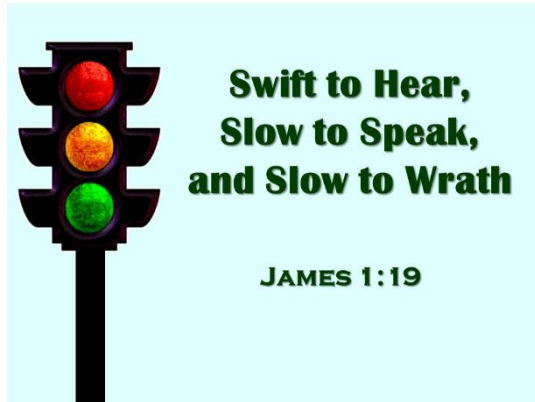


## A Triple Duty

“Swift to Hear, Slow to Speak, Slow to Wrath”  
(James 1:19)



James Hamilton wrote: Before refrigerators, people used ice houses to preserve their food. Ice houses had thick walls, no windows, and a tightly fitted door. In winter, when streams and lakes were frozen, large blocks of ice were cut, hauled to the ice houses, and covered with sawdust. Often the ice would last well into the summer. One man lost a valuable watch while working in an ice house. He

searched diligently for it, carefully raking through the sawdust, but didn't find it. His fellow workers also looked, but their efforts, too, proved futile.

A small boy who heard about the fruitless search slipped into the ice house during the noon hour and soon emerged with the watch. Amazed, the men asked him how he found it. "I closed the door," the boy replied, "laid down in the sawdust, and kept very still. Soon I heard the watch ticking."

There is some application of this story to what James is teaching us. The question is not whether God is speaking but whether we are being still enough, and quiet enough, to hear Him speak to our hearts through the Holy Spirit and His Word! Have you been listening to what the Lord is trying to say to you? Have you been open to His teaching and leading or have you been like a stubborn mule? Perhaps you need to reopen your heart once again and hear from God through His Word. This is because God has given us new life through His word; therefore, we should be receptive to His Word. Looking back to what was just said concerning the New Birth and our new life from God, James gives us a triple duty to live by.

James 1:19

“Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear (TUNE IN), slow to speak (TONE DOWN), slow to wrath” (LIGHTEN UP).

This could be considered the world's shortest marriage counseling handbook! It's good advice for any marriage. If we would listen more, speak less, and not have a

short fuse that leads to anger, our marriages would be much better. Although we can bring out some practical lessons about communication from these three principles, we need to interpret them within their context. Whenever you see a “wherefore” (James 1:19) find out what it’s therefore! The conjunction “wherefore” indicates a consequence or result from what was previously said. It refers to something that has gone before. It’s looking back to the spiritual provisions of a good God and specifically the New Birth and new life we have in Christ.

James 1:18

“Of his own will begat he us (*gave us a new birth*) with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”

James is essentially saying, “Wherefore, since you have been born again by the Word of God (through the instrument and agent of God’s truth), now start living like a born-again Christian who is following God’s Word. James seems to be suggesting that since you were born again because of the Word of God, now you must listen to it and allow it to transform your life. The clue to the meaning of these three commands is found within the context and relates each one of them to the Word of God: listen to God’s Word (“swift to hear”), don’t interrupt when God is speaking through His Word (“slow to speak”), and don’t argue over God’s Word (“slow to wrath”). Someone explained it like this: “We are to have a quick ear, a cautious tongue, and a calm temper.” In other words, we are to listen much, speak little, and not become angry.

The test of salvation is fruit (change of life). James has much to say about this in chapter 2. This means a changed life, Christian character and conduct, and ministry to others becomes the fruit of the New Birth and brings glory of God. We have been born again by God’s Word (James 1:18) and therefore we should live like a born again Christian (James 1:19) by taming our tongue and bearing fruit as we listen to God’s Word and put it into practice in our daily lives. There are many areas where we can manifest fruit (transformed living or a different way of life). Last time I checked, Christians are to be different than the unsaved for they are to lead spiritual lives and have spiritual goals (James 2:17, 20, 26).

This fruit of transformation might be winning souls to Christ (Rom. 1:16), the fruit of growing in holy living (Rom. 6:22), the fruit of sharing our material possessions (Rom. 15:28), the fruit of spiritual character (Gal. 5:22–23 – “fruit of the Spirit”),

the fruit of good works (Col. 1:10), and even the fruit of praising the Lord (Heb. 13:15 – “the fruit of our lips”). Of course, religious good works can be manufactured and seek to manipulate fruit, but they do not have any real life in them, nor do they bring glory to God. Real fruit has in it the seed for more fruit (transformation), so that the harvest continues to grow fruit, more fruit, and much fruit as Jesus said (John 15:1–5).

