Quick to Hear, Slow to Speak and Slow to Anger. How can we model this for others?

James 1:19-20

***You know this, my beloved brothers and sisters. Now everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger; for a man’s anger does not bring about the righteousness of God.***

**“You know this, my beloved brothers and sisters.”**

What is it that we know? We are aware that God has given all that we need to live victoriously in Him. We can overcome the trials and temptations that attack us in this life. We can do this through the knowledge that God, through His will, has given us salvation by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

He has also given us new birth in the Spirit when we come to know Him, when we repent of our sins, when we acknowledge our need for a Savior, when we trust in Him, not ourselves, for our salvation.

The word of truth (Scripture) guides us in this new life. It provides us with all the knowledge we need to live according to the Spirit rather than the flesh.

He has made us His first fruits in that He has made us His special new creation through the Spirit. We are consecrated to Him just as He commanded Israel to consecrate the first fruits of their harvest to Him. We are special to Him and He loves us with the same love He has for His Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that we know all these things how should this have an impact on the way that we live? In verses 19-20 James will instruct his readers how they should live in the Spirit. The Epistle of James is a very practical writing because it provides believers in Christ with much instruction on how their lives should be different now that they have this new life in Christ.

**“Now everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, *and* slow to anger;”**

**Quick to Hear**

Can you think of a time in your life when you were too quick to speak and said something that you later regretted? I have shared with you that one of the ways that I struggle in communication is that I am very quick to speak before I allow someone else to finish what they are saying. When I do this I miss out on important information that I need to have before replying. I am continually trying to listen more than I speak, but this is a habit that takes much work to change. What we need to look at as we study this concept today is why it is so important for us as believers in Christ to be quick to listen, to be slow to speak and then to be slow to anger?

The Greek word for hear is akouo and when used in Scripture has the following applications: 1. to be endowed with the faculty of hearing, not deaf, 2. Also means to consider what is said or perceive the sense of what was said and 3. To learn by hearing. In this passage James is instructing his readers that the first thing they must do when communicating with others is carefully consider what is being said before reacting.

In preparation for this sermon, I consulted several theologians who have studied this passage and offered their viewpoints on it. For this part of the message, I would like to share what Matthew Henry has to say about being quick to hear. His perspective will help us as a church family to practice this attitude in the ways we relate with each other. Let us discuss 3 reasons why being quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger is so important.

1. *“It is our duty rather to hear God’s Word, and apply our minds to understand it, than to speak to our own fancies or the opinions of men, and to run into heat and passion thereupon.”* The new attitude that the Spirit gives us when He enters us is that He helps us not to be so hasty in the way that we speak with others. In the world today there are so many opinions regarding so many topics. Everyone wants to think that their view is right and therefore they take as many opportunities as possible to make their views known. It is not wrong to share an opinion regarding a topic, but the problem that can arise is that when someone wants to be right more than being in line with the will of God that is when being slow to hear can be a major problem. Matthew Henry is reminding us that the first step in being quick to hear is to listen to God’s Word first and then do whatever we can to try to understand it to the best of our ability. One way to do this is to always seek counsel from the Holy Spirit when we begin reading Scripture. A verse from the book of Psalms that Katie and I have found to be a prayer before studying Scripture is from chapter 119 verse 18 “**Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your Law.”** If we approach God’s Word with the attitude that He will enlighten us to His truth we will them be able to better listen to what the Word says.

The second piece of advice Henry gives is that we need to understand God’s Word rather than rely on our own opinions because when we do so it results in us relying on our own interests rather than the will of God. Someone who is slow to hear would rather speak first and have their opinions heard. Henry’s advice regarding such an attitude: *“Let not such errors as that of God's being the occasion of men's sin ever be hastily, much less angrily, mentioned by you (and so as to other errors); but be ready to hear and consider what God's word teaches in all such cases.”* Blaming God for the trials and temptations of this life is a very hasty accusation. This viewpoint is not Scriptural, so what we need to do is read God’s Word in its entirety to guide us into the truth. Let Scripture speak rather than infallible man.

1. The second point Henry makes is that *“It is our duty rather to hear how God explains his providences, and what he designs by them, than to say as David did in his haste, I am cut off; or as Jonah did in his passion, I do well to be angry. Instead of censuring God under our trials, let us open our ears and hearts to hear what he will say to us.”* When we are quick to speak rather than hear we will reach conclusions to our situations that are neither rational or accurate. One such example happened to me when I was looking for my first teaching job. I had several interviews but every time I was called after the interview I was told that I was not qualified for that position. I started to become impatient and annoyed. After my interview at Madison, I was offered the job almost immediately, but that was to be a Career Based Intervention instructor rather than Social Studies, which is really what I wanted. I accepted the job, but then almost did the wrong thing by accepting another job that was offered after that one. To accept the second job would mean I would have to go back on my word with Madison. Katie told me that was not the appropriate way to act and for me to stand by my word when I accepted the first job. I am so happy she helped me remember to do that because through that first job I was able to eventually end up coming back to Ashland. I was so quick to reject what God was calling me to because I didn’t think that job was right for me. By listening to my wife and being honest with the school I ended up having a great opportunity enter my life. That was not a trial, but what I can say is that after we have experienced a trial in life we must stand back and look at what God is saying to us in that situation. Consult His Word and pray asking for the wisdom to come from Him. When we do so we will have the proper perspective. This attitude supports the Proverb **“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight” (3:5-6).**
2. *“Here we may observe that, whenever matters of difference arise among Christians, each side should be willing to hear the other. People are often stiff in their own opinions because they are not willing to hear what others have to offer against them: whereas we should be swift to hear reason and truth on all sides and be slow to speak any thing that should prevent this: and, when we do speak, there should be nothing of wrath; for a soft answer turneth away wrath.”*This third point made by Henry really hits hard. One of the most difficult aspects of the church is that it is made up of many different people who have different opinions and convictions that guide their lives. I grew up in a congregation that eventually fell apart because many people were unwilling to discuss differences of opinion that they had with others in the congregation. The issue of contention that split apart the church was a pastor who had been sowing seeds of division in the church. He developed a following by half of the church. Those who did not agree with him were treated as unfaithful followers of Christ and were therefore being chastised because of their different opinion. Our congregation has recently decided to withdraw from the United Methodist Church. I know this decision was not unanimously made and that there were differences of opinion on the issue. As we work together to establish a church constitution and by-laws guiding us in the future let us remember that doing this kind of work can only be fruitful if we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us through the process. Rather than being stiff in our opinions we need to take the time to lovingly listen to each other and to hear all sides of an issue before deciding. After listening to each other in love we will respond in kindness towards each other rather than with anger.

