

But don't you suppose that is *exactly* the kind of angry and defensive objection James was trying to prevent? No one ever objects to what they *know* to be the truth. We only object when we *suspect* something may be false. **But hard truths are only seen to be true when we sit with them awhile. Hard truths are only received when we receive them with "meekness."** Sure, there may be a time to object. There may be a time to "speak," but we must be "slow" to do so. There may even be a time to get angry about something that has been said, but we must be even slower about that reaction. Before we speak, and especially before we get angry, we must be "quick to hear."

As I said in the beginning, these words from James 1:19 can be helpful in all sorts of situations. After all, it is *never* wrong to "be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger," but it is especially important when someone is trying to correct our lives with the word of truth. So, the next time a preacher or teacher preaches something that "steps on our toes," let's be *slow* to say, "I disagree with that," and be *quick* to ask ourselves, "What if that is true?"

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Marietta church of Christ

8150 Driggers St.
Jacksonville, FL 32220

Times of Worship

Sunday:

9 am - Bible Classes / 10 am - Worship / 5 pm - Worship

Wednesday:

7 pm - Bible Study/Worship

Evangelist: Devin Barber

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Glad Tidings

December 18, 2022

Quick to Hear, Slow to Speak, Slow to Anger James 1.19 Re-Examined

Some passages of Scripture lend themselves to being easily taken out of context. Their meaning seems to be self-evident and their context seems to be inconsequential. One such passage is James 1:19, "...be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Seems pretty simple and straightforward, doesn't it? But of all the ways we apply this verse, we tend to overlook its primary application.

The Apparent Meaning

When read apart from its context, this verse seems to be most applicable to interpersonal relationships. It very well could be helpful advice when dealing with a friend, family member, or neighbor. It might be good marital advice or help children deal with their feelings.

It might help to deescalate a conflict or an argument. It might help someone avoid jumping to conclusions or making unfair assumptions about people. It might keep us from sticking our foot in our mouth.

Though these words could certainly prove true and helpful in many different situations, James seemed to have none of these in mind when he pinned these words. And though we often apply these words to a myriad of situations, we often fail to apply them to the very situation James did have in mind.

Considering the Audience

As I noted in my book, *Beyond the Verse*, concerning the book of James:

"James seems to be writing to the kind of Christians who think very highly of themselves; the kind of people who consider themselves to be wise, religious, and capable teachers. They are critical and judgmental. They want to live comfortable lives. They envy wealth and scorn poverty. They believe themselves to have a lot of faith and a lot of wisdom, but what they really have is a lot of words."

James' audience was eager to teach, but they actually needed to be taught. They had a lot of opinions and a lot of thoughts, but those opinions and thoughts were not manifesting themselves in love and good works. They seemed to be content with talk, rather than action. Which is why, it seems, James had to remind them, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (James 1.26-27)

In other words, they needed to stop *talking* about religion and start *practicing* religion.

But it's very hard to teach people who think they have all the answers. When anyone presumptuously believes they ought to be the teacher (see James 3:1-5), rather than the student, it's very hard to teach that person anything.

Examining the Immediate Context

Now that we've talked about the audience, let's consider the immediate context: James 1.17-21

In context, James is describing the "the word of truth" and the process by which it saves. Like Jesus (Luke 8:11), James seems to be using a seed metaphor to describe the word of truth. When the word of truth is "implanted" in us, it makes us "a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." As God's new creatures, we can experience salvation and the righteousness of God.

Receiving and being transformed by the word of truth not only requires repentance, but also "meekness." The word meekness is a word we desperately need to understand, but it has a lot to do with **not being defensive**. When we feel someone is accusing us of wrongdoing, we have a tendency to lash out defensively. But this tendency to lash out can keep the word of truth from being implanted and prevent us from being saved.

So, when James says, "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger..." he is telling them not to angrily and defensively close their ears to the word of truth, preventing it from doing its saving work. James knows that his audience will likely feel an urge to say, "I disagree" or "I object" or "That's not true" every time he tries to warn them about their actions and bring the truth to their hearts. He knows that their defensive anger will "not produce the righteousness of God."

Applying the Passage to Our Lives

In the age of social media, when nearly everyone can presume to be a teacher, speaking is easier than listening, bridling the tongue is harder than ever, and defensive anger is never in short supply, James' message is incredibly relevant to each and every one of us. When someone is trying to speak truth to us, when someone is trying to teach us, when someone is trying to correct us, "be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger."

I can already hear the objections, "But that's only when they are speaking the word of truth! I already know "they" (whoever "they" are) are not speaking the word of truth!"

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