

James 1:19-20

James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; (20) for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Questions On The Text

What is James' instruction?

Verse 19: James tells us that we are to be swift to hear. Hearing refers to more than just audible words; it implies really listening to what a person means. Listening is therefore an important skill; in fact, it is more important to hear than to speak. As is often pointed out, this is illustrated in the truth that God has given us two ears and only one mouth. That should tell us something.

Listening also includes listening to God. One reason that this is so important is that faith does not come directly from the Word of God, but it comes by hearing (Rom 10:17). God speaks quietly (see 1 Kings 19:10-12), so we need to make sure that we are diligent listeners.

What should our speech be like?

Verse 19: We are to be slow to speak, which does not refer to the speed at which our words flow; it refers to how quickly we respond in speech to what others are saying, or even to situations.

The Bible contains many warnings about the use of the tongue. For instance, Proverbs 10:19; 13:3; 17:28; 29:20. See also what happened to an Amalekite who was hasty in his speech. (2 Sam 1:1-16) The Rabbis understood how important it was to control the tongue, and referred to the "third tongue" which kills the speaker, kills the person spoken to, and kills the person spoken of.

What else does God want to be slow?

Verse 19: God wants us to be slow to anger. This is an important quality as it is one of the characteristics of God Himself. (See Ps 103:8) See also Proverbs 19:11; 14:29 for God's remedy to being quick to anger.

Why does God want us to be slow to anger?

Verse 20: Apart from the fact that being slow to anger makes us more like Him, there is another reason that God wants us to take on that quality. Human wrath has zero eternal value as it does not produce God's righteousness.

It's easy to think that anger gets results, but it does not get the results that God wants. As an emotion, anger is very difficult to control, and under its influence, serious damage can be done to others, especially through the unrestrained use of our tongue.

Further Questions For Discussion:

How can you be a better listener?

How can you ensure that you will listen to God more closely?

What's the best way to be slow to speak?

How can a person become slow to anger?

Why does human anger fail to produce God's righteousness?