So, in James 1:19 we are dealing with the fruit or results of the New Birth. In short, our tongues will be under God’s control if we are living a born-again life. This means we are to be *swift to listen* to God’s Word (be teachable and submissive to it), be *slow to speak* (be quiet and receive God’s truth without opposition or resistance), and *slow to wrath* (without being argumentative and aggressive) which speaks of fights that are fueled by an angry spirit and result in caustic words.

David Roper gives the sense and summary of these three statements:

“Here James enjoins the necessity of response. The difference made by the Word is the difference it makes in us, but for it to make any difference at all we must decide whether we will receive it with humility or place ourselves in opposition to it.”

Later he writes:

“The problem is that the more we keep the Word out of our will the more theoretical, abstract, and distant God becomes. Then terrible things begin to happen to us: our heart begins to harden, coldness sets in, and eventually bitterness overwrites our souls.”

This triple duty described by James (swift to listen, slow to speak, slow to wrath) indicates that believers are to respond positively to Scripture, and eagerly pursue every opportunity to know God’s Word and will better (Ps. 119:11; 2 Tim. 2:15) without developing angry spirits and fights over the content of Scripture (James 4:1). In other words, we are to receive God’s word with eagerness and deal with others in humility without argumentation and fleshly conflicts. James reminds us earlier that we are to “receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save (*deliver*) your souls” (James 1:21). Now he talks to us about this important triple duty for the Christian life - swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath! The general thrust of James’ teaching is this. If we have been born again by the Word (James 1:18), then we should receive it with an open heart, live by it with an

obedient life, and demonstrate our New Birth before others in all our interpersonal relationships.

How do we live like a Biblical and born again Christian?

**A. Our first duty: LISTEN UP! = Listen to God's Word  
("swift to hear")**

Our first duty is to learn to listen - "swift to hear." Some think this was a familiar proverb of the day. Since the context is talking about the Word of God the admonition is this: "When you are listening to God's Word, give careful attention. Be quick to hear what God has to say." **TUNE IN!**



Curtis Vaughan concludes:

"In the words *let every man be swift to hear* the thought is that of readiness or eagerness to listen to God's Word."

The idea behind "to hear or listen" probably implies a public reading of the Word and oral instruction in the Christian faith by others. This means that God wants us to be speedy or quick when it comes to listening to others, ready to listen to their counsel, wisdom, guidance, and conclusions which are based upon God's Word and truth. Essentially, we are to keep our ears open to God and His Word. We are to be ready and receptive to what He has to say to us.

We are to seize every opportunity to increase our exposure to Scripture, to take advantage of every privileged occasion to read God's Word or to hear it faithfully preached or taught. In the Word of God we find passages of thanksgiving and praise, words of comfort, encouragement, and strength. In times of confusion, we find wisdom and guidance. When we are tempted, we turn to the Scriptures and see God's standards of purity and righteousness and are reminded of the power to resist Satan. Being ready to hear God's truth is to be an integral part of our Christian experience.

Can we sing with Charles Wesley?

"When quiet in my room I sit,  
Thy book be my companion still;  
My joy Thy sayings to repeat,

Talk o'er the records of Thy will,  
And search the oracles divine  
Till every heartfelt word is mine."

Some Christians are a "know it all" but God says we need the wisdom and counsel of others that comes from His word (Prov. 11:14; 24:6). We need to be open to listening to it. Listening begins by being quiet, holding our tongue, or refusing to speak. The phrase "let him hear" shows up 18 times in the Bible. Some form of the word "hear" is used 1285 times in the Bible.

It is interesting that James' opening exhortation, to be quick to hear, follows the same sequence that Luke uses after presenting the parable of the sower. Jesus follows it with the exhortation, "Take heed (care) how you hear (listen)" (Luke 8:18a). In Matthew 13:9, Jesus immediately follows the parable with, "He who that ears, let him hear." The Word of God cannot work in our lives unless we hear it and receive it in the right way. Again, Jesus not only said, "Take heed what ye hear" (Mark 4:24), but He also said, "Take heed how ye hear" (Luke 8:18). As a Christian, we can develop a bad habit of not really hearing God speak to us through His Word. Some fall into the tragic condition in which "hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:13). They attend Bible classes and church services but never seem to grow. Is it the fault of the teacher or preacher? Perhaps. Some are not really teaching the Bible. But sometimes it may also be the fault of the hearer.

