

James has shown us in verses 14 and 15 that within every person there are ungodly desires that result in sin and end in death. But then in verses 16 to 19 he tells us not to be deceived by those desires because God has good gifts for us. His Word brings about new life in us resulting in us being the firstfruits of his creatures. We are dedicated to God for His glory. He has been laying out what the life of the new believer should look like. First, we must face trials with joy knowing that God is using them for our good. Secondly, we should resist temptation and in wisdom prefer the good gifts of God to satisfy our souls rather than the passing pleasures of this world, the greatest of which is Jesus. Now he has come to the third result of new life, dealing properly with anger. This new nature we are born into through Christ is to prevail over our old nature and its desires (Romans 8:13ⁱ; Galatians 5:17ⁱⁱ).

¹⁹ Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; James 1:19 Know this! The original language might be better translated ‘keep this in mind’. He is telling us is something that should continually guide our behavior in this world. Take this seriously.

It is addressed to *beloved brothers*. The word *adelphoi* literally means ‘from the same womb’. We saw in the second message on James that “the twelve tribes” is a way that the early church saw all who were in Christ, both Jews who were completed in Christ and Gentiles who were grafted in by having that same faith in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth (Romans 11:24ⁱⁱⁱ). The womb we were born from is the church (Galatians 4:26^{iv}). The Holy Spirit hovers over us and gives us the seed of God’s Word to plant in hearts. We share how Jesus died for our sins so we can be right with God. Then we nourish the new believer with the sincere milk of God’s Word (1 Peter 2:2^v; 1 Thessalonians 2:7^{vi}). That is true of every believer, male and female. That makes us a family with the same Father (Romans 8:15^{vii}). James wants us to remember what he is about to tell us because of that familial love. He desires that we all be more like our Savior.

We all need to be quick to hear. In verse 21 he will tell us that what we need to be quick to hear is the Word of God. Why do people struggle with listening? I think it is because we are so self-centered. We have a lack of love for one another. Our default mode is to put self first. But that is the opposite of what the Christian life should be. We are to love one another and put others first (Ephesians 5:19^{viii}). Hear what Peter exhorted the believers to do. *²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,* 1 Peter 1:22 That would result in us being genuinely interested in what others are saying, especially if they are sharing God’s Word.

God gave us two ears and one mouth, and we are to use them in that proportion. Trapp writes, “*But hath not Nature taught us the same that the apostle here doth, by giving us two ears, and those open; and but one tongue, and that hedged in with teeth and lips?*”^{ix} When I meet someone who will not stop talking, I know something is wrong in their soul. They are not interested in two-way communication. They are sometimes even afraid that you will speak so they fill up every second with words. Sometimes it is a sign of a huge ego, and sometimes it is a sign of insecurity. Listen and you will be able to discern which, and if ever given the chance and the Holy Spirit prompts you, a few Spirit chosen words will speak to their hearts.

Consider Jesus' responses to people in the Gospels. It is often so different from what we would expect. He often responded to questions with a question. "Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responded, "Why do you call me good?" Mark 10:17,18^x And to many questions Jesus would cite Scripture beginning with the question, "Have you never read?" Matthew 21:16^{xi} In our time we might ask, "Did you know that the Bible says ...?" But to be able to do that we must listen to the Word. Listening is an art that seems to be disappearing from our culture. Differing viewpoints yell at one another, but rarely listen.

James is telling us to be quick to listen before we speak. We should be listening to the person who is speaking, but also to the Word and the Holy Spirit. We listen to what others are saying out of concern and respect. We listen to our brothers and sisters in Christ because as the Apostle Paul told us, ^{3b} *in humility count others more significant than yourselves.* Philippians 2:3b Those who listen well are humble. It is pride that keeps us from hearing what others are saying. Then we see if what they said aligns with God's Word. Listening with the heart when the Word is proclaimed is essential to our growth in Christ.

