

Introduction

1. One of the things that's apparent in the book of James is that much of his readers trials were driven by the conflict they were experiencing with one another (lack of obedience, favoritism, cursing one another, jealousy and bitterness, quarrels and conflicts, complaints and speaking against one another, etc.)
2. In the first 18 verses, James has already told them the right way and the wrong way to handle trials:
  - a. The right way is to consider it all joy when facing trials and let endurance complete it's work and lead to spiritual maturity
  - b. The wrong way is to blame God and not recognize the role that one's own lust and sin play in trials
3. James will spend the rest of his letter addressing various areas of concern, different issues that were plaguing his readers, but before he does that he wrote these words (READ 1:19-20)
4. As I mentioned in our introduction, I believe this verse serves two purposes:
  - a. One is that it provides an outline for the rest of the letter:
    - 1) Quick to listen is addressed in 1:21 through all of chapter 2
    - 2) Slow to speak is addressed in chapter 3
    - 3) And slow to anger is addressed in chapters 4-5
  - b. A second purpose was to provide his readers with a proverb of sorts to help them overcome one of the primary drivers of their trials: the conflicts created by their behavior

A. The first thing James wrote is to be quick to listen

1. If we take this at face value, it simply means that we should be quick to listen to others, and this is especially important when dealing with conflict and trials (as James' readers were):
  - a. Proverbs 1:5: **"A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel."**
  - b. Proverbs 18:2: **"A fool does not delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own mind."**

- c. Proverbs 18:13: **"He who gives an answer before he hears, it is a folly and shame to him."**
- d. Listening helps prevent and reduce conflict because it demonstrates respect, shows a desire to understand, expresses patience, etc.

2. However, as I also noted in the introduction, James was a Hebrew and he was writing to Hebrews
3. This is important because in the Old Testament listening (hearing) is often equated with obedience—in fact, the Hebrew word shama is both the word for hear/listen and obey
4. Examples of this:
  - a. Deuteronomy 6:1-4 (notice the emphasis on obedience tied to listening and hearing)
  - b. Deuteronomy 4:30: **"When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the LORD your God and listen to (obey) His voice."**
  - c. Deuteronomy 12:28: **"Be careful to listen to (obey) all these words which I command you, so that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever, for you will be doing what is good and right in the sign of the LORD your God."**
5. The same principle is true with the Greek word James uses here which can also mean both listen and obey (Ephesians 6:1): **"Children, listen to (obey) your parents in the Lord..."**
6. So when James says here that we are to be "quick to listen" what he has in mind is being quick to listen to and obey the Word of God and we know this because that is the focus of the next section of his letter (READ 1:20-22)
7. It's amazing how many conflicts and trials could be avoided in life if we were all quick to listen to one another and quick to obey God and His Word

B. Next, James says we are to be slow to speak

1. Based on the context of chapter 3, when James refers to speaking here he has two things in mind:
  - a. First, just because we have a tongue doesn't mean we've learned to control it or use it properly:

- 1) Proverbs 10:19 says, “**When there are many words, transgression is unavoidable, but he who restrains his lips is wise**”
  - 2) Jesus said in Matthew 15:11: “**It’s not what enters into the mouth that defiles the man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles him.**”
  - 3) But, Proverbs 21:23 says, “**He who guards his mouth and his tongue, guards his soul from troubles**”
  - 4) That’s James’ principle right there—being slow to speak (guarding what we say) helps keep us from trouble
- b. The second thing James has in mind is that just because we have an opinion and want to share it doesn’t make us wise and understanding or qualified to teach or lead others:
- 1) There were apparently many among James readers who were seeking to be teachers and give wisdom and advice
  - 2) The problem was, they not only didn’t know how to control their tongues, but they were driven by jealousy and selfish ambition
  - 3) Their wisdom wasn’t from above but earthly, natural, and even demonic
  - 4) A perfect example of this is what we’ve seen with the explosion of social media: everyone wants to be an influencer and share their opinions, wisdom, and advice with the world
  - 5) But have you seen what Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. are filled with? And I’m not just talking about the content but the vitriol, arguing, bickering, name calling, etc.
2. We’d all be so much better off and have far less conflict and trials in our lives if we’d all just learn to be slow to speak, control our tongue, and when we do speak do it with Godly wisdom and knowledge

### C. Slow to Anger

1. Notice that James doesn’t say “**Don’t get angry**” but rather “**be slow to anger**”:
  - a. The Bible doesn’t prohibit or condemn anger in general

- b. We see throughout the Old Testament that God Himself gets angry, and there are at least four or five examples in the New Testament where Jesus got angry (e.g. twice when cleansing the temple)
  - c. In fact, Ephesians 4:26 says, “**Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger.**”
    - 1) Some suggest that this should be understood as “in your anger do not sin” (as the NIV) but that’s not grammatically or contextually supported
    - 2) Rather, Paul is referring to righteous indignation over sin within the body of Christ, and at times we should rightly be angry—just not let our anger also cause us to sin
2. What the Bible does condemn is self-righteous anger and when James says we should be “**slow to anger**” he has this kind of anger in mind:
- a. This is clear in verse 20: “**for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God**”
  - b. James point is that when we are quick to get angry, it doesn’t bring about righteous behavior or result in a righteous outcome—but that should be our goal

### Mom’s instruction on dealing with angry patrons

- c. Mom’s advice was actually Biblically sound:
- 1) Proverbs 15:1: “**A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.**”
  - 2) Proverbs 15:18: “**A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but the slow to anger calms a dispute**”

### Conclusion

1. In the coming weeks and chapters, James will expound on each of these as they relate specifically to the struggles and conflicts being experienced by his readers
2. However, his proverb of being quick to listen/obey, slow to speak, and slow to anger will serve us well no matter what the conflict or trial