

## **“A RELIGION OF HEARING AND DOING.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

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**Scripture Text: James 1:19-27**

### **Introduction.**

There are a lot of parents in this room this morning who can testify with me that it not just older people who are hard of hearing but also kids. In fact sometimes I think kids are even harder of hearing. You say something and it's in one ear and out the other. You repeat yourself and somehow it still doesn't get through.

Our kids are all old enough now that they like to remind their old parents of the things they heard over and over again growing up. One of my most famous and repeated sayings in our home was, “What we have here is a failure to communicate” (Paul Newman in Cool Hand Luke).

This morning's text is about eliminating failures to communicate when it comes to the Word of God.

### **Receive the Word, 1:19-21.**

Over the years when I have read these verses 19-21 I have always applied them to personal behavior. And of course that's not a bad thing to do, it is a good thing to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger when we are at home or school or work or in church, in meetings or conversations.

But that application misses another application that fits the context better.

I ended last week's sermon reminding us that all good and perfect gifts come down from heaven from God and the greatest of these good and perfect gifts is our salvation brought about by the Word of Truth.

And today James talks about how we are to receive this implanted Word of Truth. More than being some good advice about how to get along with others, this is sound advice about receiving the Word of God and how to make it bear fruit in our lives.

With regard to the Word of God James gives three imperatives, be quick to hear, be slow to speak, be slow to anger.

***This is all about how we should receive the implanted Word of God.***

Our very birth, our life and breathe, our existence and future depend on the Word of God. This gift is of priceless benefit, it should be received and handled as such. There is so much goodness of God in His Word that we should want to receive it well and remove whatever hinders our receiving it well. There are *three aids* to receiving the word well.

### *Quick to hear.*

Swift, ready, prompt, attentive. Ready to make the most of the opportunity, ready to receive.

**I Samuel 3:10** And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant hears.”

Hearing is the sense by which we are saved. In the OT the constant refrain is, “Hear, O Israel.” In the NT God says, “This is my beloved Son, listen to Him.”

**Romans 10:14, 17** How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

If you can't hear God, if you aren't listening to His Word, you are in trouble at the very core of your being.

We all have much to learn, we should all seize every opportunity to hear what the Spirit will say to us through His Word. Be quick to listen, quick to learn. Don't rush on, don't hurry things. Don't think yourself wise already. On this earth we will always be a student.

### *Slow to speak.*

It was the ancient stoic philosopher Epictetus who first noticed that we have two ears and one mouth and that we should use them in that proportion. Our ears are always open, our mouth has two lips to stand guard.

Don't be hasty or rash, or speak out of turn or before knowing the matter at hand. This is a call to put away impatience as you seek to know God and understand His will and ways.

Progress in our spiritual life increases the more we listen and the less we speak, the more we humble ourselves under the Word and the less we show off what we think about the Word.

Can you almost hear James saying, shut up and listen?

As long as God is speaking to us, it's a good time to keep our ears open and our mouths shut.

### *Slow to anger.*

How does this apply to giving and receiving God's Word? When do we have wrath toward God's Word?

Proud people get angry before God's Word. Self-righteous people get defensive when they are corrected or rebuked by the Word.

I am sure you have had ample opportunities to experience how anger and wrath have a way of closing our ears and our minds. It's hard to listen when you are mad, when you are all stirred up inside. Anger blocks our ears both in human relationships and in divine relationships.

People who are mad at God don't usually hear Him very well.

***Wrath does not produce righteousness.***

This is another way of saying that anger and wrath are seldom productive. They might make us feel better for a bit, but in the long run they don't serve us well.

Does anger improve our driving, does it improve our golf game, does it improve our parenting or communicating? Our anger does not bear fruit in Christ-likeness.

Jesus said of the leaders who were trying to kill him: "You seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you" (John 8:37). The word of truth was not implanted in them.

The Pharisees knew the Bible, but it had found no place in their hearts. You can go to a CRC church and to a Christian school and grow up in a Christian home, you can hear the Bible a thousand times, but if it finds no place in you, if you feel no need for it, if it isn't implanted in you, it is fruitless.

The one anger that is not sin is the anger that is at sin. But even in this we must guard our hearts, for that sin we are most angry at is often the sin we most frequently commit.

***Therefore ... receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.***

Meekness means ready to submit, teachableness, not cocky like you already know it all. When you open to read, when you listen to it being taught or preached, receive it, trust it, believe it, yield your spirit to it, hunger for more of it. Humble yourself before the Word of God.

The greatest imperative is to receive the Word, and all the rest of the imperatives are for making the path for that clear and unobstructed, quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger.