Be slow to speak. Consider what you are about to say. Is it edifying? Is it contentious? Does it need to be said? Is it self-exalting? If it is defensive, does it really need to be said? Check with the Holy Spirit for approval and inspiration. You will find that He will often give an appropriate verse to share. But again, we need to be hearers of the Word so that we have those verses in our hearts and minds for the Spirit to bring them forth. And if He does not, it is probably not the right time and would not be received. We do not need to fill every silent moment with words. Rarely do I see people comfortable with just being together in silence. Our world is so fast paced that it is rare to see two people just sitting quietly together enjoying one another's presence.

In 1 Timothy 6:20 Paul tells Timothy to avoid irreverent babble. That would mean profane talk which we often hear in our culture. The word for babble in the Greek is a compound word combining the words empty and talk. Words carry such potential that we should use them wisely and with loving and sincere intent that comes from our love for one another and the value we see in every soul (Colossians 4:6^{xii}).

Be slow to anger. If we listen well and choose our words wisely, we will find we have fewer reasons to be angry. We all experience anger at times. Men especially have an issue with anger. I liken it to a warning light on your car's dashboard. It means that something is wrong, and you better pull over and find out before some real damage occurs. In other words, when anger flares up, **stop and ask yourself why you are angry.** Has someone stepped on your pride? Count it a blessing! I heard someone respond to an insult by saying, "Yes, I am that bad, and much worse! But Jesus paid my sin debt and is helping me to change." Imagine how disarming that would be. We often think of humility as a weak nature when it is a great strength in the Lord.

When insulted, instead of thinking of a comeback that would up the insult level, we could respond by jovially by saying, "Ouch, that was a blow to my ego. Thank you for that. God must be humbling me for my good." Just think how that could be testimony to the person insulting you and soften their attitude. It may even open the door to a cordial conversation.

Do you remember when King David was fleeing the city and Shimei was cursing him? One of the warriors asked David if he could go remove Shimei's head from his shoulders. ¹⁰ *But the king said, "...If he is cursing because the LORD has said to him, 'Curse David,' who then shall say, 'Why have you done so?'"* ¹¹ ... *"Behold, my own son seeks my*

life; how much more now may this Benjaminite! Leave him alone, and let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. ¹² *It may be that the LORD will look on the wrong done to me, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing today.*” 2 Samuel 16:10-12 It was a humble response with complete trust in God to discipline or restore him. Those were the words of man with a heart after God (Acts 13:22^{xiii}).

Long ago I learned a valuable lesson from a customer. I was being insulted by one customer because he thought the store policy should be different. The next customer told me not to take what the man had said personally. He said the man was not angry with me but at his own life and everything not going his way. That really helped me to see verbal attacks in a different light. It is rarely about us. That is why we should not take it personally and respond in kind, not to mention that it is not Christlike.

I think we have the most opportunities to become angry when we are driving. Am I right? We are cut off in traffic or endangered by reckless driving and our blood begins to boil. That driver does not know you are angry. He could care less if you are. Anger will not change him or her. What we can do instead is pray for them, and not that they will get in an accident. But pray for them to learn that considering others is sowing goodness into their own lives (Galatians 6:7^{xiv}). Pray that their heart is changed before they harm someone else. What a difference in our own spirit when we do that instead of nursing the anger and murmuring.

I still remember an incident in Japan riding in a car with a British mentor 40 years ago, brother Dennis Turner, when someone passed us in a dangerous spot and sped off. He giggled and said that the man’s wife probably called him and told him she made his favorite dinner and had a romantic evening all planned for him. Now that is a different way to look at things! He was thinking the best possible scenario instead of the worst. And is that not better for our own emotional state?

The Apostle Paul said, ¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* Romans 12:14 How much more then should we turn from anger to grace when something as little as a rude driver stirs up anger in us? *When we feed on anger and bitterness, the feast is us.*^{xv} The next verse tells us why.

