

Be Slow to Speak

James 1:19-20
10/31/1999

James, chapter 1. The book of James, the first chapter. We'll read together verses 18 through 20. James, chapter 1, verses 18 through 20. Speaking of God, it says:

“Of his own will begot he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath: For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.”

Now in our study together last Lord's Day evening, we began to consider how we should respond with reference to the *hearing* of the word of God. In verse 18, we are told that God, of His own will, begot us *with* the word of *truth*. We are then told in the following verse, that with reference to that word of truth, we are to be *swift to hear* it. That is, we must aggressively seek out and expose ourselves to God's word of truth at every opportunity.

To be swift to hear means, as we saw last time, to seize those resources and occasions that convey God's truth to us, and apply ourselves diligently to them. We are to be *quick* to read the Scriptures. We are to be *quick* to hear all of the sermons preached at church. We are to be *quick* to read biblical expositions. In being swift to hear, there should be a readiness of mind and a focused attention upon hearing and receiving the word of truth as it comes to us through its various avenues.

Now this brings us then this evening to the second exhortation, given to us in verse 19. It says not only are we to be swift to hear, but also that we are to be *slow* to speak. Now this slowness to speak is in regard to the same matter that our swiftness to hear is. That is, we are to be *swift* to hear regarding the word of truth, but we are also to be slow to *speak* regarding the word of truth.

The word of truth, in verse 18, is what is being referenced in the exhortations in verse 19. Indeed, we see that this subject of the word of truth is continued right on down through verse 21 and 22: “receive with meekness the engrafted word”; verse 22, “be *doers* word”; verse 23, “if any man be a hearer of the word.” And so, clearly, it is the word of truth, or the word of God, that is the context in which these verses lie, and *to* which they refer. And so we are to be *slow* to speak with reference to the word of God. And so we are to be more ready to listen than to speak when it comes to the *Scriptures*. That is what we are being told.

Now regarding *all* subjects in life, not just the Scriptures but regarding *every* subject in life, men are prone to talk too much and listen too little. This is why we have *numerous* exhortations in the Scriptures such as Proverbs 10:19, which says, “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refrains his lips is wise.” Why we have exhortations such as Proverbs 13 and verse 3: “He who keeps his mouth keeps his life: but he that opens wide his lips shall have destruction.” Proverbs 17:27 and 28: “He that has knowledge spares his words...Even a fool, when he holds his peace, is counted wise: and he that shuts his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.” Ecclesiastes 5 and verse 2 says, “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thy heart be hasty to utter *anything* before God: for God is in heaven, and you upon earth: therefore let your words be few.” Ecclesiastes 10 and verse 14, “A fool...is full of words.” And so we have these general exhortations in the Scriptures with regard to *all* matters in life that we are to be a people who are slow to *speak*. “He that has knowledge *saves* his words, but a fool is full of words.”

But this exhortation to be slow to speak is especially needed when it comes to being swift to speak regarding the mind of God and the meaning of *Scripture*. People are altogether too rash to declare the meaning and message of the word of truth before they have *scarcely* learned it themselves. Every novice is ready to declare with conviction what the Bible teaches on any subject. And the more *ignorant* he is, the greater the *frequency* with which he speaks, and the greater the *certainty* with which he speaks.

Now God has very harsh words for those who claimed to speak His mind on *any* subject, but instead who misrepresented him because they hadn't taken enough time to *listen* because they were so busy *talking*. He speaks, for example, in Jeremiah, chapter 14, verses 14 through 16, "Then the Lord said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke to them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nothing, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them." God is very hostile about those, or towards those, who are quick to speak in His name when they are not accurately representing His mind.

We see the same statement in Jeremiah 29, verses 31 through 32, and there is an extensive passage in Ezekiel chapter 13, verses 2 through 16. And in this passage in Ezekiel 13:2 through 16, He says that these people who claim to speak for Him, and are so quick to say what God's mind is, are like people who are building a wall with untempered mortar. I remember one time building a little rock wall, and I used what I thought was good cement, but it wasn't. And when I got all done, I pushed on the wall, and the cement didn't hold anything, and the whole thing just fell *over*. And this is the picture that is used here in the passage in Ezekiel, where these people claimed to speak for God, and yet their whole system of teaching *crumbles* to the ground, and destroys those who stand in the shadow of it, because they had listened to someone who was swift to speak when he had not learned the proper and true message from God.