Hebrews 5:11 says:

"Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing."

It is possible to be "dull of hearing" (Heb. 5:11), no longer hearing the voice of God through His Word, because of rot and decay in our spiritual life. Instead of being quick to hear God speaking to us through His Word we become dulled in our hearing and half deaf! We get into a mode where we are not really hearing the Word of God and allowing it to penetrate our heart and do its sanctifying work (John 17:17). We may be roaming about controlled by worldly and carnal living and are no longer hearing God speak to us. This is a sad state to be in. We develop carnality (1 Cor. 3:1) when we become careless or indifferent to hearing God's Word and no longer put it into practice within our daily lives. This is why we need to be quick to hear God's Word and as Spurgeon said, "fall before the majesty of revelation."

Both Jesus and James conclude that the first mark of a heart that is receptive to Him is that it's quick to hear the Word of God. It may come from another person (servant of the Lord) or when reading it yourself from God's Word. Competent Bible teachers, Christ-centered literature, and careful Bible study helps to saturate our minds with spiritual knowledge. To be quick to hear God's word implies an attitude of eagerness to take in the Word from every angle. As a believer, we should desire to read and study God's Word (2 Tim. 2:15), to listen to Biblical preaching of the Word (2 Tim. 4:2), to meditate on the Word and memorize it (Ps. 119:15), to understand its teachings (Neh. 8:8), hide it in our hearts (Ps. 119:11) and then obey it (James 1:23).

In Psalm 19:10, David said this regarding God's commandments:

"More to be desired *are they* than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb."

We need to evaluate our hearts today. Do you delight in God's Word? Do you long for it and pour over it as a young woman longs for and pours over a love letter from her fiancé who is in another country? What is your attitude when you go to hear the word preached? Are you hungry, ready to hear, and obey it? Do you come to hear from Heaven or hear a dull message from what you consider to be a dull preacher?

The Welsh preacher Rowland Hill (1744–1833), as an old man, was visiting with a longtime friend who said, "It is now 65 years since I first heard you preach. I still remember your text and a part of your sermon." Hill asked, "What part of the sermon do you remember?" The friend answered, "You said that some people, when they went to hear a sermon, were very squeamish about the delivery of the preacher. Then you said, 'Supposing you went to hear the will of one of your relatives read, and you were expecting a gift (return) from him. You would hardly think of criticizing the manner in which the lawyer read the will, but you would be all attention to hear whether anything was left to you, and if so, how much.

This is the way we are to hear the truth. We need to possess a ready, quick, receptive, and responsive heart that has open ears to God's Word of truth and see the things He has left for us to rejoice over and practice in our daily lives. "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God" (Rom. 10:17). Just as the

mother hears her baby's smallest cry, so the believer should be quick to hear what God has to say.

C.T. Studd (1863-1931) was an English missionary statesman who arose at 4:30 each morning to spend time with the Lord. He once said, "If you don't desire to meet the Devil during the day, meet Jesus before dawn." Folks, we need to be in touch and tune with God's truth to guide our minds, lives, and attitudes. We must respond to the Word of God and the Spirit of God for they are trying to break through our hearts! Listen! God's is speaking! Be quick to hear!

1 Kings 19:12 reminds us of this:

"And after the earthquake a fire; *but* the LORD *was* not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice."

"God can move the tallest mountains,  
He can calm the wildest sea.  
Yes, consuming fires, He can quench,  
But that's not how He speaks to me.  
In a still small voice, He speaks to me,  
Though His Holy Scriptures changes me.  
When I need His tender leading  
His Word will guide my way."

Have we been hearing God's still small voice? We won't hear from God if we are doing all the talking! Today God speaks to us through His Word but if we are not hearing what He has to share with us, then we will miss out on God's blessings and wonderful plan for our lives.

1 Samuel 3:9 says:

"Therefore Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if he call thee, that thou shalt say, Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth."

"Speak, Thy servant heareth;  
Be not silent, Lord!  
Waits my soul upon Thee  
For the quickening word."

Hearing or being a good listener (“swift to hear”) is a vital part of both learning and following God’s will and purpose for our lives. We must be quick to hear God’s voice and let Him have His way with us. A servant is always ready to listen to His Master! The art of listening is one that we all need to get better at. Jesus often used the expression: “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). God speaks; however, He only breaks through to those who have ears to hear. Has your heart been open to the Lord and are you ready to hear from Him? Has He been trying to communicate something to you? Have you been reading and listening to His Word speaking to your heart on a daily basis?