²⁰ *for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.* James 1:20 Man’s anger and righteous anger are two completely different things. Our anger over our hurt ego or over a series of unexpected problems does not produce the righteousness of God! God’s anger is over man’s rebellion against His goodness and grace, the result of being hard-hearted (Psalm 7:11^{xvi}). He is also angered over the abuse of the powerful oppressing those weaker than themselves (Amos 4:1^{xvii}). If you saw The Sound of Freedom you were probably angered over the abuse of children. That is righteous anger.

When we let anger go unchecked, it often ends up in sinning with our mouths or worse. We say things that should not be said, which even if we take back, find that the scars remain. We hurt others because we are hurt. Hurting people hurt people. We need to remember that so that we can have compassion when people wound us.

Our example is always Jesus. ³ *Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.* ⁴ *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.* Hebrews 12:3,4 If He could forgive those who mocked and crucified Him (Luke 23:34^{xviii}), surely, we can let go of our anger and forgive those who insult or wrong us. *Unrelenting anger towards someone is like drinking poison and expecting them to die.* You are only harming yourself. Realizing

their eternal destiny if there is no change should have us pleading with God for their salvation. That is the righteous thing to do. That means you are sharing the heart of God for them (2 Peter 3:9^{xix}).

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus warned us about the danger of giving way to anger. ²² *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.* Matthew 5:22 Jesus obviously saw words as something powerful and evil when used against one another. He will judge people by their own words (Matthew 12:37^{xx}). If we condemn people over something that we are guilty of, we are asking God to be as harsh with us (Matthew 7:2^{xxi}).

²¹ *Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.* James 1:21 Because anger does not produce the righteousness of God, we are to put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness. These three verses we are looking at are connected. James is implying that when we yield to anger, we are giving in to filthiness and rampant wickedness. **Anger left unchecked tarnishes our moral condition.** "Rampant wickedness" is more directly translated as a superabundance of malice. Think of all the crimes, brutality, and broken hearts that have come from unbridled anger. Anger is a self-fueling fire that can only be quenched by the Spirit of God.

I like to visualize what I need to do when anger is stirred up in me. I try to immediately stand before Jesus, receive His embrace, look into His eyes of fire, and learn why I am angry. Then I let Him turn me around and let my emotions be what I received from Him toward the one with whom I am angry. In other words, to have God's heart for them. Jesus set us free from the enslavement of sin (John 8:34^{xxii}). We do not have to cling to anger. He can set us free each time anger raises its head so that it does not end up in rampant wickedness. We can use anger as a reminder to turn immediately to the Lord and examine our heart.

One of my go-to verses regarding anger is in Ephesians 4. ²⁶ *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger; ²⁷ and give no opportunity to the devil.* Ephesians 4:26,27 These verses tell us several things. We can be angry and not sin. That warning light is there for our good. It is a check heart warning. If we continue in the flesh, we will sin, and that is a breakdown in our spiritual life. So, we must stop and evaluate why we feel that way in the presence of the Lord in prayer.

It also indicates that it may take some time to deal with it, but not too much. We need to forgive and let go before we retire for the night. If you want a good night sleep, you should let Jesus help you to forgive. If you do not, then you are giving the devil an opportunity. The word literally means a foothold. You have surrendered a beachhead on your soul that he can attack from. None of us wants that! What a severe warning. It is as severe as relating it to filthiness and rampant wickedness. It could not be more serious.

I struggled for years with anger because I grew up around it as an example of dealing with stress. Once I identified that was the source, I got serious in prayer about asking for help to break the pattern. It took years, and even now it tries to re-emerge. But by the grace of God its power is broken (Romans 6:12-14^{xxiii}). That does not mean it does not try to return, but that by the grace of God and the help of the Spirit He helps me resist it.

The next part of the verse tells us how that is possible. *Receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.* There are two imperative commands in

this verse, put away, a negative command, and receive, a positive command. We must put away the results of anger. Refuse to let it get to that point. And we must humbly receive the Word that God has engrafted into us for the salvation of our souls. *God's Word was not native to our hearts, but it has been implanted in us.*^{xxiv} Our part with the help of the Holy Spirit is to put away one and receive the other. It is as if James was saying that you cannot hold onto anger and receive the implanted Word that saves us.

