

Sermon Discussion Questions & Follow-up Notes
June 16, 2024
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Sermon Text: James 1:19-27

Title: “How to Slow Your Speech” / Series: “Words that Heal”

Core Observations of the Text

In this section of verses, James provides us three thumbnail sketches of different types of Christians. Each type of Christian is identified by their speech:

1. The “radio talk show host” Christian (in the background of verses 19-21): James has a particular kind of Christian in mind to whom he addresses the three commands of verse 19. He is thinking of someone who is quick to speak, not a good listener, and quick to become angry. It is this last word (“anger”) that James spends verse 20 explaining. James is not speaking about general general nor about all kinds of anger – rather, he has a very specific kind of anger in mind, namely “moral or religious indignation.” Three reasons lead us to this conclusion: this first type of Christian apparently thinks that their form of anger leads to righteousness (v20); this kind of Christian does not struggle with believing the bible but does struggle with doing so humbly (v21); and the overall theme of these verses is about good religion (v27). Thus, James has in mind the kind of anger that only religious people have. Such anger is rooted in the belief that God has revealed an objective moral law (the ‘revealed word’ is mentioned in v21 and “law” is mentioned in v25).

2. The true listener and friend Christian (verses 20-24): James wants us to see in verse 21 that our ability to listen is absolutely essential to how we became Christians and therefore will be essential to how we grow as Christians. Those who participated in Adult Education classes over the past two months will know the significance of the “Shema” prayer (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9), which is a prayer that God would enable us to listen. The analogy of a mirror in verses 23-24 emphasizes the foolishness of rejecting voices and input around you. This skill of listening, forged in relation to God’s perfect word that He plants in us, will transfer into our relationships with others. When we listen well, we reflect God the Father (verse 17 and 27) who listens to us generously and without finding fault (verse 5).

3. The fully mature Christian is the culminating picture of this passage (verses 25-27): In James’ God-given vision of the Christian life, he sees the fully mature Christian as one who has realized the limits of his religious/moral indignation and has learned to reflect God’s own generous listening disposition. But a third step is needed, namely a mature Christian works hard to match deeds to his words. In verse 21, James warned us to focus primarily on cleaning-up our own moral act, a point to which he returns in the final words of verse 27 (“keep oneself unstained by the world”). Being the kinds of people who “do what we say” is at the heart of James’ analogy about the mirror (verses 23-25). James informs us that the deepest happiness of the Christian life is not in the listening but in the doing of God’s Word (verse 25).

Questions to Ponder & Discuss

1. Do you think James is excluding all morally indignant speech or is he warning us about making a habit of such speech? When might it be right to speak with moral indignation? Can you think of any biblical examples?
2. Who is the best listener you know? What hour of this coming week can you set aside to listen to someone well and thoroughly?
3. Our hope for maturing in these things is that God places a bit in our mouths and trains us (verse 26). How is God training your speech in this season of life?