

HOW IS YOUR HEARING? A STUDY OF CONTRASTS

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Introduction: Scripture Reading – James 1:19-27

A. The word of God is an extremely powerful book! It has the power to change & save souls!

1. The apostles and others in the first century demonstrated great faith in it's power!
 - a. As they went about preaching they were willing to suffer for it, even to the point of death! This demanded they totally believe in its message and trust its power!
 - b. They went to places known for immorality, idolatry, and many other forms of wickedness... Preaching the gospel with faith its message would change lives!
2. Hear Paul's words as he thinks on the power of the message of the cross! (**Rom 1:16-17**)
3. The gospel contains the same power today that it contained then – But we must realize that its power in us personally is dependant upon how we respond to its message!

B. This evening I'd like to ask you a question – How is your hearing? Not your physical hearing, but your spiritual hearing! How do you receive the words of the Lord?

I. The First Man – The Ungodly Response:

A. Upon hearing the word of God, he is quick to become angry:

1. In reality, this man isn't truly listening to God's word as reads & is taught (**James 1:19-20**)
 - a. Someone once said, "We have been given two ears and one mouth so we can hear twice as much as we say" – This man hasn't learned this lesson yet!
 - b. He won't stop talking, attacking, and defending himself to really listen to the truth!
 - c. The sad reality is that God cannot produce righteous things in and through a man like this! He responds to the teachings that produce righteousness with anger!
2. He may be quick to get angry with one who corrects him: (**Prov 12:15-16; 14:15-17**)
 - a. He may say or think, "Who are you to judge me! You've got your own problems! Mind your own business! It's just between me and God so go away!"
 - b. Whether it be a preacher, elder, Bible class teacher, or friend – When one points out that he is wrong he gets mad at that person – It quickly becomes personal!
 - c. He says hateful things to the person, treat them with disdain, refuse to be friendly to them, talk about them behind their back, or just plain ignores them
3. King Jehoiakim's wrathful response is the reality of James' words (**Jer 36:21-24**)

B. This man also refuses to recognize and admit his own weaknesses:

1. He deceives himself into thinking that he doesn't have problems that need fixed or that his problems really are no big deal! (**James 1:22**)
 - a. John wrote about a similar problem – If we try to claim that we have no sin we deceive ourselves & call God a liar! None of us are perfect! (**1 John 1:8, 10**)
 - b. James is describing a man who has reasoned away his righteousness... As he listens to God's word through his own logic he feels righteous when he's not!
 - c. He fails to make the application because he does not see how it applies to him
 - d. He says "I sure am glad you preached that lesson cause brother _____ needed it!" or "I wish brother _____ was here to hear that!" – I hope you heard it too!
2. This type of man likely practices a comparative based righteousness (**2 Cor 10:12, 17-18**)
 - a. He may realize he doesn't measure up to the standard revealed in God's word, but by comparing himself to others he doesn't feel the obligation to strive for that!
 - b. He or she thinks, "At least I'm not like brother _____ or sister _____" - I don't have the struggles and I don't sin near as big and often as they do!"
 - c. Maybe this person has their progress & spirituality praised by other people, so they may think they are fine because they have the approval of men!
 - d. Self-approval & approval of other men does not matter! It's not the commendation

- of men that we are seeking but the commendation & approval of God!
3. The Pharisees are a great example of this ungodly response (**Mk 2:16-17; Luke 18:9-4**)
 - a. Jesus is not telling the Scribes & Pharisees that they are “well” spiritually – No, they were fatally sick! He was describing how they saw themselves!
 - b. They were held in high regard by others as spiritual giants and they looked down on others as being terrible sinners and felt justified as a result!

C. Finally, the ungodly man hears the word of God and makes no changes:

1. James captures the absurdity of ignoring corrections we need to make (**James 1:23-24**)
 - a. It would be crazy for a person to look in a mirror, see they are a wreck, and yet walk away without fixing themselves & forgetting what they looked like!
 - b. We easily see the absurdity of this; however, we often do this on a spiritual level which is far worse than messy hair, a need to shave, or needing makeup!
2. While this man hears the same message as others, he soon forgets it! (**Heb 3:17-4:2**)
 - a. May be one who doesn't want to give up sin in his life – He hears the word of God, feels guilty, but as soon as he leaves the building those feelings are gone!
 - b. May be one who hears, but it goes in one ear & out the other... there's no change
 - c. So he hears sermons, reads the passages, and sits in on the classes day in and day out; however, the righteousness of God is never produced in him!
3. The Bible is full of examples of this... Every time it is a very sad occasion!
 - a. The rich young ruler wanted salvation to some degree, saw he must change, but when he realized the cost he walked away w/o obedience! (**Mark 10:17-22**)
 - b. Felix became fearful, but procrastinated as he waited for a more convenient time... procrastination is nothing short of disobedience! (**Acts 24:24-25**)
 - c. Agrippa heard Paul's testimony yet was only ALMOST persuaded! (**Acts 26:28**)

