



## HG19: James 2/6 'Listening and Doing'

James 1:19-27

### Home Group Sermon Notes

20th September 2009 - Revd Warner Pidgeon

I once opened a meeting in prayer and referred to those words 'everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry' (1:19). Afterwards a man approached me and said, "Warner if we were all to do that we wouldn't achieve much would we." As it happened I didn't have a quick answer. I was *very* slow to speak! In fact I don't think I said anything in reply, but when I thought about it later it seemed clear to me that if we were all quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry we would actually achieve far more for the kingdom of God. We would hear and understand God better, we would hear and understand one another better, and we would be better equipped to do God's will.

St Paul precedes this by saying, 'my dear brothers [and sisters], take note of this' (1:19). In other words, this is important! Paul says, 'Nota Bene', NB; and whereas it goes against the grain of our generation where people are encouraged to express themselves, and everyone's opinions and beliefs are supposedly equal, this was accepted biblical wisdom: 'Be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry'. For example Proverbs 13:3, "Those who guard their mouths preserve their lives; those who open wide their lips come to ruin"; and Proverbs 29:20, "Do you see someone who is hasty in speech? There is more hope for a fool than for anyone like that"; and Ecclesiastes 7:9, "Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools."

God gave us two ears & one mouth. Could that mean that proportionally we are made to be able to listen twice as much as we speak? Certainly there have been times when that thought has helped me to not only bite my tongue but also to focus on the person speaking to me as if for that moment he or she is the most important person in the world; and I guess if God has put them in front of me then at that moment they are my priority: Quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

James continues, "For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires" (1:20), and later says, "If anyone considers himself religious and does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless" (1:26). More often than not anger shows itself or reveals itself through words said and through actions too.

Unlike me, Jesus was consistently able to get angry without sinning. In John's gospel we read that Jesus entered the Temple in Jerusalem, and upon seeing it was being used as a farm shop and a crooked foreign exchange bureau (John 2: 13-17) he got angry! However we also read in the letter to the Hebrews (4:14-16) that although Jesus was 'tempted in every way, just as we are – yet [he] was without sin'. Too often, in our anger, we sin because we speak too quickly, or we don't listen properly. Perhaps we speak or email without thinking an issue through.

I remember a situation where I was so cross with someone because I felt they had let me down, and I got my response badly wrong. I telephoned them and left a message on their answerphone – a message that was not thought out, and I then sent them an email pouring out my frustrations. Again, it was not thought out, and it was not ‘speaking the truth in love’ (see Ephesians 4:15); and so my anger was running contrary to the righteous life that God desires. What I should have done is listened – to myself, to God, and to the situation, and then slowly prepared to speak the truth in love in a constructive way.

Verse 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.” To ‘get rid’ is to throw away a soiled garment, to dispose of clothing that is deeply stained; and since James is referring to anger, the filth and evil he speaks of is the malice and hatred that can fester deep in a person’s heart.

Unless we recognise sin for what it is and reject it, then progress with God will be unlikely, hence the force of this verse lies in the words “humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.” Elsewhere ‘humbly’ is translated ‘in gentleness’, or ‘with meekness’. The Good News Bible translates it as ‘submit to God’. Probably the best way to hear this is to humbly submit to God in meekness. Meekness is a mark of those who receive the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:5), and James later writes this in chapter 3: “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom” (3:13).

Humbly accepting the word God plants in us leads us to action. We cannot then ‘merely listen to the word, and so deceive ourselves’ (1:22). We have to do what it says! God instructs us and leads us and shows us the way for a reason! There is great blessing when we hear the word and do it and continue to do it (1:25).

To summarise, it is not what we know that counts, it is what we do that counts. There are many professors, teachers of theology, and Vicars and Church Pastors and others who have masses of information *about* God crammed into their brains; but what is most important is whether we actually *know* God – whether we put the word of God, the will of God, into practice.

I wonder what situations you have been in recently where you were faced with a choice to listen to a person or a situation and decide whether or not to put God’s word, put the will of God into action. I wonder what situations you will face today or this week. Verse 27 of this Bible reading gives us a simple but easy to understand guide as to how we can put the will of God into practice. The question is: do we do it? “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.” God has good things for us to do! St. Paul encourages us to follow the maker’s instructions, made plain to us in his word, the Bible.

‘Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says’ (1:22). ‘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’ (1:27).

Are we translating our reading and our listening into doing? Are we quick to listen and slow to speak and slow to anger?

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## Home Group Discussion Notes

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COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

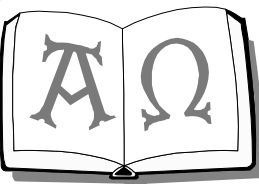
*Don't forget to take your Bible to House Group along with any previous/other notes that might be helpful.*

### Welcome/Icebreaker (10 mins)



### Looking Upwards - *Worship* (10 mins)

Songs of Worship; Prayers; Bible Readings; Meditations etc.



### Looking Upwards - *Bible Study* (40 mins)

Read through the above Bible reading (and any readings below and the references in the sermon notes) and answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss your answers in your Home Group.

- 1) Can you remember a time when you were listened to, or a time when you were not? Describe how you felt.
- 2) God gave us two ears and one mouth. Consider yourself. What might God be saying to you?
- 3) Jesus was consistently able to get angry without sinning. How about you?
- 4) Verse 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." What do you need to cast off and get rid of?

5) 'Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says'. In what area(s) of your life does this challenge you right now?

6) "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." How can we get better at this?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



### Looking Inwards - *Caring for each other* (15 mins)

Is there anything you would like to share with the group:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for help from the group?

*(Reflect with the Lord on your life at the moment and think if there is anything you would like to share and which you feel is appropriate. This is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however - 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!')*



### Looking Outwards - *Concern for others* (15 mins)

Is there anything concerning someone in: church; family; friends; or neighbours which you would like to share:

For Thanksgiving?

For Prayer?

Or for possible action by the group?

*(Please be careful not to pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared).*