Have you ever bought weights, rowing machines, or aerobic devices, and other exercise equipment and never used them? Someone said, “Yes, I use my exercise bike all the time, I hang my laundry on it!” Unused exercise equipment does nothing to get us in shape. The same is true about unused Bibles! Study Bibles, commentaries, and Bible handbooks that lie untouched on dusty shelves are not going to help us shape up spiritually. To have a successful Word workout, we must use the tools. We should be quick to use the Scriptures for they will convict us, confront us, console us, and direct us on the right course in life. Psalm 119:105 says, “Thy word *is* a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” We must be quick to heard God’s truth and follow it. This is true especially in the time of temptation.

James had just been talking about temptation (James 1:13-14). In view of this, we must also remember what happened when the Devil tempted Jesus? The first thing he did was to urge Christ to satisfy his hunger by turning some stones into bread. It was a temptation for Jesus to manufacture some food on his own. How easy it could have been for him to jump into action, turn a pile of rocks into loaves of bread, and yield to Satan’s temptation. But Jesus wasn’t the one to act prematurely. He didn’t jump into the middle of things independent of the Father. Instead, He was quick to listen. Quick to pick up on Satan’s motives. Quick to observe the scheming heart behind the seemingly innocent statements. But most of all, He was quick to answer Satan with God’s Word – “It is written!! It is written! It is written!” (Matt. 4:4, 6,7). We must be swift or quick to hear God’s truth and respond to it. If we wait too long the Devil will trap us in the temptation and get us off the path of following God’s will for our lives.



How do we live like a Biblical and born again Christian?

**B. Our Second Duty: HUSH UP! = Be quiet when hearing His Word (“slow to speak”)**



The next duty is clearly defined. It’s a characteristic companion of the first duty. We are to be “slow to speak.” **TUNE DOWN!** This speaks of an attitude of reverent attention and submission to what God is teaching us in His Word. In this context, it seems that “slow to speak” includes the idea of listening while someone else is trying to express God’s truth from His Word. We need to keep silent inside as well as outside as others are sharing God’s truth with us. We cannot listen well when we are talking! If we want to hear what God has to say, we need to listen and not speak. Keeping our mouths shut makes room for thinking, pondering, meditating, and learning.

“Speak, Lord, in Thy stillness,  
While I wait on Thee;  
Hushed my heart to listen  
In expectancy.”

The word “slow” means to be idle or inactive and suggests that we are to never engage in the wrong kind of speech or talk that keeps us from hearing and receiving God’s Word. To be slow in our speech would include a call for restraint upon hasty and ill-considered speech which is a reaction to what is heard from Scripture. It carries the idea of not reacting in opposition or resistance as others are teaching us the truth of God’s Word and as God is trying to communicate to us. Zip it up! Put a zipper on your lips and be quiet for a while!

Of course, a wise man will listen to others and answer only if he is certain he has something worthwhile to say. What we say should be carefully thought out and not quickly blurted out without proper thinking and Biblical preparation (“be not many masters” or teachers - James 3:1). This may be part of what James is thinking about when he says be “slow to speak.” Only thoughtful and inductive study from God’s Word should be presented to others (2 Tim. 2:15) and it should be done with a humble spirit – not a dominating and argumentative spirit.

When a famous Roman orator was asked by a young man to teach him the art of public speaking, the young man continued an incessant flow of meaningless talk

that allowed the great teacher no opportunity to interject a word. When they finally reached the point of discussing a fee, the orator said, “Young man, to instruct you in oratory, I will have to charge you a double fee.” When asked why, he explained, “Because I will have to teach you two skills: the first, how to hold your tongue; the second, how to use it.”

Here is the main point James is making as it relates to being “slow to speak.” We should be “slow” or idle and inactive at times and just listen. We need to stop interrupting, flapping our jaws, opposing what is said. Just listen. We need to be less of a talker and a greater listener! When we stop talking and interrupting others, we are listening and ready to receive God’s truth. There is a time to listen and just be quiet! We are to exhibit self-control in the area of speaking. A heart that is ready to receive from God quietly listens to Him speak. As the lesson of Mary teaches us, we are to keep sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His Word (Luke 10:38-42).

Ecclesiastes 5:2 similarly speaks of hasty speech:

“Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God: for God *is* in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.”

Donald Burdick comments this way:

“A continual talker cannot hear what anyone else says and by the same token will not hear when God speaks to him.”