II. The Second Man – The Godly Response:

A. He receives the words of the Lord with meekness:

1. He listens to the word of God carefully and with a meek spirit (**James 1:19-21**)
 - a. Meekness is often defined by people as being “power under control” – We get command over ourselves and bring ourselves in subjection to another!
 - b. He is swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath – Even if the word of God hurts because it exposes his shortcomings, he appreciates it, and follows it!
 - c. He does not enjoy being corrected by others... But he appreciates the correction!
2. What James is describing here is an attitude of humility! (**James 4:6-10**)
 - a. James begins this chapter by describing an empty life plagued with troubles... what was wrong? Pride was keeping God's word from drawing them closer to God!
 - b. This man is not arrogant about his own righteousness or close minded about his faith, but has emptied himself spiritually – None of self and ALL of Thee!
 - c. This man responds to God's word with lamentation, mourning, and weeping... Why? Because God's word has exposed problems in his life!
 - d. The world would tell us the way up is up – God's way up is down... via humility!
3. As we study God's word we need to study it for the right reason – To draw closer to God through our lives and our knowledge of Him! (**Phil 3:8-11**)
 - a. We listen to God's word not just to learn a bunch of facts, win an argument with someone, or prove another wrong – But to learn God's will for me!
 - b. Why did Paul seek greater knowledge of Christ – He wanted to come to know His Savior better and become more like Him! - And this is the apostle Paul!
4. Josiah was a man who received God's word with meekness (**2 Kings 22:10-11**)

B. This man also is open to his weaknesses and shortcomings

1. Unlike the first man, he listens to God's word with a spirit of self-examination (**Js 1:21**)
 - a. This man listens to the word of God, regardless of where it comes from, and is listening carefully to how he can change his life to better please the Lord!
 - b. He sees filthiness & wickedness in his life & instead of ignoring it he lays it aside!

- c. As his life is lined up against God's word he is left saying, "I MUST CHANGE!"
- d. When this man listens to the word of God, unlike the first, it's able to save his soul!
- 2. He realizes that he is in a lifelong journey! (**Rom 1:17ff, I Cor 10:12; Heb 4:11-13**)
 - a. He won't allow himself to reach a point where he feels he has arrived spiritually!
 - b. No matter how many years he has been a Christian or how much he has done in God's kingdom, he does not rest because he knows the standard is Christ!
 - c. As he listens to God's word, even if its in a part of his life he feels he has under control, he listens closely for ways in which he can improve
 - d. Many people regard him as being a spiritual giant, but he always wants to improve!
- 3. Consider the example of Paul who is in many of our minds a spiritual giant, however, he never felt like he had attained to a level where he could retire spiritually (**Phil 3:12-16**)

C. Finally, he is not only a hearer of the word but also a doer:

- 1. In contrast to the man who looks in the mirror and forgets his appearance, this man looks into the mirror and corrects what is not right! (**James 1:25**)
 - a. The "perfect law of liberty" that James writes about is the word of God – The Bible
 - b. This man doesn't just casually glance into the mirror of God's word for a brief moment, but continuously gazes into it through reading and meditating on it!
 - c. He does not forget what the word of God says... He keeps its instructions fresh on his mind where he readily has access to it (like verses on the fridge)
 - d. Instead of just entering and leaving his mind without any true response... He listens to the word, meditates on it, and then follows it with trusting obedience!
- 2. The example of the Thessalonians – They received the word with JOY and became followers of the apostles and the Lord! (**1 Thess 1:5-8**)
- 3. James gives us an example of this principle – Controlling our tongue (**James 1:26**)
 - a. James says a lot about controlling our speech – Its hard to tame our tongue, its can kindle a great fire, its two faced to bless God while cursing others, etc
 - b. This tells us something – No matter how religious we think we may be... If we don't control our speech, it's all in vain! We can be lost just because of our speech!
- 4. The only way we can have pure and undefiled religion is by action! (**James 1:27**)
 - a. Two fundamental aspects of religion: Personal holiness & personal compassion
 - b. This is a responsibility that we should all take PERSONALLY! We correctly point out this passage is about an individuals duty and not the church's duty
 - c. It's to be fulfilled personally – Like with institutionalism... giving a little bit of money to some organization doesn't relieve of the responsibility to care in person!

Conclusion: This evening we need to examine our own selves and see what our hearing is really like... The sad reality is that many who fall into the category of the first person either will not realize it or will not care enough to change!