

*When I was at high school, we had a teacher who all the kids used to call “Cutloose Bruce” (never to his face, mind you)...*

*I actually don't think teaching was the profession Cutloose Bruce should have ever entered. The slightest little thing would tip him right over the edge. Even if he had explained some science problem, and a couple of the kids didn't understand it: he'd grab something he could hurl or throw or smash. His blood would rush to his face as he turned a bright crimson red. – with the colour of his face, you could imagine smoke coming from his ears,,, and he'd growl, **“Sometimes I think your heads are filled with RICE PUDDING!!!!”***

*One day he had a metre blackboard ruler in his hand, and with the word “PUDDING!!!”, he smashed the ruler down on the desk, and snapped it in two.*

*And then the very next day, there was a brand new ruler in the classroom, because the other one had mysteriously broken...*

*And something happened that tipped Cutloose Bruce over the edge, and his face turned the colour of a sunbathing Englishman, 6 hours into a Queensland beach holiday...*

***“Sometimes I think your heads are filled with RICE PUDDING!!!!”***

*And in his hand (you guessed it), was the brand new blackboard ruler. And he slammed it down on the desk, and it snapped clean in half. And he looked at it, and in a rage, he slammed it down on the desk again, and it snapped in half again... He was now left holding a ¼ Metre Ruler.*

*What sort of respect, do you think Cutloose Bruce mustered from the children???*

*Well, we were certainly afraid of him. But I don't think any of us respected him. His lack of self-control and his antics, made him a laughing-stock amongst the kids...*

Now, you might not have anger issues, quite to the extent of Cutloose Bruce, but it would be a very rare person indeed, who doesn't **sometimes** get angry, and then sin because of that anger... In Ephesians 4, it says “**4:26** **Be angry and do not sin...**” There **is** a righteous anger – like **God** has a righteous anger – sometimes it is **right** to be angry...

But how do we tell the difference. Because we **always** feel **we're** the ones who are in the right, and we **always** feel that our anger is justified, don't we? But, even when I **am** in the right, when is it right to be angry about something, and when should I push that anger aside, and calm down, and be a peace maker, instead?

Well firstly, a bit of good advice is to consider “Do you have control of your anger, or does your anger control you?” And if your anger is dictating your actions – if you're about to lash out and say something – without thinking – or without praying,,, if you're about to respond physically as an angry response, then there's a fair chance, that your anger has control of you, and it's leading you into sin.

*Someone once said, “Speak when you're angry, and you'll make the best speech you'll always regret<sup>i</sup>.”*

How true is that, hey??? *Words are like shaving cream – once you let it out of the can, you can't get it back in again.*

And as I look back over my life, and relationships with people, there's been a few things that I've done, that I wish I could take back.... But **more** damaging, have been the words that I've said, when I should've remained silent.

James said, **be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger**

This is Godly advice, for Godly living.

Now, we've got to remember, this letter of James, is a very practical book of the bible. Next week, James is going to tell us to "be **doers** of the word" and not just hearers. James is teaching us (right throughout his letter), that faith and actions go together.

And just as our actions, should be actions that spring from our faith – actions that accompany our faith – actions that cry out the love and justice and mercy of God..., our **words**, should be words that spring from faith; our words should be words that accompany our faith; the way we speak, should always demonstrate the love and justice and mercy of God.

**So, be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger**

What does it mean to be quick to hear?

- Well, it begins with hearing the Word of God – reading the word; hearing the word preached; the Holy Spirit revealing to us God's word; the Wisdom of God, being

shared through other Christians. – the Gospel itself – the Word of Grace.

- Secondly, being quick to hear, means taking a genuine interest in others. Listen to what they're saying... Some of us just want to tell our story, **without** listening to what anybody else has to say... A **wise** man seeks counsel from others. Listen...
- Thirdly, **hear** what they're actually saying. If you disagree with it, or if you have a problem with what they're saying, or question their motivation for saying it... **Before** you make any response, gently test, that what **you understand** them to be saying, is indeed what they mean.

Or, if they've **done** something, and you're concerned with what they've done, enquire of them, about their motivations – I mean, ask them what they were trying to achieve, in what they did.