Basically, James is saying we need to be submissive to God’s Word and not quick to speak out to challenge or question the truth that God is trying to teach us and lay upon our hearts (Gen. 3:1-6). James, following the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs, is saying, “Slow down! Hold your tongue! Engage your ears before your mouth! Listen! Listen to God as He speaks to you. Listen to others who are wise and who want to teach you how to live according to God’s truth and Word.”

The commentator Kistemaker notes:

“Listening is the art of closing one’s mouth and opening one’s ears and heart.”

We need to listen to what God is telling and teaching us instead of going our own way. Again, stop and listen – God is speaking! This means you must stop speaking and listen to the Lord ministering to your heart through His Word.

I recall a time when my son and I went to visit an elderly man. We took him some money to help with a repair on his car. As we sat there, he began to speak a lot of wisdom to us, giving us sound advice based upon God's Word. We just sat there and listened. When we left his trailer I said to my son, "Sometimes we need to just be quiet and listen to these old timers speak for their wisdom is greatly needed." God speaks through his servants to us if we have open ears and are quiet enough to just sit down, shut our mouth, and listen. Instead of trying to tell God what we think He needs to know, we should stop talking and let God tell us what we need to know.

The proverbs also mention the importance of slowing down our speech, so we don't get ourselves into trouble. They wisely inform us to not be a quick talker and a bad listener! James was probably thinking about some of these verses when conveying how we need to stop in our tracks and listen to God speaks to us through His Word. Let's just glance at a few of these proverbs that deal with our speech. Think of them as guidelines to govern the mouth!

Proverbs 17:27–28

"He that hath knowledge spareth his words (he is not addicted to talking): and a man of understanding is of an excellent spirit. Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding."

You have heard the expression: "Silence is golden?" This is often true! Silence is one piece of evidence of wisdom. We learn not to speak when we should not speak! This proverb teaches that rash speech and saying stupid things demonstrate that someone has a very shallow and immature character. They certainly do not possess integrity. In fact, it is better to keep your mouth shut and let people wonder if you're a fool than to open it and remove all doubt that you are a fool! If you are wise, you won't be quick to respond to others in a rash way. Just the opposite, you will be quiet and listen. Wise people stay cool and keep their mouths shut. They are slow to speak.

Proverbs 10:19

"In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin (*sin does not cease or end but comes alive the more we talk*): but he that refraineth his lips is wise."

A loose tongue will get you into tight places. So, the more we talk, the greater the probability of saying something wrong and even downright sinful. Compulsive talkers should beware of this! A loose tongue is dangerous. The lust for incessant conversation, being more conversational than others, trying to go to the next plateau, saying something more grandiose, often leads to exaggeration and even saying things that are even sinful. But the man who exercises self-control, who refrains his lips or speech from excessive and out of control talk, is a wise person that will keep himself from saying something wrong. Talking less can save us from embarrassment, apologies, and outright sin. So, be slow to speak.

Proverbs 21:23

“Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles.”

There are times we must shut our mouths or else we might pay the penalty for talking too much, getting ourselves into trouble, causing sin and other embarrassing things to come out of our mouths. Be slow to speak.

Someone said:

“Don’t fly into a rage unless you are prepared for a rough landing.”

Proverbs 13:3

“He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life: but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction.”

This sounds similar to what James taught concerning bridling the tongue (James 3:1-11). Control your tongue (speech) and you control the direction of your life. The lesson is this. Be careful what you say and how much you say—it might be used against you. I think you get the general idea from these proverbs. Be slow to speak! Learn to stop yapping! Let God teach you and speak to you! This is what James is talking about. Don’t try and control everything with your speech. Listen to the wisdom of others especially when they are teaching you wisdom from God’s truth – the Word of God!

TV interviewer, Larry King, observed:

“I never learned anything while I was talking.”

Be slow to speak! Be a good listener and shorter speaker. In the case of James, he seems to be confronting the person who is never silent before the Lord to hear what

He wants to teach him through God's servants and His Word. We must learn to listen to God and just "be still and know that He is God" (Ps. 46:10). When God's word confronts our ways and inspects our paths, we can be quick to argue or challenge the Lord or find excuses of why this doesn't apply to us. But instead of negatively reacting we need to listen! We need to be "slow to speak." In other words, don't talk. Just hush up for a while and hear the voice of Jesus!

Peter had to learn this lesson while on the Mount of Transfiguration. Remember how the heavenly vision burst upon his sight, and he caught a glimpse of the transfigured Lord in conversation with Moses and Elijah. Then he opened his mouth and blurted out some sheer nonsense!