**Slow to Speak**

Being slow to speak means that we will listen first before making any rash judgments or get angry about what we heard. This is not easy to do because of our nature of being rebellious towards God we want to have things our own way. Even Burger King gets their customers excited for the product by telling them they can “have it your way.” Jesus dealt with this issue in His ministry several times, but one of the most powerful situations was His discussion with Peter before He went to Jerusalem to face His death. Please read with me **Matthew 16:21-23 “From that time Jesus began to point out to His disciples that it was necessary for Him to go to Jerusalem and to suffer many things from the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and to be killed, and to be raised up on the third day.  And *yet* Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, “God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You!”  But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me; for you are not setting your mind on God’s purposes, but men’s.”** I know that it is easy for us reading this passage to get a little impatient with Peter. However, we must remember that Peter was just speaking in haste because he did not understand what Jesus was telling Him and why His death was important.

I have to say that I have been very happy to join a congregation who love each other and can discuss things no matter what our individual opinions may be. All of you who attend worship with us are cherished, loved, and welcomed in the body of Christ. The first thing we must all remember is that we have been forgiven in the name of Jesus Christ and that we all have dignity, worth and value. With that being said, I want to assure each of you that no matter what your preferences are regarding the way to worship, conduct communion, or study the word your opinions matter to us, and our church family will always take the time to listen to you.

**Slow to Anger**

The third component of living in love and respect towards others is to be slow to anger. When we think of anger I know that all of us can remember a time when we have become angry and then allowed that anger to control our reaction to a situation. Just the other day a student and I were discussing anger and the student said something very profound. “I must control my anger, not let it control me.” There are two types of anger that we see being shown in Scripture. The righteous anger of God which was shown when His people disobeyed Him. The other kind is anger that comes out of the selfish desire for revenge after someone was wronged. This second type of anger is what James is referring to in this verse. When we get angry we are not looking at things the way God does and therefore we act in a way that is not honoring Him. This happened in the book of Genesis (chapter 34) when the sons of Jacob took revenge on the city of Schechem because the prince of that city had taken their sister Dinah and raped her. Rather than allowing God to deal with the city in His own way the brothers plotted to have the men of the city become circumcised so that they would be weakened and easier to defeat. Then the brothers attacked the city killing everyone. They did this because of their anger and as an act of revenge. Later Jacob scolded his sons because they had brough dishonor to the name of God. When we face a trial and believe that we have been wronged we must first listen to God through prayer and reading His Word, receive counsel from someone whom we trust who also trusts God’s word and then we must take some time to allow the counsel we receive to give us wisdom to make the right decision before acting. If we do so we will make a better decision and bring honor to God because we have acted in a calm and rational manner.

**Conclusion**

Today as we conclude our study let us take a few moments to consider this passage when establishing the future of this congregation. What I am about to share with you I have already shared with church council, but I would also like to share this with all of you today. All churches must conduct the business of the congregation but do it in a way that glorifies God. As we move forward in establishing our constitution and by-laws let us keep these things in mind. Let us discuss the differences between doctrine, conviction, and preference.

1. Primary doctrine- Primary doctrine deals with the essential elements of the Christian faith that are necessary for someone to be a Christian. Examples of this would be: The trinity, Jesus Christ being the Son of God, Jesus Christ literally rose from the dead, and that Christ paid the penalty for our sins through His death on the cross. These are the beliefs that we all hold in common. There are usually very few disagreements in this level of doctrine.
2. Secondary doctrine- deals with issues that are clearly addressed in Scripture, but also where believers in Christ may have other opinions on these subjects. Some examples include: the mode and method of baptism, how people come to salvation (Armenian- we choose God or Calvinism- God chooses us), or whether a congregation should be independent or part of a hierarchal church. We may have disagreements over these issues, but these disagreements need to be discussed openly in love and then after consideration we will decide what the church needs to do based upon the consensus of the majority. There are more disagreements at this level because people have been raised differently and have strong opinions on how things should be done.
3. Conviction: Based on various teachings in Scripture, we come to reasonable conclusions that bind our consciences, but are not binding to others. Some examples: what it means to be modest, views on alcohol, use of debt, etc. More disagreements take place at this level because people can be very opinionated. We should never allow our personal conviction to be used to judge the salvation situation of others.
4. Preferences: What you prefer, not at all reasonably defendable from scripture. Not right, not wrong, just you. Examples: style and type of music used in worship, how the church building is decorated, where the church family meets, etc. This level is where most church disagreements take place. May we never allow our personal preferences to dominate what we do as a church family. Our guide must be primary doctrine, but we may lovingly disagree on the other levels keeping in mind that the church’s work is to carry out the great commission.

No matter what trials or challenges we may face as a church, let us always be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger with each other. By doing so we show that we are disciples of Christ and others will know us by our love.