“The first thing then is *receive*. That word ‘receive’ is a very instructive gospel word; it is the door through which God’s grace enters to us. We are not saved by working, but by receiving; not by what we give to God, but by what God gives to us, and we receive from him.” (Spurgeon)^{xxv} We were born-again by the living and enduring Word of God (1 Peter 1:23^{xxvi}). We must let that Word reign in our hearts so that it transforms our actions. We may still struggle, but when we receive the Word, the Word has the power to keep us from letting anger take over our thought life which then changes our actions and words. It is all a work of God, but we must be willing to receive. Sometimes we need to pray that God would help us be willing and receptive to what He is doing in us. The flesh will always resist if we let it, but the Spirit will help us receive God’s help.

When our soul is saved, we not only have eternal life in the future, but that life is manifest in us now (Romans 8:11^{xxvii}). The spiritually dead people are those who let anger result in filthiness and rampant wickedness without remorse. They have no power to resist it nor do they want to. Those with the life of Christ can refuse to let anger be manifest in those ways. Only those whose souls are saved by the power of the implanted Word are truly able resist anger and walk in righteousness and love for those who wound us.

Some of us will have a harder time than others with this issue because of different factors such as temperament, background, and experiences. We need to be patient with one another and realize that. Encourage those who are weak in this area. If they are in Christ that weakness grieves them. Pray for them. If anger is directed toward you remember that a soft answer turns away wrath (Proverbs 15:1^{xxviii}). Let the love of Christ prevail by the power of the Holy Spirit in you. His new life in us who have been born-again is our victory.

Questions:

- 1 What was the theme of verses 14-18?
- 2 What are the three imperative commands in verse 19?
- 3 Why is it so hard to listen?
- 4 Why do we need to do before we speak?
- 5 What does anger result in if we act on it?
- 6 How can we keep from acting on it?
- 7 What was Jesus’ warning about anger?
- 8 What does Ephesians 4:26,27 teach us?
- 9 How are we born again?
- 10 What does that make possible in us?

ⁱ **Romans 8:13 (ESV)**

¹³ For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

ⁱⁱ **Galatians 5:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

iii **Romans 11:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree.

iv **Galatians 4:26 (ESV)**

²⁶ But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother.

v **1 Peter 2:2 (ESV)**

² Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—

vi **1 Thessalonians 2:7 (ESV)**

⁷ But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

vii **Romans 8:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!”

viii **Ephesians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

ix David Guzik, *James*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Jas 1:19,20.

x **Mark 10:17-18 (ESV)**

¹⁷ And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ¹⁸ And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.

xi **Matthew 21:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ and they said to him, “Do you hear what these are saying?” And Jesus said to them, “Yes; have you never read, “‘Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise’?”

xii **Colossians 4:6 (ESV)**

⁶ Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.

xiii **Acts 13:22 (ESV)**

²² And when he had removed him, he raised up David to be their king, of whom he testified and said, ‘I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will.’

xiv **Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

xv R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 67

xvi **Psalms 7:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ God is a righteous judge, and a God who feels indignation every day.

xvii **Amos 4:1 (ESV)**

¹ “Hear this word, you cows of Bashan, who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to your husbands, ‘Bring, that we may drink!’

xviii **Luke 23:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.

xix **2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

xx **Matthew 12:37 (ESV)**

³⁷ for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

xxi **Matthew 7:2 (ESV)**

² For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you.

xxii **John 8:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

xxiii **Romans 6:12-14 (ESV)**

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

xxiv R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1991), 68

xxv David Guzik, *James*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Jas 1:21

xxvi **1 Peter 1:23 (ESV)**

²³ since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

^{xxvii} **Romans 8:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

^{xxviii} **Proverbs 15:1 (ESV)**

¹ A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.