

April 25, 2021

Am I a Servant of God

"My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life God desires. 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." James 1:19-21

Saving faith will always be obvious in the lives of those who are truly being saved by God's grace through the way we live and how specifically in how we treat others. James wants believers to understand this truth, "*...faith without deeds is dead.*"

So, the challenge to each one of us who claims to follow Jesus is to make sure that our lives reflect our faith in every way. This is, James would say, obvious in the way we manage conflict. In our present culture conflict over nearly anything has become almost a universal opportunity to respond in anger and rage.

True believers cannot continue to rage. The Apostle Paul will make it clear that believers need to rid themselves of rage. He writes, "*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious; sexual immorality, impurity, debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy, drunkenness, orgies and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*" (Galatians 5:19-21)

No matter what our society may tell us, as believers we must rid our lives of anger and rage, but how do we even begin to accomplish this? James, the ever practical, shows us the way. He writes, "*... be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*" If we could learn to interact with others as James commands we would discover that managing conflict is much, much easier and our anger and rage will disappear.

Be quick to hear: The simple truth is most of us are horrible listeners. We hear little or nothing of what most people say to us and we are not talking about a physical malady here. That same self-serving nature that is the source of so much of our sin is also the source of our inability to actually hear what others are saying. In nearly every conflict, and we experience literally dozens of conflicts every day, we start out wanting something, so our conflicts are sourced in the fact that those with whom we relate do not want the same things that we want, and conflict results.

How do we deal with these conflicts? We state our needs or desires or beliefs and pretty much ignore what others might want, need desire or believe. We actually do not even hear them. When they don't immediately capitulate to our demands we restate those needs again usually more loudly and accompany them with all of the reasons that our needs, desires and beliefs are RIGHT.

When that doesn't get us what we want we become angry and eventually explode in rage to try to WIN. Except, of course, no one wins. Overcoming this pattern which most of us practice is very hard. It begins with a change in purpose. My task in any conflict is not to get what I want, or to drive home my beliefs, or to win the fight. My task is to find out what that other person needs or wants or what they actually believe. I can only learn those things when I shut up and listen.

Be slow to speak: Words can either edify or they can destroy relationships and nothing matters as much to our God and Father as do relationships. Once words leave our lips we can never

retrieve them nor can we control where they go and who they impact. The best way to avoid letting our words destroy our very souls is to trap them in a closed mouth.

Be slow to become angry: The outcome of improved listening and controlled words is improved control of our anger. And, James would remind us again in rest of our context for today that true believers must do what the word says. When we don't he compares us to a man who looks in a mirror and then goes away and forgets what he looks like.

When you and I look into the mirror of Scripture we should see only ourselves and those things that we need to work on in our own lives. If we fail in this we risk developing a fatal case of 'plankitis'. A true servant of God will always be admitting and accepting responsibility for their own struggles and have very little, or honestly, no time at all for correcting the rest of the world.

Counting other people's
sins
does not make you
a saint