

# Can You Pass This Test?

Sunday, June 7, 2020

One of the definitions of the word test is... "an event or situation that reveals the strength or quality of someone or something by putting them under strain."

Our nation, and indeed our world, has certainly been tested as of late

A global pandemic with specific and devastating consequences to our economy, our personal freedoms, and our way of life.

A travesty of justice played out on camera for all to witness a gross abuse of power and disregard for human life that has unleashed a firestorm of anger, protest, rioting and violence and which has once again put racism and the need for change at forefront of national discussion

Our faith has been tested, our theology has been tested, our personal resolve and love for others has been tested

And on many levels, we have failed the test

I have witnessed people, especially within the church fail these most recent tests. I recently left a Facebook group made up only of credentialed ministers of the Assemblies of God because it was filled with constant bickering, arguing and name calling over issues such as these. They showed little concern for each other and spent most of the time tearing each other down rather than building each other up.

## **Key Text: James 1:19-26 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, <sup>20</sup> because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. <sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> 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.

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

**We fail the test when we...**

**Are quick to speak and slow to listen**

Everybody wants to speak; everybody wants to be heard... The problem is most people don't think before they speak. And Social media is a big part of the problem

We would do well to carefully examine the book of Proverbs once again and take special note of all the things it has to teach us about controlling our speech. Things like...

**Proverbs 13:3 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin.

Do you "guard" your lips or do you speak before you think

**Proverbs 10:19 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup> Sin is not ended by multiplying words, but the prudent hold their tongues.

So often we feel we must speak, and speak, and speak and speak because we feel that we have an obligation to change what is wrong. While there is a lot of truth in that, I also know that in most cases no matter how many words I use things don't change. I am not suggesting we never speak up, but that we use wisdom and discernment in when and how we speak.

**Proverbs 17:27-28 (NIV)**

<sup>27</sup> The one who has knowledge uses words with restraint, and whoever has understanding is even-tempered. <sup>28</sup> Even fools are thought wise if they keep silent, and discerning if they hold their tongues.

Our key verse in James tells us that we should be "slow to speak" but "quick to listen."

How well do you listen?

Consider these thoughts about listening

*"No one is as deaf as the man who will not listen."* **Proverb**

*"Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply."* **Stephen R. Covey**

*“One of the most sincere forms of [respect](#) is actually listening to what another has to say.”* **Bryant H. McGill**

*“Never miss a good chance to shut up.”* **Will Rogers**

*“Wisdom is the reward you get for a lifetime of listening when you would have rather talked.”* **Mark Twain**

*“Courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.”* **Winston Churchill**

*“[God](#) gave us mouths that close and ears that don’t, that must tell us something.”*  
**Anonymous**

*“Listen thrice. Think twice. Speak once.”* **Anonymous**

Before we move on from this point, I want to talk about one more way that we are quick to speak and slow to listen.

When we presume to speak for God before knowing what God wants us to speak

#### **Deuteronomy 18:20 (NIV)**

<sup>20</sup> But a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, is to be put to death.”

#### **Jeremiah 23:16 (NIV)**

<sup>16</sup> This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD.

I believe in the prophetic, but I also know that a lot of what is propagated in the name of God as prophetic words are nothing more than the words of men. Let’s not speak to quickly in the name of the Lord. Let us carefully weigh our words and take time to first listen to what God is truly speaking and examine it in light of His word.

#### **Mark 13:5-6 New (NIV)**

<sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them: “Watch out that no one deceives you. <sup>6</sup> Many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and will deceive many.

We fail the test when we...

React in anger, judgement, and condemnation rather than respond with mercy, discernment, and forgiveness

Yes there is wrong, yes there is evil, yes people do unbelievably stupid things, yes this world moves further and further away from biblical standards, yes it is frustrating, and yes it makes you want to scream and even sometimes feel like you want to reach out and strangle a few people.

But that's not what God wants from us. Again, let us refer back to our key text where James says...

**Key Text: James 1:19-26 (NIV)**

<sup>19</sup>My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and **slow to become angry**, <sup>20</sup>**because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires.**

Again, Social media and media in general is a huge part of the problem. I have always asserted that we were never meant to process the amount of information and news (and the resulting feelings they produce) which we are all being inundated with on a regular basis.

*Through mobile phones, [online entertainment services](#), the Internet, electronic mail, television, radio, newspapers, books, social media etc. people receive every day about 105,000 words or 23 words per second in half a day (12 hours) (during awake hours).*

Add to that fact that so much of this information is false or misrepresented or twisted and taken out of context for the purpose of getting people to react.

Notice how many aspects of the George Floyd story and the Presidents handling of the rioting have been changed from one day to the next. Look how many times the news about COVID-19 has contradicted itself.

And what do we do... We react, we post, we comment, we shame, we get angry, we judge, we condemn. There must be a better way for us to pass this test.

Rather than react with anger, judgement, and condemnation we can respond with

## MERCY

There is an old axiom that states “two wrongs don’t make a right”

God’s word teaches us in depth about this principle

### **Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)**

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,”<sup>[a]</sup> says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **Luke 6:36 (NIV)**

<sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Considering the greatness of God’s mercy to us who did not deserve it; should we not show mercy in abundance to others?

### **Micah 6:8 New International Version (NIV)**

<sup>8</sup> He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does The Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

## DISCERNMENT

There is a difference between discernment and judgement. I would dare say that most of our reactions are those of judgment

### **Matthew 7:1-5 (NIV)**

<sup>7</sup> “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. <sup>2</sup> For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

<sup>3</sup> “Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? <sup>4</sup> How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? <sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take

the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

There is a process here of discernment regarding the truth of God's Word, we must also be discerning regarding untruths and propaganda and the devices of the enemy, how he wants to use these situations to promote fear and division both within the church and the world in general.

## **FORGIVENESS**

It seems that like the teachers of the law and the Pharisee's we often stand, stones in hand, ready to condemn. Jesus shows us a better way

### **John 8:3-11 (NIV)**

*<sup>3</sup> The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group <sup>4</sup> and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.*

*But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. <sup>7</sup> When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup> Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.*

*<sup>9</sup> At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. <sup>10</sup> Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"*

*<sup>11</sup> "No one, sir," she said.*

*"Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."*

Rather than condemn, can we find it in our hearts to forgive; even those who do not deserve it.

### **Matthew 5:43-48 (NIV)**

*<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor<sup>[a]</sup> and hate your enemy.' <sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute*

you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. <sup>46</sup> If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? <sup>47</sup> And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? <sup>48</sup> Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Let's finish where we began with James... It's one thing to hear these scriptures and to even agree wholeheartedly with them; but what is most important is that we DO these things.