Matthew 17:4

"Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias."

It was too bad that Peter did not simply listen because Luke tells us that the two visitors from glory were talking with the Lord about the death that Christ was soon to accomplish at Calvary. Here is the lesson. Engage your ears before your mouth!

A famous naturalist, walking through a city park with a friend, said suddenly, "Did you hear that cricket?" "No," his friend replied, "I heard nothing. How could you possibly have heard a cricket with all of this roar of traffic enveloping us?" Said the naturalist, "You hear what you train yourself to hear. Watch!" He pulled some coins from his pocket and threw them on the sidewalk. Instantly, several passersby slapped their pockets and looked to see if they had dropped some money.



We've mentioned Samuel's experience already in 1 Samuel 3:9. It actually applies to the first two points of our study: "**Speak, LORD** (*be swift to hear = we are ready to hear God's voice*); **for thy servant heareth**" (*slow to speak = stop speaking and be quiet before God, surrendered and ready to listen and receive from Him*). God is to do the

speaking and we are to do the listening! Like a young Samuel, we need to stop speaking (“slow to speak”) and keep training ourselves to hear the voice of the Lord speaking to us through His Word (“swift to hear”). We need to sense His conviction and direction or we will lose our way in life. This means we must be slow to speak, be silent before the Lord, and be still enough to hear from Heaven. When James says to be “slow to speak” he is teaching us to practice “an eloquent silence.” Not talking means that God is talking and when we hear God speaking, we become teachable, reachable, and moldable into His likeness.

“Speak, Thy servant heareth;  
Be not silent, Lord!  
Waits my soul upon Thee  
For the quickening word.”

When it comes to the Devil tempting us (James 1:13-14), there is always the temptation to speak out, to complain, gossip, or spew out angry words at others and even at God. When confronted by temptation, it is often our words that get us into trouble. We make promises we can’t keep and say things we don’t mean. If we are not slow to speak, we will probably be eating our words later!

The parrot and the owl are good examples of the foolishness of chatter and the wisdom of silence. I’m not sure where this short poem comes from, but its message packs quite a punch:

“A wise ol’ owl lived in an oak  
The more he knew, the less he spoke.  
The less he spoke, the more he knew.  
And this same thing applies to you.”

It may be significant that God created us with two ears and one mouth! God could have been suggesting that we listen twice as much as we talk!

How do we live like a Biblical and born again Christian?

**C. Our Third Duty – DON’T BLOW UP! = Don’t fight over God’s Word (“slow to wrath”)**

Right on the heels of “slow to speak,” James attaches the phrase “slow to anger.” The two are interrelated



like two links on a chain for if we are learning to be humble and quiet before the Lord while listening to His Word, we will not blow up in anger and become an argumentative bully over the lives of others. There are many Christians who are walking sticks of dynamite. They stand ready to blow up at any moment. Many Christians are holding anger against God and other people, and it eventually shows up! Again, the word “slow” means to be idle or inactive and suggests that we are to always keep anger in check. We are to **LIGHTEN UP!**

This final duty is very important to obey. Like a snail, we are to move slowly and think before blowing up and expressing wrath before others. If we think before we speak it will keep us from expressing anger toward those whom we might disagree with. The idea is that we should not possess a short fuse and go around blowing up before others expressing outward displays of anger. We are to be slow to wrath. In other words, don't have any part of it! Discipline yourself and don't allow it to take control of your heart and life.

David Guzik said:

“We can learn to be slow to wrath by first learning to be swift to hear and slow to speak. Much of our anger and wrath comes from being *self-centered* and not *others-centered*. Swift to hear is a way to be *others-centered*. Slow to speak is a way to be *others-centered*.”

The Greek work “orge” (orgay) means to be moved or agitated, to possess a temper that consists of anger and indignation toward others. It is something inward that can build up in resentment which eventually displays itself outwardly before others. It is something that seethes and smolders from within (the origin of all anger) but at times it can become unleashed in outward aggression. This word has a particular meaning in the context of living by God's Word and demonstrating our New Birth before others (James 1:18).

How does being “slow to wrath” relate to being open or receptive to God's Word? Some suggest that in a general way this could be referring to anger which consists of an attitude of resistance against the revealed purposes of God found in His Word. We are in angry opposition and resistance against God's way and will for our lives. In other words, we can fight against God and His purpose for our lives. This can certainly be true if we don't possess a right attitude and acceptance of God's truth.