Well, the principle of verse 19 of James chapter 1 is that we must be students before we can be teachers. We need to be far more ready to listen than to speak; to be *taught*, rather than to attempt to teach; and to follow the example of Ezra, who, in chapter 7 and in verse 10 of his book, said this. It says, "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord"—number one, "and to *do* it"—number two, and to then and only then "teach in Israel statutes and judgments."

You see, Ezra didn't just run out and start trumpeting, "Well, the Lord says this and the Lord says that." He spent a lot of time studying and learning, and then he spent *more* time putting it into practice and doing. And only *then* did he presume to be a teacher of the people of God. And so once he had learned God's truth by being swift to hear, once he had *done* God's truth, then he could teach without error and without hypocrisy.

And just like Moses had to go up in the mountain and spend 40 days with God and receive the commandments from God before he could then turn and *give* them to the people, so it must always be, we must *first* receive and hear, and then only should we speak to others.

In Exodus 24, and in verse 12, “[T]he Lord said to Moses, Come up to me into the mountain, and be there: and I will give thee tables of stone, and a law, and commandments which I have written; that thou may teach them.” And so Moses had to be swift to hear before he was ever ready to speak to the people of God.

We see Jesus with this exact same attitude when in John 8 and verse 26, the passage we preached on this morning, Jesus said, “I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.” You see, Jesus spent thirty years being swift to hear and three years *speaking*. And He said that His message that He preached was one that He heard from God, and He learned it from God, and then and only then, once He had learned it, did He then go and start telling it to others.

Peter said the same thing in Acts, chapter 4 in verse 20. He says, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” And John, in First John 1, and verse 3, says, “That which we have seen and *heard* declare we unto you, that you also may have fellowship with us.”

And so whether we look at Moses, or Jesus, or Peter, or John, every one of them heard first, and *then* they spoke to others. So we need to be swift to hear, proven and qualified teachers of the word of God, and we need to be *slow* to speak what *we* think that word of God may or may not *say*. This is the thrust of James’ exhortation to us.

So having considered together last Lord’s Day the duty we have to be swift to hear, this evening we want to consider together the second point of that message, and that is the duty we have to be slow to speak. God willing, next Sunday, we will deal with the responsibility to be slow to wrath.

So this evening we are considering together the duty to be *slow* to speak. Now this passage tells us, in James 1:19, that there should be *in* us a readiness to hear that mind of qualified teachers upon the meaning of the word of God. We should not be so puffed up with our *own* knowledge that we are not more ready to hear than we are to *speak*. Some people so exalt their judgment that they have no *patience* to hear what might contradict their beliefs, and speak before they give another a chance to even make their case.

And this is one reason Paul gives the instruction that he *does* in First Corinthians 14, regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts in the local church. At the church in Corinth, *everyone* wanted to talk and nobody wanted to listen. And so Paul says to them, in First Corinthians 14, verses 30 through 33, “If any thing be revealed to another that sits by, let the first hold his peace.” In other words, he needs to be quiet and swift to hear. “For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.” They were all talking at the same *time*. And so he had to tell them, No, don’t do that. Do it one at a time. Everybody be swift to hear while one person *speaks*. He says, “[T]he spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.” If you really *have* the Spirit of God *within* you, then you ought to be able to control yourself to keep your mouth shut long enough to listen and to learn something from someone *else*. He goes on to say, “God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.

So what he is saying here is that this confusion that was occurring in the church at Corinth was because everybody was swift to speak and slow to hear. And James is saying precisely the opposite should take place in our assemblies, because we cannot be swift to hear and swift to speak at the same time. *One* of them has to be sacrificed for the sake of order, and for the sake of edification in the assembly.

Now this evening, I want us to consider together four points at which we are to be slow to speak—four points at which we are to be slow to speak. In the first place, then, consider together that we are to be *slow* to be teachers of the word of God. We are to be *slow* to be teachers of the word of God. Now by this I mean that we are to be *slow* to take up positions of formal teaching within the church. No person is to attempt to take up regular preaching of the word until he has demonstrated sufficient maturity, sufficient gifts, and sufficient *knowledge*.

