



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

To Listen Quickly

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Review

A normal question to ask at this point is how can we be sure that God is not responsible for sending us our temptations, and He only sends trials to perfect our souls? Armed with a little dangerous theology someone could suggest that God is ultimately in charge of everything so He is sending the temptation and behind the evil.

An example may help explain: It is possible to covet any good thing and turn it into a temptation. We can be jealous over someone else's remarkable relationship with the Lord, or their biblical awareness, and those obviously wonderful things are transformed into temptations. The fault lies within our sinful and covetous natures. The fault is not in God's goodness.

James 1:19-21

¹⁹ My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, ²⁰ for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. ²¹ Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

My dear brothers, take note of this:

Again we are reminded that his message is to us, who are brothers and sisters in the Lord. And it is we who are told to "take note" of these words.

Everyone should be quick to listen,

Everyone is specifically referring back to "dear brothers." So, "dear brothers" specifies a certain audience, but within that particular group, everyone is included in the admonition. If you are a Christian and you are reading these words, then the instructions were written for you.

Believers in Christ are people required to be good listeners. We mistakenly think of listening as a passive exercise. Too often we do not really listen at all. Often, when someone is speaking, we are really listening to our own inner voice, trying

to formulate the next response. Our minds are more directed toward ourselves. Being quick to listen implies a readiness to focus on other people and what they are saying.

This is important on so many levels. The principle has application to following instructions, heading highway signs, paying attention to loved ones, and even paying attention to what your own body is telling you. It is a very significant problem, and we need to slow down and pay attention.

slow to speak...

Slow speech obviously does not mean to speak with a slow cadence. James is saying our words should be measured, evaluated, wise, and full of love (Ephesians 4:15). Words have amazing capacities to exert a strong force in the world around us. Trials can be transformed into evil temptations by our reaction to them, and words can be instruments of good or evil.

Slow to speak is used by James primarily to deliver a simple message—big talkers are seldom quick to hear. We cannot not hear and talk at the same time and James tells us to put our best effort into the listening and to measure our speech carefully.

and slow to become angry,

If words are used with deliberation, our anger should be subject to the same slowness of response. It is more common for our anger to be an expression of our "self-importance, self-assertion, intolerance, and stubbornness."²¹ Such anger is sin and we should not go there. There is a righteous anger that takes up the cause of injustice, spiritual and moral purity, and the defense of all things good. But, this is not the anger James is speaking to. He is well aware that most anger flows from ungodly motives.

Once again we are reminded of our responsibility. Anger can be controlled even admitting some are more skilled than others at keeping temper in its proper place. James reflects the teaching of Jesus when He says our evil behaviors spring out

BIBLE STUDIES

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James

of wicked hearts. James is saying slow down and do not let your deceitful heart have rule over you words and emotions. Live at a higher level.

for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.

Man's anger means fleshly anger, not centered in God's will. What a sad thing that our angry passion can be mistakenly thought of as righteousness. James even takes it a step further and says that we can wrongly attribute our sinful ways to a godly lifestyle that He desires. It is not a new problem—all we have to consider is the story of Cain and Abel. From the beginning people have wrongly masqueraded their darkness as light, but God is not fooled. Believers have God's light and, therefore, are required to examine their thoughts and behaviors by God's standards and His Word.

Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent

James is a man of action. He obviously understands that the inner life is the seat of our wrong desires, but as we are armed with the truth, he calls us to act upon what we know to be right. He also says to get rid of it all. Obviously, this is a call to a high and unattainable standard, but the direction is certain. The moral filth and evil is prevalent. It is really a sad and sobering thought that such wickedness is part of us. It is, in many ways, the air we breathe and move in, and so we can become numb to its influence. We must be on guard and not get too cozy with ungodliness.

The imagery of “get rid of all moral filth” is a picture of taking off dirty clothes and laying them aside. Paul uses the same word translated as “put off,” *You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires (Ephesians 4:22).*

and humbly accept the word planted in you,

Here the standard is set in place. We evaluate everything by the word that is a part of our new selves as a people born of the Spirit.

This is humbling because we do tend to think of ourselves as at least above average. Our conscience is in some ways innate, but it can grow away from or toward that which is right and true. Hearts can be seared and hardened to righteousness, or hearts can be softened and inclined to accept the word.

We grow in the right direction when we are nourished with the right food—God's word. The natural world is filled with examples of the necessity of being replenished with good nourishment. Our bodies will become sick and die if we do not feed them properly. Even our lawns need regular feeding of minerals and nutrients to stay vibrant and green.

... which can save you.

Daniel Doriani offers a good explanation of this saving work:

In the New Testament, salvation has three aspects.

- *Salvation is a past event, for Christ accomplished our salvation in the past. We receive that salvation the day we believe (Titus 3:5)*
- *Salvation is a future event, because our deliverance is never complete until Christ returns, judges men and angels, sends evildoers away from his presence, and restores the heavens and the earth Romans 5:9-10).*
- *Salvation is a present reality, something we seize and work out day by day (Philippians 2:12).²*

In this text, James is concerned with the present reality of salvation. God's word sanctifies us by helping us see ourselves as a separate people, helping us grow by His Spirit, and giving us a standard as a measure of holiness. With everything we need at our disposal, James says, “Now go and do the right thing.”

Slow down and think about this...

1. What are some practical ways you can slow yourself down and listen before speaking?
2. To what or whom should you be listening?

1. Alec Motyer quoted by Daniel M. Doriani, *Reformed Expository Commentary, James*, (P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ, 2007), p. 47.

2. *Ibid*, p. 49.