However, this type of anger is probably more specific in its meaning and revelation among God's people. The wrath or anger is being extended toward God's saints. This warning likely suggests scenes of wrangling or fighting, attempts at self-display, which include the manifestation of unchristian tempers in the midst of debates on Christian truth. Mitchell calls it "the wrath of argumentation." In other words, this type of anger involves fighting over doctrinal issues while displaying an argumentative spirit and using sarcastic, caustic, and scathing words that demean the other person. This is a foretaste of what James later identifies as "wars and fightings among you" (James 4:1).

There was discontent and dissension within some of the congregations to whom James wrote. People desired to have their own opinions confirmed by others, their own ways approved by everyone, their own likes and dislikes accepted by the entire church, and this caused plenty of fights and divisions. The self-will of many and their personal hostility resulted in enormous spiritual damage. Instead of working together in love, they fought each other to have their own ways, regardless of the consequences to the church or their own spiritual well-being.

Dr. Lehman Strauss wisely said:

"We all are acquainted with the fact that words unfitly spoken often cause an outburst of temper. What starts out as a sincere and friendly discussion sometimes leads to an argument, with its resulting flare of anger. Among those things for which the Christian should seek wisdom (1:5), there is the ever-present need for a controlled tongue and a controlled temper."

Although we must defend God's Word, we should not destroy other people in the process. We are not to blow up! We are not to get angry and verbally bash others in our confrontations over doctrine and other subjects. This would have some specific application to the meetings during the early church where different revelations of the truth were given and where some saints were seeking to display their alleged superior knowledge over others in arguments and disruptions of fleshly display (1 Cor. 14:29-33). Many were eager to be teachers instead of students and listeners.

James 3:1

"My brethren, be not many masters (*teachers*), knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation" (*greater judgment at the Bema Seat of Christ*).

Manton comments in this way:



“If we were as patient and swift to hear as we are ready to speak, there would be less of wrath and more of profit in our meetings.”

Yes, we are in one sense to get angry so we don't sin and compromise the truth, but at the same time we can let the sun go down upon our wrath (Eph. 4:26). If I am angry at nothing but sin, I can be angry so as not to sin. However, before we know what has happened, we can cross the line from righteous anger to sinful anger where a violent passion is aroused which seeks to argue and squash a person. James is talking about a type of wrathful reaction – a manifestation of carnal zeal under a religious disguise as people argue about doctrine. It is good to be a fundamentalist, but don't start fighting about every little jot and tittle of theology with everybody you meet up with and with whom you might disagree. Don't act like a “know it all” because you don't know it all, and don't be a doctrinal bully.

Don't misunderstand me. Sound doctrine is very important (“speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” - Titus 2:1). We must earnestly but graciously defend the faith (Jude 3). James is talking here about the person who has allegedly seen the light, who has a corner on every doctrinal teaching, and who in his flesh seeks to argue and win arguments which often is over some pet doctrine. In defending doctrinal truth, which is important, we should not become filled with rage or anger as we try and crush the opponent and seek to chew them up and spit them out. Sometimes the saints band together to overtake another group. However, tag team theological wrestling is not Christian like! We might win an argument but lose our integrity!

Proverbs 14:17

“He that is soon angry dealeth foolishly: and a man of wicked devices is hated.”

Ecclesiastes 7:9

“Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.”

Blowing up with anger never brings good results. It never resolves anything. It only complicates things. I used to say to my children, “No fighting and no biting!” This is a good motto for living the Christian life. Yes, we are to “fight the good fight of faith” (1 Tim. 6:12) but it's how we do it that counts! We are to fight zealously but at the same time gracefully, speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), without outbursts of uncontrollable anger and wrath to those we are opposing.

There is an old saying that goes like this:

“Don’t let your itch to get angry end up destroying you and others. He who has a sharp tongue soon cuts his own throat.”

Of course, we can get angry and fight others over many things – not just doctrinal matters. We can fight over our rights, our position, material things, the color of the church carpet, finances, etc. My granddaughter once said to me, “Grandpa, that is my french fry.” She was trying to draw me into a french fry fight! Just to let you know, I didn’t take the bait.

I remember the old roller derby skating during the 60’s and early 70’s. Women’s roller derby was especially interesting. When those women would be on their roller skates, they would go around and pick fights with other women, elbow them, pull their hair, and try to throw them off the skating arena. Let me tell you, these women could get angry. James says, “Don’t be a roller derby Christian! Do not blow up and beat up on others who are trying to run the race of the Christian life.”

