

Series: WORDS
6a A Listening Tongue
James 1:19

Today we will be talking about conflict and how our tongue has the power to create and minimize conflicts. But first let's look at what the Bible says to be the root of conflicts. Accordingly to Galatians 5:19-21 **The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, strife, 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.** Conflicts are the result of our sins, of walking in the flesh, of being guided only by our feelings and desires, of doing only our own will and disregarding what God wants for us.

Conflicts usually start out small, sometimes because of insignificant and silly things, but they grow disproportionately. They are a bad witness and set a bad example for others. They destroy healthy relationships we might have. They impact our health and open the door to all kinds of destructive things. Proverbs 17:14 says that: **The beginning of strife is like releasing water; therefore stop contention before a quarrel starts.** Conflicts are like that, you never know the end result, what will be destroyed in its path.

If this is true why is it that we still get into fights? Or add wood to the fire instead of following this advice: **Those who control their tongue will have a long life; opening your mouth can ruin everything.** Proverbs 13:3 **Watch your tongue and keep your mouth shut, and you will stay out of trouble.** Proverbs 21:23.

Paul advised Timothy: **don't get involved in foolish, ignorant arguments that only start fights.** 2 Timothy 2:23 Why? Because it leads to destructive conflicts. To be conflictive is a sin and add to the conflict just makes things worse.

One of the keys to fewer conflicts is to listen more. **Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.** James 1:19 Conflicts result of being too quick to speak and get angry but slow to listen.

Proverbs 10:12 says that: **Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.** The best antidote to prevent and heal conflicts (quarrels, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, divisions and envy) is love. A love that Jesus commands us to have for one another. It is a love that comes from God and that according to John 13:35 it's the proof to the world that we are His disciples. As Christians we should ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to cultivate this kind of love that impacts the way we react and talk.

To have peace in our relationships and deal with conflicts it is essential that we learn to LISTEN. The main complaint in marriages is that: "He/she never listens to me." "He/she never understands what I say." "He/She doesn't value my opinion." To learn to listen better it's a skill that we can develop and if we do it we'll have less conflicts, we'll have more friends, we'll be wiser and we'll be healthier with more peace in our lives.

According to some studies we spend approximately 40% of our day listening but with an efficiency rate of only 25%. That means that most of us are not very good listeners. As the years go by it gets worse as the ability to listen effectively declines with aging.

What is listening? Listening goes beyond words and sounds. We can hear people but that does not mean that we are listening. Listening is very important because it fills a deep need in human beings which is the need to be appreciated, the need to receive attention that begins as a child ("Mommy look at me, look at me daddy"). When we listen to somebody it shows that we care about them, that we take them seriously. It shows that we want to understand them, that we think they're important. Listening is loving and if you love someone you will listen to

them. So if you want to improve your relationship with your mate, kids, boss, coworkers, friends, you have to learn to improve your listening. If you want to be at peace with them and minimize your conflicts you need to improve your listening.

Today we will be looking at three obstacles that prevent us from listening to others and next week we'll consider some of the things that will help us to listen more effectively. The first obstacle is:

1. ASSUMPTIONS – To assume means to presume something is true or false without getting all the information necessary for verification. Example: *You were near the bar. You went there to drink wasn't it!* "or" *When you were talking to Laura you looked at me. You were they talking about me, weren't you?* We do this all the time, some more than others, and that's a problem. How many times have you had an argument because you assumed something? *"But I thought that was what you meant ..."* *"I assumed you wanted this..."*

Proverbs 18:13 says that: *He who answers before listening, that is his folly and his shame.* The Living Bible says, *"It's stupid to decide before knowing the facts."* We get into trouble and create conflicts because when we make assumptions, we are not listening. What message do you give to others when you assume things?

a. I know what you are thinking. You might even be able to guess but until you listen you won't know exactly what it is. *A new employee of a large insurance company walked up to a paper shredder, stood before it looking confused. "Need some help?" the secretary asked. "Yes, how does this thing work?" "It's simple," she said as she took the documents he had on his hand and fed it into the shredder. "See?" "I see," he said, "But how many copies does it make?"* She assumed to know what he wanted but she was way wrong. How many people and relationships do we shred because of the things we assume?

b. That there is only one way to see things, usually ours. But there are lots of ways to look at things. *Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others.* Proverbs 12.15

c. We assume that everybody thinks like we do but that's not true.

d. That people never change. They do change and we need to give them the right to change.

e. That we can guess their motives, why they did what they did or said what they said, but that's judging without understanding.

To presume prevents us from listening and the second obstacle is:

2. IMPATIENCE – When we are impatient we don't listen.

Experts say that the average person can hear about 650 words per minute. However, most people speak only about 150 words during that same time. That means that we can hear much faster than we can talk. During that minute we could hear another 500 words. So what we do with the time left? We think of other things, about a soccer match, or about the clothes that the person is wearing, or wondering when they are going to finish. We make decisions, etc., etc., etc. And as a consequence we do not listen to everything because it's taking too long.

Have you watched people on quiz shows answering before the question is finished and they're wrong? When they give the answer it was totally unrelated to their answer. Everybody knew the answer once the question was asked but they jumped too quick, that's what happens when we become impatient. Proverbs 29:20. *There is more hope for a fool than for someone who speaks without thinking.*

Proverbs 19:11 **A man's wisdom gives him patience;** those who are wise are patient. When I want to show my wisdom, I'm patient with my kids. When I want to show my wisdom, I'm patient with employees or my wife or other people. I'm dumb when I'm impatient. Wisdom produces patience. And when you listen you're wise: Presumption and impatience impede our hearing, and the third obstacle is:

3. PRIDE – Prov. 13:10 **Pride leads to conflict; those who take advice are wise.** Pride makes us defensive and unteachable. We can learn from anyone if they are willing to ask questions, but often we are afraid to ask because we do not want them to think that we don't have things under control, or that our marriage is not going well, or we have financial problems, or because we don't want others to think this or that about us. Many are those who prefer to look smart than to be smart. When we need help there are no stupid questions, how silly it is to be proud and not ask questions!

Some say: "I learn from my experiences," That's good and we all learn from our experiences, but it is even smarter to learn from the experiences of others. You do not have time to make all the mistakes to learn from them, learn from the positive and negative experiences of others. How do we learn? Observing and asking questions. But for that you have to put pride aside.

Proverbs 20:5 **Though good advice lies deep within a counselor's heart, the wise man will draw it out.** We are all ignorant; only on different subjects. We can all learn from each other but we have to learn to ask the right questions. The wise learn to listen and learn to ask questions.

Proverbs 15:31 says **If you want to be wise, accept correction, looking to improve your life.** Seek to learn from the advice and criticism. You do not have to accept all that they tell you, you don't have to embrace all the suggestions you get, but at least, you have to stop and ask: "Is it true? Can I learn or grow with what I see from what you are telling me? Can I improve my life, my marriage, my finances, etc.?"

In Romans 12:18 Paul says: **"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone.** These 3 obstacles depend on us, and now we have to make a decision to abandon presumption, impatience, and pride to hear better and we will minimize the conflicts in our lives.

Next week we will analyze some of the things that do not allow you to hear better, to avoid conflict, and have peace with better relationships with others.