

Listening: The Pathway to Wisdom

by Bryan Gibson

“So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak...” (James 1:19). Be honest—how often have you disobeyed that commandment? Too often we do just the opposite—we’re slow to hear and swift to speak. And we do that because we’re more interested in what we have to say than what someone else has to say.

Practicing the “Golden Rule” would sure help: “Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them” (Matt. 7:12). We appreciate it when people listen to us, so why not show them the same courtesy. To become truly wise, we must learn to listen—to our parents, to our spouses, to our children, to our brethren, to our friends and neighbors, to those whom we’re trying to teach, and especially to God. Let’s look at some other passages (all from Proverbs) that urge us to be “swift to hear and slow to speak.”

“He who has knowledge spares his words, and a man of understanding is of a calm spirit. Even a fool is counted wise when he holds his peace; when he shuts his lips, he is considered perceptive” (17:27-28).

“He who answers a matter before he hears it, it is folly and shame to him” (18:13).

“Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction” (10:14).

“A prudent man keeps his knowledge to himself, but the heart of fools blurts out folly” (12:23).

“Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding, but what is in the heart of fools is made known” (14:33).

“Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (29:20).

“The ear that hears the rebukes of life will abide among the wise. He who disdains instruction despises his own soul, but he who heeds rebuke gets understanding” (15:31-32).

Let’s take the following test to see how well we’re doing.

1. Do we listen when someone is correcting us, or only when someone is praising us?
2. When we share knowledge with others, do we do it to inform or to impress?
3. Do we feel like we have to say everything that’s on our mind?
4. How often do we interrupt when someone else is speaking?
5. Do we really listen to the ideas of others, or is our way always the best way?
6. Do we tell things on other people before we’ve heard all the facts?
7. Do we really listen when our children tell us what’s going on in their lives?

8. Do we listen to the elderly, or do we dismiss their wisdom as “outdated”?
9. Do we listen carefully in Bible class, both to the teacher and to those making comments?
10. Do we listen carefully to every sermon?

“Swift to hear, slow to speak”—that’s what God wants, so let’s keep working on it.