Why does James teach this? He answers with the next verse in James 1:20:

“For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

In other words, anger fails to yield the righteous life and character that God desires. The reason God has implanted within us a new nature and new life through the New Birth (James 1:18) is so we might stop acting in ways that go against the new nature and so we might live as a born-again Christian. When the new nature and life is at work in our hearts, we will not express wrath to others even when defending the truth. Instead, we will manifest “the righteousness of God” (James 1:20) or the righteous actions and character of God before others. All too often, unguarded speech gives expression to an inner turmoil going on within our hearts. Jesus said, “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34).

God has given us a New Birth so we can live a transformed way of life which includes not being overcome with wrath or anger in our relationships with other people, including Christians. Since we have God’s life, nature, and power (Eph. 6:10) we can keep a lid on anger and promote the righteous display of God in our lives, the life He has implanted within us at the time of regeneration.

Anger and wrath are not displaying the new nature – they are displaying the old nature. James is saying, “If you are born again – act like it! Don’t act like an idiot.” If you suffer from “motor mouth” God wants you to slow down the engine. Some people are foaming at the mouth so fast that you cannot tell them anything or teach them anything.



This is why someone wrote:

“To live above with saints we love; Oh that will be glory.  
But to live below with saints we know;  
Well, that's a different story.”

Jonathan Edwards was the third president of Princeton and probably one of America’s greatest thinkers and preachers, but he had a daughter who had an uncontrollable temper. One day a fine young man at the school, who had fallen in love with her, came to Jonathan Edwards and asked for her hand in marriage. Jonathan Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” The young man said, “But I love her.” Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” The young man said, “But she loves me.” Again Edwards said, “You can’t have her.” “Why can’t I have her?” he protested. “Because she is not worthy of you,” replied Jonathan Edwards. “Yes, she is a Christian, but the grace of God can live with some people with whom no one else could ever live.”

What is the takeaway from this Bible lesson? Here it is. Keep listening to God’s Word, keep quiet and let God speak to your heart, and stop arguing and fighting with others! To simplify – **LISTEN UP, HUSH UP, and DON’T BLOW UP!** Or **TUNE IN, TUNE DOWN, and LIGHTEN UP!** In other words, start living like a Biblical and born again Christian!

In his autobiography, Number 1, Billy Martin told about hunting in Texas with Mickey Mantle. Mickey had a friend who would let them hunt on his ranch. When they reached the ranch, Mickey told Billy to wait in the car while he checked in with his friend. Mantle’s friend quickly gave them permission to hunt, but he asked Mickey a favor. He had a pet mule in the barn who was going blind, and he didn’t have the heart to put him out of his misery. He asked Mickey to shoot the mule for him.

When Mickey came back to the car, he pretended to be angry. He scowled and slammed the door. Billy asked him what was wrong, and Mickey said his friend wouldn't let them hunt. "I'm so mad at that guy," Mantle said, "I'm going out to his barn and shoot one of his mules!" Mantle drove like a maniac to the barn. Martin protested, "We can't do that!" But Mickey was adamant. "Just watch me," he shouted.

When they got to the barn, Mantle jumped out of the car with his rifle, ran inside, and shot the mule. As he was leaving, though, he heard two shots, and he ran back to the car. He saw that Martin had taken out his rifle, too. "What are you doing, Martin?" he yelled. Martin yelled back, face red with anger, "We'll show that guy! I just killed two of his cows!"

Beloved, anger can be dangerously contagious. It certainly should not be part of the life of a born again Christian!

Have you been born again? Jesus taught, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7) if you are going to live eternally in His presence. Furthermore, I can begin to put a curb on anger and all the sins that seek to overtake my life when I am born again through the infusion and introduction of God's new life and nature within my human spirit (Eph. 2:1). As Christians we are to have a *belief that behaves*. You will find that anger and bitterness will be some of your biggest enemies. Knowing how to conquer and control these two enemies will help you to behave in a Christlike and born-again manner.

The Bible says, "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth" (James 1:18). Since we have been born again through the instrumentality of God's Word, we should follow its instructions and live a different way of life. We are to live as a Bible believing, Bible practicing, born again Christian.

"You may think it's foolish what I'm going to say  
I'm not ashamed, no I'm not ashamed,  
One day I prayed 'Jesus, take my sin away'  
And that's when I was born again.

Born again, there's really been a change in me  
Born again, just like Jesus said;  
Born again, and all because of Calvary,  
I'm glad so glad, that I've been born again."