

I. From Hypocrisy to Integrity

²⁶ Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless.

²⁷ Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

- James 1:26-27 -

Religion - or ‘Devotion’ - that God our Father Accepts:

- 1) It cares for the poor. *Note:* ‘orphans and widows’ are two of the four major categories of the poor in the Old Testament.
- 2) It “...*is not **polluted by the world***” (James 1:27b). What James means may not be exactly what we expect by this phrase.
 - a. “...[N]ot polluted by the world means that it is not seeking security or advancement in terms of what is valued by people in the world. Because it does not love the world, there is no need to hold on to money. Therefore, such people can be generous and give freely.”¹ – Peter Davids. One of the key areas of ‘the world’ as James defines it is the drive for security through wealth, or through favouring the wealthy because of the desire to ride coattails - as we’ll see in James 2.
 - b. Another way we can compromise the integrity of our faith is by aiming to accomplish what God wants through anger - through unchecked violence, through our words. We can be disciplined by the ‘Twitter-sphere,’ or the 24-hour news cycle, the ‘raging’ that is often front and centre in political discourse. So, ‘don’t be polluted’ by that way of being - don’t be swept up into ‘rage-machine.’

II. From Self-Deception to Honesty

The opposite of hypocrisy is Integrity – Wholeness - Consistency across all areas of life. Do you live what you claim? Is there alignment between your stated beliefs and values and what you regularly practice?

The truth is all of us are fractured to some extent. That’s what sin does. It ‘breaks apart,’ it ‘dis-integrates’ what was intended to be whole; and Jesus has come - has let His life be broken apart - so He can put us back together - heal our fractured selves.

¹ Davids, Peter H. (3 October 2013). *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: The Epistle of James*. Eerdmans.

Twice in our text, James warns against how we can “...deceive ourselves...” (James 1:22 & 26).

Self-Awareness is a Christian Virtue

Self-Awareness - the ability to accurately assess our own thoughts, words, attitudes and behaviours - and just be honest about it.

James tells us what to do with self-deception:

“...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 [or ‘heal you’ as it could be translated].” - James 1:21

How are we healed of our anger, of our self-deception? Open ourselves to God’s healing through Jesus; and when we do, that calls us to live in consistency with what Jesus has said - to hear and obey His word.

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”
- James 1:22 -*

Take Home: It’s possible to read the Bible regularly - to memorize great swaths of it - to lead Bible studies - to stand on stage and preach from the scriptures, week in and week out, and not ‘do what it says.’ What then counts? As Paul puts it, what, “...counts is faith expressing itself in love” (Galatians 5:6). Hear – Yes - But then *do it*. Let it change you. That’s the consistency - the Integrity.

There weren’t many mirrors in the ancient world; so, if you did happen to catch a glimpse of yourself, you might quickly forget what you look like. That’s what it can be like, James says, about hearing God’s word. You might catch a glimpse of it, say, ‘Oh that’s interesting,’ but then forget all about it and walk away unchanged.

James says to pay close attention:

*“But whoever **looks intently** into the perfect law that gives freedom, and **continues in it - not forgetting** what they have heard, **but doing it** - they will be blessed in what they do.”
- James 1:25 -*

The perfect law that brings freedom - All of the Hebrew Scriptures, as interpreted by Jesus, and all that Jesus Himself taught. It can be summed up as, Jesus does, with the phrase: ‘Love God, and love others’ (Matthew 22:37-40).

III. From Anger to Humility

*“My **dear [or beloved]** brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.”*

- James 1:19-20 -

A. Feeling and Expressing Human Anger

Often anger seems like the only legitimate place to go when we feel powerless. Think about the community James is addressing - they're feeling scared - they're feeling worried. Perhaps the way they respond is, well, to get angry about it - and express it with harmful words. Theologically, our anger and the negative expressions of it, that amounts to a lack of trust in God. It's a way to try and gain control, rather than - following the example of Jesus - who “...*he [Jesus] entrusted himself to him who judges justly,*” as we read in 1 Peter 2:23.

Giving expression to our anger - in words or gestures or tones - in angry outbursts ‘works;’ but, as James says, it doesn’t result in what *God wants*.

*“**Human anger** does not produce the righteousness [or ‘justice’, the ‘right-way’, ‘the kingdom way’] that God desires.”*

- James 1:20 -

B. Fully Integrated Personhood

*“Everyone should be quick to **listen**, slow to **speak** and slow to become angry.”*

- James 1:19b -

The first two elements are what we do with our *body*. *They are physical - Outward*. The inward, emotional element of anger is important to deal with, but the order matters. You start with your body.

By using this order James maintains an important aspect of his Biblical way of viewing the human person - fully integrated in body and soul.

Against Gnosticism: In ancient Greek philosophy, and still today in much of our thinking (even among Christians), there was a view called Gnosticism. Essentially this means a division of body and soul. Like, what *really matters* is the ‘soul’ part of you. The inward you is the ‘real you.’

Throughout the Bible a human is a ‘soul/bodied thing.’ You cannot break these two apart or treat them as separate things. In fact, the first major heresy that Christians had to deal with and denounce was this gnostic tendency.

