

Listen!

Ponder: Listening to understand, not to answer

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

You are trying to explain an important truth to someone or tell about an event. You use a word or phrase that reminds them of an unrelated issue they’ve had on their mind. They cut you off in mid-sentence to tell you about whatever bee they have in their bonnet. Irritating? Indeed, it is downright rude! The unspoken message is, “What I have to say is much more important than what you were saying, so I will ignore you, interrupt you, and expect you to hear my story.” To say the least, somebody wasn’t listening.

Listening involves far more than letting sound waves vibrate your ear drums! Solomon warned of the folly of answering a matter before you hear it (i.e. before you understand). Whether it’s a friend, an employer, or a spouse speaking to us, we ought to strive to understand before making any reply.

We need to look no further than the political scene to find people who have no interest in listening to actually understand each other. Sound bites, out-of-context quotes, and buzz words rule the day. Unfortunately, this counter-productive behavior damages family relationships and hinders Christian fellowship, too. Spouses too often “listen” to the other spouse just long enough to grab onto something to prove that “you’re wrong and I’m right!” Brothers and sisters in Christ sometimes do the same when involved in a disagreement. In any case, “it is folly and shame on him.”

Let us discipline ourselves to listen! Listen to understand what the other is saying. Especially in a disagreement, and even more especially in a heated one, focus not on what you will say in reply, but on understanding the other person. Demonstrate respect and wisdom by re-stating what the other person said. “I understood you to be saying thus and such; is that right?” The other person can clarify if needed and will probably appreciate your effort to understand. Who knows, they might even reciprocate!

Let’s re-discover the art of truly listening!

Song: “Angry Words”

Prayer: Father, You have given us two ears but only one mouth. Help us, we pray, respect others by truly listening with the intent of understanding what they are saying. In Jesus’ name, Amen.