

FAITH THAT REALLY WORKS

(When Your Belief System Becomes Your Lifestyle)

James 3:1-12

'Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire'

Although it isn't certain when and where and why this often-used chant originated, there is some agreement that it became popularized through a poem about a liar written by William Blake in 1810. The idea seems to coordinate the sin of deceit and dishonesty with the warning of **Revelation 21:8 & 22:15** in the Bible that: ***"...all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death"***. It is as if to say, that people who lie are already so close to hell that their lower garments are already smoldering from the heat of their coming infernal destination. If lying is a sure outer sign of a soul on the way to destruction there are a lot people, including many professing Christians, who are only 'lying' to themselves, others and God about their alleged relationship with Christ and God (**Matthew 7:21-23, Titus 1:16**). But lying is just the tip of the iceberg of a cold and despicable heart ready to damage and destroy with a cutting tongue any life that may brush up against it. Gossip, slander, deception, partial truth, evasive speech and bold-face lying are the verbal filth that flows from a heart that is more similar to an overflowing septic tank than a spiritual well that emits living waters from God (**Matthew 12:34-37**). That little flap of muscle between the teeth, like a floodgate on a dam, is this control valve on how and when words are released to flow for better or worse.

God, in the book of James, confirms the amazing influence of what we say on others, the course of history and the destiny of immortal souls: ***"the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity", "it sets on fire the course of nature and is set on fire by hell", "it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison"***. Without a doubt, control of one's talk is key to victory in all other areas of the Christian's life. Until the believer's speech is reigned in under the Holy Spirit's reign, the things Christians say can be horrible hindrances to the cause of Christ. James is correct in saying that the tongue is small like a rudder on a ship that steers a great vessel on the sea; what we say with words formed by the tongue do indeed have great power to steer lives toward the heavenly harbors of goodness or to drift in the murky stream of hostility toward the gulf of the Lake of Fire. 'Loose lips sink ships' warns the captain to his crew'; 'sinful speech scuttles souls' warns the Captain of our faith to body of Christ, His church (**Hebrews 2:10**).

The only antidote to a runaway tongue is truth, God's truth, and lots of it. The only thing powerful enough to reign in a runaway tongue to submission to God is the memorization of and meditation on God's Word (**Psalm 119:9-11, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 2:1-2, etc.**). Scripture is a powerful spiritual medication to any heart that is bitter, frustrated and ready to attack verbally. God's Word not only sedates the restless soul, but it actually transforms it to feel, think and react like Jesus did (**2 Corinthians 3:18**). Another 'tongue tamer' is humility to confess sinful speech and seek to correct the damage it has done (**Matthew 5:23-24, James 5:16**) / swallowing your pride, admitting your sinfulness to the one you sought to damage and receiving their forgiveness is essential to verbal victory. Being full of the Holy Spirit also settles the heart and strengthens the soul with 'mouth control' (**Galatians 5: 22-23, Ephesians 5:18-21**). We can also bless God and protect the unity of the body of Christ by refusing to listen to negative, critical, defaming remarks by grumblers and complainers in our midst (**Galatians 5:15, Philippians 2:14-15, 1 Tim. 5:17-19-21, Jude 16-19, etc.**). And of course the future judgment seat of Christ where what we have said in this life affects rewards or loss thereof we will receive from the Savior, should help us control what comes out of our mouth: ***"But I say to you that for every idle word men speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned (loss of reward)"*** (**Matthew 12:36-37**). These are just a few helpful thoughts and activities that the Lord has given Christians for transforming troublesome tongues into a grace-giving, praise-pumping appendages in heart where He is ruling in truth and grace. In the end how we speak tells the truth on our heart about whether we really do 'fear God' and sense His presence, and whether we truly are 'full of the Holy Spirit' or just full of sin and an unholy spirit.

"Therefore put away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another ... Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed to the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor and all evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you."

Ephesians 4:25-32

‘Scriptural Speech Therapy’
(James 1:19 & 26; 2:12; 3:1-12; 4:11, 5:12)

Communicating God’s Grace
(Use of the tongue to form words that teach)

3:1-4

“My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds that are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires”.

- **Discuss the comparisons between a person’s tongue and: ‘a horse’s bit’; ‘a ship’s rudder’**
- **Why does the Holy Spirit pick these two examples?**
- **Can you think of examples of when something someone said affected the direction of a person’s life?**
- **Has something good someone said affected the course of your life?**

Communicating Devilish Evil
(Use of the tongue to form words to destroy)

3:5-12

“Even so (vs. 1-4) the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude of God.

Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so.

Does a spring send forth, fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh?”

- **The tongue doesn’t work on it’s own independently. What is it hooked up to that really runs it?**
- **How is usage of the tongue like a fire?**
- **Why is the tongue (our speech) so hard to control? (note the words ‘unruly’, ‘poison’)**
- **What are some examples of how wrong words do great, irreparable damage?**
- **Have you or someone you know been damaged by harmful things said to or about them?**
- **What does God think of mouths that sing one minute and then later slanders?**