If the Word of God comes to us like seed then it needs to find good soil and not fall among the rocks and weeds of closed ears, open mouths, and hostility, anger and impatience.

The Word of God is a holy thing, it will not flourish where there are the rocks of a hardened heart and the weeds of continual unrepentant sin.

Never underestimate the power of the Word of God, it is able to save your soul from sin and death. When the Word of God comes in to save, it comes in to stay and continue to bear fruit.

If I am already saved by the Word and the Word stays, then why does it say receive what is already implanted?

In a sense as Christians we can talk about the Word in two ways, the *already implanted Word* and the *continually received Word*. It is as if the implanted Word is our lungs and the received Word is oxygen, both necessary to sustain life.

Breathe the Bible, breathe it every day. Don't receive it on Sunday and then hold your breath until next Sunday. It isn't enough oxygen, breathe it daily, receive it daily, for the sake of your life and soul.

**Psalm 1:1-3** Blessed is the man . . . [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Take this to heart, the Word of God is a great treasure to you, God's means to bring you salvation and hope and help as you receive it. But there is more than just receiving it.

### **Do the Word, 1:22-25.**

If you diligently plant a crop but nothing happens then something is wrong. There needs to be some tangible effect from your efforts. If the Word is implanted and takes root, there will be fruit. If there is no fruit, then we must question the implanting.

If you look into the mirror and walk away with your hair still a mess, shaving cream on your face, toothpaste on your mouth, then it wasn't a very profitable look in the mirror.

The purpose of Bible Studies and sermons and reading the Bible is not just to gain knowledge but to grow in maturity and to bear fruit in good works.

**Matthew 7:24, 26** "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. . . . 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

**Luke 11:28** But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

### **Share the Word, 1:26-27.**

I warned you James would be direct, in our face, blunt. He says there is such a thing as worthless or useless religion.

You can tell the doers from the hearers by their words and actions. Those who take the Word of God to heart control their tongue, control their desires, care about others.

Notice the balance between the outward doing and the inward doing, between the social justice and mercy ministry, the practical compassion and the personal purity and integrity and godliness.

Before James was telling us to watch our tongue before God and His Word. Now he is saying watch our tongue with others. We can be all righteous looking and then blow it with our mouth. We can have the appearance of religion and then open our mouth.

Brothers and sisters, take responsibility over your tongue, rein it in, bridle it, especially at home.

James mentions orphans and widows as specific examples in a more general category of those around us who are in need, who are oppressed. James mentions two trees in a forest of the least, the last, the lost, the lonely.

True religion cares for the outcasts, the down and out, the weak and helpless, the insignificant and unimportant, the fatherless, the orphans, the widows, those unable to defend themselves.

True religion cares about the homeless, about immigrants, it cares about the defenseless child in the womb and the defenseless senior saints who can no longer care for themselves.

Who do you know who is alone in grief or depression, who is alone in an addiction or health crisis? Who do you know who is in need? Is there someone who could really benefit from your presence, your kindness, your compassion?

I know there are many here who are doing just that. Yesterday a number from our congregation served and helped and showed care and compassion and there were a number who benefited. And it doesn't just happen once a year around here.

Take to heart what James is saying and ask God what He would have you to do to make your faith in Jesus more tangible, more concrete, more real, more fruitful, more neighborly, more Christ-like.

When I taught James in a Men's Study a couple of years ago I challenged the men who claim to be Christian to be vigilant in protecting women and children, physically and emotionally. And one way that needs to be said more and more these days is to protect them by not taking advantage of them on the internet through pornography.

And single men must protect women by not pressuring them for sex until they are married.

***What is being unstained by the world?*** How do you keep yourself from being unstained in today's world? We pick up dirt and germs every day. How do we get clean?

First, acknowledge that it is a struggle. Give up naiveté. It's a constant, unrelenting battle. Second, flee, run, put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. Third, pray, get help from God, Spirit, Word, others.

### **Application and conclusion.**

As you go out into the world this week remember first of all that because of the grace of God He has given you the gift of His salvation. Because of the grace of God He has implanted His Word in your hearts. And by His enabling grace as you continue to receive and feed on His Word, as you look into His Word, as you do His Word you will be able to bear fruit and make a difference in this broken world of ours.

When you encounter trials and troubles and roadblocks be quick to listen to God's voice and the counsel in His word, be slow to speak and slow to anger, keeping yourself from that which defiles, and give yourself to those in particular need. If you do this you will be blessed in your doing. Don't grow weary in your well-doing for in due time you will reap a reward from God.