The maturity and the gifts and the knowledge that are required to be teacher of God's word is set forth in *many* passages of Scripture, most notably, First Timothy 3, Titus chapter 1, and First Peter, chapter 5. But suffice it to say that the Plymouth Brethren notion that *every* man in the congregation is to be a teacher of the word is a very grievous error. Churches oftentimes set up young men to teach in order to give them a sense of importance and honor, in order that they might *retain* them in their congregations.

I remember being advised as a young ministerial student that the best way to keep newcomers to your church is to give them a job. You get a new young couple into the church, first thing you want to do is get them teaching Sunday school, and then they'll stay because they'll feel important, and like they have a job to do, and like they have commitments.

Tertullian, one of the church fathers who lived around 230 A.D., observed even in his day that churches were making men teachers before they were scarcely Christians, and that this was one of the ways heresy made such rapid progress, as any man with an ability to speak was ready to expound his peculiar view, even though he was *untaught* and ignorant of the truth.

And when you look at the great heresies in our day and age that have arisen—Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and the other cults—the mark of every one of the leaders of those religions is that they were ignorant and untaught men—or in the case of Christian Science, a woman, Mary Baker Eddy. And so what we have, is we have people who have been swift to speak who never bothered to hear in the first place.

The same problem exists, of course, in our day as well. In James chapter 3 and verse 1, we are told, "My brethren, be not many teachers, knowing that we shall receive the greater judgment." It is an awesome responsibility to be a teacher of the word of God, and fools rush in where the wise tremble to tread. Did I not feel constrained by God to be doing this, I would be doing something else. It is not something that I really enjoy, but it is something that I feel constrained to do, and I tremble under the responsibility of it, knowing that I shall have a great judgment, having being a spokesman for God and representing the mind of God to His bride. And I pray to God that I have represented it accurately through the years.

And so we're to be slow to speak, as teachers of the word of God. Secondly, we are to be slow to speak, not only in that we are to be slow to be teachers of the word. We are also to be slow to take a stand upon issues and doctrines. We are to be slow to take a stand upon issues and doctrines.

Now people are altogether too quick to pronounce that the Bible teaches this, or the Bible teaches that, and then *dig* in and take a stand and invest their pride and reputation in a hastily taken position before adequately researching the matter and considering all the information that is available *regarding* it. And so, we need to be slow to speak on issues until we have a sure ground for the position that we take, lest haply we be found to be fighting against God and contradicting His word.

How many people have I heard say, Well, you know, God this, or God that. And I think, Man, you don't know what you're *saying*. Don't you realize that what you're saying is in direct contradiction to this or to that passage? And it's simply because they haven't spent the time and invested the labor and *listened* enough to others before they have taken a stand on an issue.

And so do not be too hasty to defend *any* position until you have thoroughly tested it. People of sudden and rash opinions find themselves either having to change positions often, as facts are brought to bear, or else they find themselves out of *pride* having to defend indefensible positions. And a man who is slow to speak, until he has certain and proven ground to stand on, will avoid either of those pitfalls—either constantly changing his position, or out of pride defending what is really an indefensible position.

Now turn in your Bibles please, for an example of this at work to Acts, chapter 15. The book of Acts, chapter 15. This is the great Jerusalem Council, and notice how James, who wrote this book, conducted himself with this little affair. And what we're going to see is that here was a man who was swift to hear and slow to speak. Notice. Acts 15, verse 1, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question."

Skip down, if you will, to verse 4. "And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter. And when there had been much disputing," or much debate, "Peter rose up, and said to them, Men and brethren, you know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

"And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us. And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon has declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith

the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is...”

Now the point is, is that James didn't pass sentence on an issue of controversy until he had heard all the witnesses, listened to the testimony, examined the Scriptures, and *then* and *only* then did he finally take a position, or a stand upon the issues. It is known that James had the nickname in the early church, “James the Just.” Why do you suppose he had that nickname? Because he was someone who took into consideration *all* the facts and *all* of the data before he would render a decision with reference to it. In other words, he was not precipitous and rash in the conclusions that he arrived at. And so sentence was passed after extensive inquiry, and James was one who followed his *own* advice—he was slow to speak.

