

RECEIVING THE WORD

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Text: James 1:19-21

■ A few years ago Paine-Webber employed an advertising campaign emphasizing their ability to listen to their client's needs and custom-design an investment package for each one. You may remember the ads: "How did your broker know you wanted to retire early?" "He ASKED." They were selling the idea that their representatives listen. Compare the success of this campaign with that of E.F. Hutton. Everyone remembers, "When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen." Investors, however, weren't impressed—today E.F. Hutton is no longer in business. Paine-Webber realized that investors want to invest in a company with a reputation for listening, rather than one with a reputation for talking. (Sermon Notes Brochure)

Very often we have a tendency to talk too much and listen too little. The result of this action is that self becomes all too important in the grand scheme of things. Our egos become enlarged and our feelings become the center of attention. Thus we are not open to anyone—including God. It is easy to see how a person in this frame of mind cannot hear God speaking to them.

However, a Christian's ability to hear and receive the Word of God is as important as a human's ability to breathe oxygen—each gives life. The problem is that too often we feel we can reason out life and God's will on our own. But God has not left us to our reason and logic; He has given us His Word. When we are receptive to God's Word we are energized and empowered by the life that it gives. But to have that "life" and to truly receive the Word, there are a few *exhortations* we must observe.

I. WE MUST BE SWIFT TO HEAR (v.19).

A. We must listen to God's Word even if it rebukes our actions.

■ In v. 19-21, James is attempting to clear the way for the reception of God's truth. He begins by calling for the reader's attention: "Take note of this." The reception of the Word demands a readiness to "listen." Reluctance at this point will block the acceptance of truth. It also demands restrained speech. A

continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says and by the same token will not hear when God speaks to him. (Burdick, 174)

B. We must heed the voice of God.

■ Jed Harris, producer of *OUR TOWN* and other plays, became convinced he was losing his hearing. He went to a specialist who gave him a thorough checkup. The doctor pulled out a gold watch and asked, "Can you hear this ticking?" Harris said, "Of course." The specialist walked to the door and held up the watch again. "Now can you hear it?" Harris concentrated and said, "Yes, I can hear it clearly." The doctor walked out the door into the next room and said, "Can you hear it now?" Harris said, "Yes."

The doctor said, "Mr. Harris, there is nothing wrong with your hearing. You just don't listen." (Hewett,)

Too often this is our problem. We say we can't hear God or that God hasn't spoken to us concerning our actions or words. But the real problem is not that He hasn't spoken; it is that we are not listening when He does speak.

II. WE MUST BE SLOW TO SPEAK (v.19).

A. We should always think before we speak or act.

Failing to think before we act sometimes produces wrong actions or offenses that come when we say things we don't mean or do things we wouldn't normally do.

■ A young man was applying for a job as clerk in a shoe store. The storeowner asked him, "Suppose that a lady customer asked you, 'Don't you think one of my feet is bigger than the other?' What would you say?" The young man responded promptly, "I'd say, 'Oh no, ma'am. If anything one is a little smaller than the other.'" (Hewett, 472)

Good judgment comes from considering all the facts, the situation, and other people's feelings.

B. We need to choose carefully what really "*needs to be said*."

Words improperly spoken may produce hard feelings, anger, and resentment. Words properly spoken produce a good response, confidence in God, hope for healing, peace, joy, and renewed strength.

■ Someone said, "Tact is the art of making a point without making an enemy."

III. WE MUST BE SLOW TO WRATH (v.19-20).

A. Wrath is anger that has turned into aggression.

Anger is a natural emotion, but sometimes it gets out of control.

■ The *Arizona Republic* (4/25/95) reported that when Steve Tran of Westminister, California, closed the door on twenty-five activated bug bombs, he thought he had seen the last of the cockroaches that shared his apartment. When the spray reached the pilot light of the stove, it ignited, blasting his screen door across the street, breaking all his windows, and setting his furniture ablaze.

"I really wanted to kill all of them," he said. "I thought that I used a lot more, it would last longer." According to the label, just two canisters of the fumigant would have solved Tran's roach problem.

The blast caused over \$10,000 damage to the apartment building. And the cockroaches? Tran reported, "By Sunday I saw them walking around."

(Rowell, 13)

How often has something similar happened to us? In our anger we overreact, bring trouble on our own selves and the problem remains.

B. Our impulsive anger cannot be used to fulfill the righteousness of God.

We need to ask ourselves, "Has God really given you and me the task of meting out punishment?"

IV. WE MUST BE WILLING TO REPENT AND CLEAN UP OUR LIVES (v. 21)

A. Repentance is only as good as the fruit it produces.

■ John Locke said, "Repentance is a hearty sorrow for our past misdeeds, and a sincere resolution and an endeavor to the utmost of our power, to conform all our actions to the law of God. It does not consist in one single act of sorrow, but in doing works meet for repentance; in a sincere obedience to the law of Christ for the remainder of our lives." (Hewett, 440)

■ A.W. Tozer writes, "God will take nine steps toward us, but he will not take the tenth. He will incline us to repent, but he cannot do our repenting for us."

-- A.W. Tozer, *Christian Reader*, Vol. 32, no. 5.

B. A repentant heart is a meek heart that will accept the Word of God.

■ The NIV renders James 1:21, "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." (italics added)

No one has ever truly loved God's word and at the same time refused to follow it.

CONCLUSION

Receiving the Word of God is more than an intellectual process; it is a life-changing event. It is also necessary for us if we are to show the world that there is a reality to serving Jesus Christ. Believe it or not the world around us can tell what is in our lives.

■ The Scriptures often exhort us to be filled with various godly virtues—which means what? How do we know if we are "full of goodness" (Romans 15:14), for example?

Think a moment about a water-saturated sponge. If we push down with our finger even slightly, water runs out onto the table. We immediately know what fills the interior pockets of the sponge.

The same is true of ourselves. We can tell what fills us on the inside by what comes out under pressure. (Larson, 22)

We make a great mistake when we decide to take the *exhortations* of God's Word lightly. When we willingly receive the Word of God into our hearts, our lives will be transformed. Is the Word transforming your life today?

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