose it! Anger can move the passion of a person in motivation, such as starting an organization to prevent drunken driving versus shooting the drunk driver. 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! Jesus saw His house of worship and prayer turned into a market, and modeled to us the correct way to channel our hostility in fervent action (Matt. 18:15-17; 21:12-13). Anger can be a solution or a real problem, depending on how you handle it. Anger can also become evil. Literally, it is the rotten fruits unhitched from our temper and control. They will harden our hearts and cause us to become people who do not forgive, filled with resentment, contempt, defensiveness, bitterness, pride, critical nature, and withdrawal. They kill, they cause wars and hatred, and they destroy 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; 2 Thess. 2:6; 1 John 4:4). Remember, temper is a valuable commodity that we are called to cultivate and care for; so, do not lose it!

Not listening? Have anger? These are sure ways to keep people and care away from you. 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? *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 (Prov. 27:9).

The Essential Inductive Questions (for more Inductive questions see [Inductive Bible Study](#)):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me? How am I encouraged and strengthened?
4. Is there a sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
5. How can I be changed so I can learn and grow?
6. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?

7. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
8. What can I model and teach? What does God want me to share with someone?

Additional Questions:

1. How would you define listening? How well do you control your temper?
2. How do you feel when someone takes the time to listen to you? What prevents you from doing this for others?
3. How, and why are listening and anger management necessary tools for life and trials?
4. Do you believe that you cannot have a quality dialogue with another person if they are not listening to you, or you are not listening to them? How? Why, or why not?
5. The goal of the Christian life is to pursue righteousness. So, what does this mean to you? What can and should it mean?
6. Why is it we cannot *produce* (learn and grow) if we are not listening to God's correction and discipline, listening to godly advice, and listening to others to see their point and concerns?
7. How is listening quintessential to relational development and personal growth?
8. 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?
9. What blocks you from adhering to God's truths? Why, at times, are we not willing and able to receive them?
10. Do you understand why you become frustrated and angry? What can you do to set up boundaries for yourself so you can control your temper?
11. What excuses and reasons can you come up with not to listen to God or godly advice? Which of these reasons are right and biblical? Do you believe we just need to listen and forget about making excuses?
12. How does anger and not listening give people a false impression of God? What can you do to be a better listener?

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith." Romans 1:16-17

© 2004 R. J. Krejcir IntoThy Word Ministries, www.intothyword.org