And so when we come to an issue of biblical controversy, don't be quick to jump down on one side or the other of it, but take your time to study, listen, learn, reflect, examine the Scriptures, seek counsel and advice, both from the living and the dead—the living, by their mouths, and the dead, by their books—and thus arrive at a conclusion on a matter.

Thirdly, we are not only to be slow to speak and that we are to be slow to be teachers of the word of God, and that we are to be slow to take a stand upon issues and doctrine. Thirdly, we are to be slow to speak in the *presence* of those more knowledgeable than we in the things of God. We are to be slow to speak in the *presence* of those more knowledgeable than we in the things of God.

Now the illustration that I would use, first of all, is the illustration that comes to us out of the book of Job. You remember after Job's troubles, four friends came to him. There was Eliphaz, there was Bildad, there was Zophar, and there was Elihu. And you remember that the vast majority of the book is taken up with a discussion between Job and Eliphaz and Bildad and Zophar. Those four men did the talking. And Elihu's sitting over here as silent as a *post*. And for 31 chapters, you don't hear a peep out of him. And finally, after these more knowledgeable, more mature, more godly men have exhausted all that they have to say, then he speaks. And he said that the reason why he had kept silence up 'til then, in Job, chapter 32, and in verse 7, he said, “I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.”

Now it's true that in the end, this younger man proved to be wiser than his three older friends. But nevertheless, he understood a principle. And the principle is this, those who are older than we and more experienced that we ought to be given the license to speak, while are silent. And after they are done speaking, then it's time for us to put in our two cents' worth.

And Elihu demonstrated the validity of this principle and the worth and value of it in the way in which he dealt with those who were his elders in age, and apparently in understanding; although in this issue, he had more understanding than *they* did.

Notice if you will, also, the example of First King 12, verses 1 through 14. In First King 12, verses 1 through 14, what we have is Rehoboam has now taken the throne and Israel comes to him and says, Look, lighten up on the taxes and we'll serve you. And he says, Well go away for three days, and I'll tell you. Because Solomon had exacted *very* heavy taxes on the people. And so Rehoboam calls his counselors. And the *old* men come, and they give their counsel. And then they say, Lighten up. If you lighten up on these folks, they'll be your servants forever.

And then Rehoboam turns to the young men, and he says, What do you guys have to say? And they said, Stick it to them! And it says, in First Kings 12, and verse 8, that Rehoboam *forsook* the counsel of the old men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that were grown up *with* him which stood before him, and he followed their counsel. And the situation was, is that people who had age *, , experience, and understanding were *ignored*, in the favor of those who were still wet behind the ears and hadn't been around the bush more than once.

And so when it comes to *listening*, being slow to speak and swift to hear, we need to be swift to hear those who are more knowledgeable than we in the things of God, and slow to speak until they have expressed their opinions on matters. And when they have, and when they're finished, it is fine for us to speak. But you see, Rehoboam made a huge error in ignoring the counsel of the old men and following the counsel of the young men.

And that brings us then to our fourth and final point. We are to be slow to speak, not only with reference to being teachers of the word, not only with reference to taking a stand upon issues and doctrine, not only in the presence of those more knowledgeable than we in the things of God, but fourthly, we are to be slow to speak when convicted by the word. We are to be slow to speak when convicted by the word.

Now when we are quick to hear, we will hear, from time to time, those things that are a source of *conviction* to us. And our problem is that we are altogether too quick to speak out our objections to the word of God when we are *convicted* by it. One of the stated duties of a pastor, for example, is to preach the word in season, out of season; to reprove; to rebuke; and to exhort with all patience and doctrine. And so if there is to be reproof, rebuke, then there is obviously going to be some conviction on the part of those who hear that preaching. And we are altogether too quick to speak out our objections to the word when we are *convicted* by it.

Just start talking to somebody, for example, about observing the *Sabbath*, and boy, they're just all over you like flies on meat about why the Sabbath is "legalistic." When the word convicts us, it is natural for the mind to leap to our defense and the tongue to leap into action, and we do not allow time for the Spirit to work in our consciences and convince us of our wrong.