“The first two commands James gives in this section are concerned with how the follower of Christ uses his [of her] *body* - only then does he move to the emotional aspect of anger or its source in the heart. The order and combination of James’ commands reveal his biblical commitment to the connection between body and soul - far from the Gnostic tendency of the contemporary American [and Canadian] church, which rarely imagines a character flaw that “quiet time” [Bible reading and prayer] can’t solve...

...James directs his readers to root out their hearts anger by changing what they do with their ears and mouths. By listening first and speaking only after deliberation, our body’s participation in the sin of anger will be gradually shifted, and our heart’s posture will follow.”² - Jeffrey Meyers

C. A Note on Anger

Anger is an emotion we feel, and feelings aren’t themselves ‘moral.’ For example, Paul says in Ephesians 4:26a, “*In your anger do not sin.*”

Paul is saying, ‘When that anger rises up in you watch that you don’t express it in sinful ways.’ Same thing for James. He doesn’t say, ‘Never get angry;’ but, ‘be *slow* to anger.’

God is described in Exodus as being *slow* to anger. God is patient.

James wants us to become like God. That’s the ‘maturity’ goal that’s at the centre of this whole letter. As we see in our text, it’s often through our words that we let our anger out in sinful ways.

1. “Quick to Listen”

Listening doesn’t come naturally. It takes discipline to say, ‘Tell me more about what you’re thinking - what you’re feeling;’ and then to really pay attention. It’s costly in time and in mental and emotional energy. It’s especially difficult when we are feeling upset about something.

² Meyers, Jeffrey. (28 March 2022). *Wisdom for Dissidents: The Epistle of James Through New Eyes*. Athanasius Press ISBN-13 978-1735169095

Almost every conflict is radically changed when I just start with, ‘Hey, tell me more about what you’re thinking, what you’re feeling,’ and then just actively listening.

When someone feels heard - feels understood, it lowers the temperature. In almost every situation, when I start with good listening, I am better able to love and serve that person. Listening is loving.

2. “Slow to Speak”

We can’t listen when we’re talking. We can’t hear others if our mouth is moving. Two ears, and one mouth.

The wisdom here is to be patient - to pause - to not just react. Taking a break when we feel upset - of 10 minutes, 2 hours, a day or two in some case - that can give our brains and bodies time to cool off.

It might *feel good* in the moment to quip back; but in a conflicted moment, it will not produce what pleases God.

Any conversation that is potentially conflicted – or could be misconstrued as mean or hurtful – does not happen on a screen.

Texts, Direct Messages, Social Media comment sections - are only for sharing mundane information, or memes and cat videos. Nothing in the mode of conflict. Even emails - again, for information purposes only. I do not do ‘conflict’ over email.

Two key reasons:

- a. The mediation of a screen dehumanizes the person we are in conflict with. Without their face and body - the entirety of who they are as a person - in the room, it is far too easy to treat the other person as less than human - to not recognize the image of God in the other.
- b. It’s also too easy for miscommunication to happen; since - by far – it’s body language and tone of voice that say more than our words.

3. “Slow to Become Angry”

The bodily practices - opening our ears, slowing our tongues - are key first steps to the third, internal, emotional element.

- i. Being ‘slow to anger’ comes as we recognize our call to love others. We won’t be explosive in anger when we ***remember the God-given humanity of the other.***
- ii. We grow in patience when we ***remember our purpose - to reflect the love of God to others.*** That moves us away from defending our ego, and toward our mission to share the gospel.
- iii. There is a place for ***confessing our sin to God*** in this area. Jesus has mercy for you today, and it will mean ***confessing and apologizing*** to those who have been hurt by our anger.
- iv. For some, learning new ways forward might also include ***getting help from a therapist.***
- v. ***Give permission*** to your close friends or your spouse to say, ‘Hey, seems like you’re getting a bit heated here.’ We help each other when we are starting to get frustrated.

Life Group Discussion and Reflection

Open Up

In what ways do we often see an interplay between religious hypocrisy and words of anger?

What impacts do you see angry words having on the witness of Christians in your experience?

Dig In

1. **Read James 1:19-27.** In the message we noted that the first ‘steps’ James mentions involve practices that involve our bodies - our ears and our mouths.
 - a. Why, in your experiences, is listening such a key part in controlling our anger? (How has it been important when you’ve listened well, or had others listen well to you?)
 - b. How, in your experience, does holding your tongue - being patient before you speak - help in conflicted situations?
 - c. In what ways are you challenged or encouraged toward ‘quick listening’ and ‘slow speech?’ How do you want to grow in this area?
2. In the message, we heard of Pastor Dave’s own practices of not doing ‘conflicted conversations’ through the mediation of screens (Texts, Social Media comments, Email). The two reasons he gave were that the mediation of text on a screen can tend to ‘dehumanize’ the interaction, and that too much is lost in communication. What practices would you like to adopt going forward to help you communicate in wise ways?
3. James reminds us that it’s possible to hear the word of God (the perfect law that brings freedom, which is the teachings of Jesus and his interpretation of the OT), but not be changed by it. To not ‘do it’ is a self-deceptive way to live. ‘Doing it’ comes with the promise of God’s blessing. How do you think we experience this blessing when we enact the teachings of Jesus?

Prayer

Take time to thank God for His wisdom that we are given through the book of James. Ask God for help to ‘live out’ what you discussed tonight. Pray for any needs in your Life Group.