An Open and Shut Case

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.” James 1:19

There is a delicate balance in life. It involves the capacity to speak. In many situations, just because we can speak, doesn’t mean we should. We must wait for the right moment, the time that brings healing, faith, or hope.

God’s people labor to find the answer to when to open their mouth or to remain silent. We often get it wrong, for we tend to listen to ourselves, like the world, rather than God all too often.

We can never find what God wants to tell us until we stop talking and open ourselves to the flow of faith which comes from heaven each day. God speaks. Silent people are able to listen and be blessed.

“There are joys” wrote Henry Ward Beecher, “which long to be ours. God sends ten thousand truths, which come about us like birds seeking inlet; but we are shut up to them, and so they bring us nothing, but sit and sing awhile upon the roof, and then fly away.”

So, open your heart to the insights and blessings which God continually sends our way. If we say we do not hear God, then we are not listening.

Have you ever noticed that it is difficult to hear others speak when we are talking? It’s the same with God. We must find that balance between open and shut. Only then will we hear what we need to hear. Only then will we be who God wants us to be.

Marriage is a good place to learn to listen. There are many opinions about who should be in charge. Comedy writer Ogden Nash has put it into words as only he can.

“To keep your marriage brimming,
With love in the loving cup,
Whenever you’re wrong, admit it;
Whenever you’re right, shut up.”
There are many passages in the Bible about this balance. One of my favorites is the old proverb, "Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise; when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent." Proverbs 17:28. I heard it paraphrased another way." Better to Remain Silent and Be Thought a Fool than to Speak and Remove All Doubt. Some say Abraham Lincoln said it, others Mark Twain. No matter who came up with it, it is a great rule of thumb for those who want to practice the art of silence for the better good.

If we want to learn about stepping on our own tongues, and what not to do, just watch the television news each night with that thought in mind. People talk all the time, and most of the things they say don’t make sense. When the news is colored with opinion, so that the opinion becomes the news, then we have only words, not reality.

If we want to learn what to do, just watch Jesus. He knows exactly when to speak, and has the right things to say when he does. He knows when to be silent, even when it might make people uncomfortable, and even that is for a reason.

The blessing we as Christians have is that this ability to know when to open and shut is a gift from God. We as humans have limited capacity. Our minds are darkened by the condition of sin, and only God can bring the light.

Perhaps prayer would be a great place to practice this balance. We can talk and not listen all day, and the only person we hurt is ourselves. The true practice of prayer is to listen, to wait for the voice of God, and to be blessed by the communication of the greatest speaker in existence.

Indian writer Ashwin Sanghi puts it in just a few words. “Would the fish have ever been caught if it had kept its mouth shut?”

It is true that we cannot know how to truly open and shut without the love of God tempering and informing what we should do. When we leave the posture of prayer and begin to talk to others, it is important not to interrupt. A sure way of giving value to others is to be known as a good listener.

Even when we might know more, and especially when we are under attack, the best way, the way of God, is to remain silent. The time will come when we are supposed to speak, which could be never in that instance, and here’s the good part. He will give us the words.

“Let there be a door to thy mouth, that it may be shut when need arises, and let it be carefully barred, that none may rouse thy voice to anger, and thou pay back abuse with abuse.” Ambrose, 4\textsuperscript{th} century A.D.

It’s an open and shut case.