Now if upon a considered and thoughtful reflection we are not wrong, fine. But too often, a quick resentment to the preached or applied word of God is a sign of a guilty conscience and a moral failure, and we will save ourselves adding sin to sin if we keep our mouth *shut* under the conviction of the word of truth as it comes to us, and restrain our outbursts of objection, and give time for the Spirit to God to work and to prove the matter in our *hearts*.

Now an example of someone who failed to do that is Jeroboam. He's the guy who led the people away from Rehoboam when he wouldn't lighten up on the taxes, and he decided that, Since we've now separated from Jerusalem, the only way I'm going to keep my little separated kingdom is if I keep the people from *going* to Jerusalem three times a year, like they're supposed to to the temple, to observe the various feasts, the Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Three times a year, Israel was to—all the men were to present themselves in Jerusalem for those things. And he said, You know, if they all start going back to Jerusalem, pretty soon their allegiance will go back there, and I'll lose my kingdom.

So what did he do? He set altars in Bethel and in Dan. And he said to Israel, You can worship here. There's no need to go down to Jerusalem; after all, these golden calves, and we've got priests, and we've got ceremonies, and they're on *exactly* the same date—just by coincidence—as the feasts in Jerusalem. And so, don't bother to make the trip. You can stay here and worship. And so by leading the people into idolatry, cutting them off from the true worship of Jehovah, he hoped to preserve his kingdom.

Well, that's lousy strategy. But nevertheless, it says in First Kings 13:1, “And behold, there came a man of God out of Judah by the word of the Lord to Bethel; and Jeroboam stood by the altar to burn incense. And he cried against the altar in the word of the Lord, and said, O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord; Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee. And he gave a sign the same day, saying, This is the sign which the Lord has spoken; Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out. And it came to pass, when king Jeroboam heard the saying of the man of God, which had cried against the altar in Bethel, that he put forth his hand from the altar, saying, Lay hold on him. And his hand, which he put forth against him, dried up, so that he could not pull it in again to him.” Kind of calmed him down a little. Verse 6, “[T]he king answered and said to the man of God, Entreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored me again. And the man of God besought the Lord, and the king's hand was restored him again, and became as it was before.”

Here was a man who was *way* too quick to speak when brought under the conviction of the word of God. And it made him into a fool. And he added to his sin of idolatry the sin of attacking a prophet of God, and the sin of rebelling against the word of God.

So when you receive some sort of reproof, either in the preaching or in the personal counseling, be slow to speak regarding a rejection or a reproof of it. Give time to search out the matter and to wait upon the Lord, and see if the Lord would confirm that word.

Now I have two principles I want to bring to your attention by way of conclusion. The first principle is this, we are not always to be slow to speak. We are not *always* to be slow to speak. *Sometimes* we are to be very *quick* to speak. For example, we are to be quick to speak the Gospel. First Peter 3, and verse 15, says, “[S]anctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready *always* to give an answer to every man who asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” In other words, he says you're to have the Gospel ready on the *tip* of your tongue, and as soon as you have an opportunity to *share* that word, you're to say it right out. You're not to be slow to speak when it comes to sharing the Gospel.

You are not only to be quick to speak the Gospel, but you are also to be *quick* to teach your *children* by counsel, reproof, and instruction. Now I said previously that we are to be slow to be teachers of the word of God, and I made that very clear. I was talking about formal teaching in the church. But when it comes to teaching in your *home*, and discipling your children with the truth of the word of God, you are to be very quick to speak.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 6, verses 6 through 7, it says—and God's speaking here—He says, “[T]hese words, which I command thee this day, shall be in your heart: And you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in thine house, and when thou

walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise up.” In other words, the stuff’s supposed to be rolling off your tongue all the time, all day long.

So do not say, Well, you know, I’m supposed to be slow to speak with reference to the word of God, so therefore, I won’t say anything to my children. I’ll let them make up their own mind about what they’re going to believe. That’s the lie of the *Devil*. You’re supposed to make up their mind *for* them about what they believe by teaching them diligently each and every day the word of God, having them memorize the Scriptures, having them function on the basis of biblical principle, and constantly bringing passages to bear upon their behavior and the principles that are under their personal experience and discussion at that moment.