- Fourthly, beware if you have a propensity to take offence... By my experience, some people, have a natural propensity, to see an offence, or take an offence, or hear an offence, even if the person **meant** no offence in what they said or did...

**And** sometimes, the greatest **givers** of offence, are also the ones who see an offence towards themselves, at the slightest drop of the hat... And they tell me how they've been deeply hurt or offended by someone in what they've said or done,, and I find myself thinking "Really???? You need to take a good look at yourself, and the deeply offensive things you say to others..."

If you find that you are often offended by what others say or do, you may be someone who has a natural propensity, to take offence, where there really is no offence. Now, this means that you need to take some **extra** time to hear what the other person is **really** saying, and checking that your understanding of what they've said or done, is a **true** understanding, and not just a **perceived** offence...

Be quick to hear....

But be slow to speak.

If you're anything like me, you want to always put forward your side of the argument. Or you **may** be someone given to retaliate quickly with angry words... Woo back there. Hold it back a bit.... Be slow to speak...

*Some people say "Count to 10 before you reply, or if you're really angry, count to 100."*

Well, I reckon you could find a better use of your time than counting... How about having a quick prayer... And if your emotions are getting the better of you, and you don't know what to pray, pray the Lord's prayer... That should help you to get your perspective right.

Be slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

While the righteousness of God sometimes produces a righteous anger, **the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

Alright, you got that??? The righteousness of God sometimes produces a righteous anger... **But the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

We humans – we are masters at self-justification. I've got news for you – it is the Lord who justifies us – it should never be ourselves. **Self-justification**, is ugly. It is vile. It is deceiving. But it is so very easy to do.

And we quickly give ourselves over to anger – we take the high moral ground and we feel that we are justified in our anger, and so we claim it to be a righteous anger of God.

Well, sometimes the Lord will give us a righteous anger.... But I suspect that **more** often than not, our anger, is exactly that – “our anger”. And as such, it is not a righteous anger.

But how do I tell? How do I tell whether the anger I express, is man's anger, or God's anger?

Well, one is self-serving, and the other serves God.  
One glorifies self, and the other glorifies God.  
One grieves that it had to be expressed, and the other takes pride in its expression (I put him in his place)  
One first gives warning and the opportunity of repentance.  
And the other will boil over, almost immediately.

V21 <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the **implanted** word, which is able to save your souls.

This is really a lead-in to what we're going to be talking about next week, and again after Christmas time. – about being doers of the word, and the impact this has, on our character; on how we talk; on what we do...

He tells us to put away, **all filthiness and rampant wickedness** – he's talking about repentance. Living by the Spirit, means we constantly turn from our old ways. We constantly put off, our old, destructive way of living, and we live the Jesus way instead.

And we're going to learn, as we continue through James, one of the most destructive parts of our bodies – is the tongue. Speaking too quickly. Speaking instead of listening. Speaking in Anger. Filthy talk...

And here James is referring to it as “**rampant wickedness**”. I've been in a few churches, where the people of God, have been **at** one another – their words – daggers flying from their mouths... Rampant wickedness – angry words; lying words; bitter words... a people, founded in love, but grounded in hate...

And that kind of behaviour has no place in God's church. Take it off. Throw it away...

and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.,

James always brings us back to the Gospel, doesn't he... Do you know the opposite of meekness? Pride. Pride is what makes us justify our anger. It's pride that makes us want to always have the last word. It's pride, that insists that **I've** got to win the argument...

But when you came to Jesus, there was **no** room for pride, was there.... When you received the gospel – the Good news of Jesus, and forgiveness in His name, there was **no** room for pride...

We come to Jesus in meekness. We walk with Jesus in meekness. Let the way we live – the way we talk – the way we relate to others, always reflect, the very meekness, in which we came to God.

We have nothing to bring. We are beggars before God. Why would we ever try and portray ourselves as anything different to our brother???

Let's pray

<sup>19</sup> Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; <sup>20</sup> for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. <sup>21</sup> Therefore put away all filthiness and



rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

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<sup>i</sup> Rowell Edward K. *Quotes & Idea Starters for Preaching and Teaching from Leadership Journal*. Baker Books. Grand Rapids: 1996. P.11