

James 1:19-27 – Behaving Faith – Part 2

1

Introduction

In the first chapter of his book James has given a series of tests of a true believer. The first was his response to trials (1:2–12). The second was his response to temptation (1:13–18). The third is his response to the truth revealed in the Word of God (1:19–27).

When the true disciple hears God’s Word, there is an affection for its truth and a desire in his heart to obey it. One of the most reliable evidences of genuine salvation is that hunger for the Word of God (cf. Ps. 42:1). In 1:19–27, James focuses on two major truths relating to that evidence. First, saving faith is marked by a proper reception of Scripture as the Word of God (vv. 19–21). Second, it is marked by a proper reaction to the Word, reflected in an obedient life.

2

James 1:19-27

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. ²¹ Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. ²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does. ²⁶ If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion *is* useless. ²⁷ Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

3

A Willingness to Receive the Word with Submission.

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

By addressing his readers as “my beloved brethren” James clearly indicates his deep compassion and concern for them. He is not simply trying to convince their minds in a purely intellectual way but also is trying to reach their hearts. No matter how well the mind may understand and acknowledge a truth, it will be of little spiritual benefit to the believer or to the kingdom if the heart does not embrace and submit to it.

In the second half of verse 19, James gives three important commands for the believer who is willing to receive God's Word with submissiveness.

4

Swift to Hear

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

We must be “**swift to hear**”, that is, be a careful listener, making sure that we pay attention in order to get the message right.

Proverbs 17:28 states, “Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; When he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive.”

James’s appeal is for believers to seize every opportunity to increase their exposure to Scripture, to take advantage of every privileged occasion to read God’s Word or to hear it faithfully preached or taught. The sincere, desire for such learning is one of the surest marks of a true child of God.

5

Slow to Speak

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

The believer who willingly receives the Word with submission must be “**slow to speak**”. That characteristic is a companion of the first. You cannot listen carefully while you are talking, or even while you are thinking about what to say. Many discussions are fruitless for the simple reason that all parties are paying more attention to what they want to say than to what others are saying. In this context, it seems that “slow to speak” includes the idea of being careful not to be thinking about one’s own thoughts and ideas while someone else is trying to express God’s. We cannot really hear God’s Word when our minds are on our own thoughts. We need to keep silent inside as well as outside.

6

Slow to Speak

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

When the appropriate time “to speak” comes, what one says should be carefully thought out. When we speak for the Lord, we should do so in a way that both edifies those who hear and honors the Lord. We should pursue every opportunity to read the Word ourselves, to hear it preached and taught, and to discuss it with other believers who love, honor, and seek to obey it. At the same time, we should be cautious, patient, and careful when we have opportunity to preach, teach, or explain it to others. It is doubtless for that reason that James later warns, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.”
(James 3:1).

7

Slow to Anger

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

The believer who willingly receives the Word with submission must be “**slow to anger**.” Anger is a natural emotion that is often automatic response to things that harm or displease us. The word for “anger” here does not refer to an explosive outburst of temper but to an inner, deep resentment that seethes and smolders, often unnoticed by others. It is therefore an anger that only the Lord and the believer know about. Therefore, it is a special danger, in that it can be privately harbored.

In this context, James seems to be speaking particularly about anger at a truth in the Word that displeases, that confronts sin, or conflicts with a personal belief or standard of behavior. This anger was also visible within some of the churches to which James wrote (James 4:1-2).

8

Slow to Anger

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

James's emphasis here seems to be on those who hear the truth and resent its exposing their personal false ideas or ungodly lifestyles. Paul asked believers in Galatia, "Have I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). In the minds of some church members, the answer doubtless was "yes." In reality, of course, Paul's persistently telling them God's truth, without compromise or omission, was the kindest and most helpful thing he could do for them. That is the kindest and most helpful thing anyone can do for someone else.

9

Slow to Anger

James 1:19-20

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; ²⁰ for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God..

There is, of course, a just anger, a holy indignation against sin, Satan, and anything that dishonors the Lord or assaults His glory. Jesus was intensely angry when He saw His Father's house in Jerusalem, turned into "a place of business," and He expressed His anger twice by driving out those responsible for the desecration (John 2:14–16; cf. Matt. 21:12–13).

But mere personal anger, bitterness, and resentment can never serve the cause of Christ, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God. It does not accomplish what is right in God's eyes. That is especially true when the hostility is against the truth of God's Word, for that in reality is against God Himself.

10

So What ...

You will never force someone into righteousness. Your anger will not result in others yielding their hearts and minds to God. Anger only produces resentment. What we need is to have is the mind of Christ. We are to be shepherds leading others to the green grass and cool waters of God.

Of course to be a leader, you must know where you are leading.

This means you need to be in God's Word. You need to be reading and studying and allowing it to point out the areas you need to change.

Lets commit ourselves to being "quick to hear", "slow to speak", and "slow to anger"!