Thirdly, you are to be quick to enter into fellowship. You are to be *quick* to enter into fellowship. People say, Well, you know, I’m supposed to be slow to speak, so therefore when I get to church this Sunday, I won’t say anything to anybody. I’ll be slow to speak and swift to hear. That is *not* what the passage is teaching. In Malachi 3, and verse 16, it says, “Then they that feared the Lord spoke *often* one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.”

And so being slow to speak doesn’t mean you stand around with nothing to say when you’re in the fellowship of the saints. You are to be quick to speak to one another about your relationship with God and about God’s work in your *life*.

Fourthly, you are to be quick to ask questions. You are to be quick to ask questions. In Psalm 27, and verse 4, David says, “One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple.”

When David went to the temple, he asked questions. He wanted to *learn*. And so this is not saying, in Sunday School class, when I say, Are there any questions, you sit there and say, Well, I better be slow to *speak*. That’s not what I’m *saying*, okay? You’re to be quick to enquire of the Lord in the *temple* of the Lord, which is the church. There’s nothing wrong with asking questions. There is everything *right* about it. It’s how we *learn*. And so don’t feel like that by asking questions somehow you’re not being swift to hear. You have already heard. You know my style of teaching. I teach, and then I say, Are there any questions? And you’ve been listening, listening, listening. And then, if you have a question, by all means, be quick to ask it.

Fifthly, we are to be quick to speak encouragement and comfort to other people. We are to be quick to speak encouragement and comfort to other people. In Second Corinthians 1, and verse 4, it says of God that He “comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be *able* to comfort them which are in *any* trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.” So as often as you see someone in trouble, you’re supposed to speak *comfort* to them as a result of the comfort that God has taught you through your difficult experiences.

And then sixthly, you are to be quick to offer praise and thanks to God with your mouth. You are to be *quick* to offer praise and thanks to God with your mouth. Ephesians 5, and verse 20, says you are to be “[g]iving thanks *always* for *all things* unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” And so, continuously we are to be talking about the thanks that we have to God and the praise that we owe to Him for the blessings that He has brought into our lives.

So we are not always to be slow to speak. We are to be quick to speak the Gospel, quick to teach our children, quick to enter into fellowship, quick to ask questions, quick to speak encouragement and comfort, and quick to offer praise and thanks to God. We're just to be slow to speak with reference to those four things that I mentioned.

And then my second principle, by way of conclusion, is this. To be slow to speak does not mean that we are to *never* speak. Some people are so slow to speak, they wind up never speaking at all. And this is not a sign of humility and obedience as much as it is a mark of either mental laziness, because they *will* not work their brains about the things of God, and so therefore, they're so empty-headed they never *have* anything to say. Or, it is a mark of pride, because they are afraid of looking ignorant or of being wrong by asking a question, and so they don't say anything out of pride.

And so, he does not say, Don't speak at all. Once you have *learned* something and you are confident of the position and you are in a teaching position where the others who are older have spoken, and this is not a matter of speaking out against some conviction that's in your life, *say* what God's word that you have learned. Say of God's word what you have learned. Don't be afraid to do that. Just be *slow* in doing, that's all. But it doesn't mean don't do it at *all*.

One man said this. "Do not shrink from speaking when speaking is plainly your duty. But at the same time, do not be rash, and carefully weigh your words before uttering them." I think that pretty well sums it up.

And so I hope this evening that the Lord helps us to understand what it means to be slow to speak with reference to the word of God, and that we would not rush in, for we ought not to be rushing in, but that we would also not hold *back* where we ought to be uttering. And you know, this is the situation in which James 1:5 really comes into play. "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God." Oftentimes I ask myself *so* many times, Should I say something? Should I not say something? How much should I say? And we need to be constantly before the throne of grace, asking God to give us wisdom in relationship to our tongues so that they will be a source of *health* and blessing to people and an honor and a glory to God, and not be used as a two-edged sword that pierces and destroys and dishonors the Lord.

Well, shall we pray together. Father, thank you so much that you have made your word available to us. Lord, help us all to be swift to hear. Father, I pray that you would speak clearly and plainly to each of us. Help us, Father, to be ready to close our mouths and open our minds and to be taught, in order, Father, that we might truly know and then someday be like Ezra, ready to teach others. Thank you, Father, for your mercy and kindness to us. Help us to *rightly* understand these things, and help us to be quick to speak where we should. Father, we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

* Tape skips at ~29'29".