

Faith is absolutely essential to any relationship with God. But it is inside and seen only by God who knows hearts. It becomes known to others by statements and works that flow from it. Statements of faith are proved by one's life (works), so his claims of being justified by faith in Christ are justified by his works.

Having spoken about the role of works in demonstrating faith, James now speaks to the believer's use of his tongue. He already mentioned it briefly earlier when describing true religion. First James speaks of the responsibility of one who teaches or aspires to teach. The religious teachers, Rabbis, in the Lord's time had authority and honor. ("Rabbi" is Hebrew for "Master") A man might be tempted to seek the honor and power he saw in teaching without realizing the immense responsibility of a teacher before God. A teacher's life, his works and sayings, must be consistent with his teaching for it to be credible. The Lord was addressed as "Rabbi" more than once but He brought honor to that title which had largely been discredited by the behavior (works) of the rabbis of the day. James isn't saying don't teach the scriptures. They speak of Christ. But we should beware of aspiring to be a teacher, a "laborer," a "traveling brother," an evangelist, a clergyman for the supposed respect and honor we see in the position. Paul addresses that ambitious spirit among the Corinthians in both epistles. Serving the Lord, in whatever capacity, carries with it responsibly, and a teacher more than most. We will account for all we say and do before the Lord.

Teaching entails use of the tongue (and the pen). James is only too aware of the misuse of the tongue. The Lord himself declared that out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. When James refers to controlling the tongue we may be sure he is referring to restraining the influence of the flesh upon the tongue.

*Matthew 12:34 O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.*

*Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.*

The Lord Jesus was the only Man who ever had complete control of His tongue. And He didn't have to bridle His body either for "in Him is no sin," 1John 3:5. All the rest of us, saved and unsaved, have a tongue that must be bridled. James was a good teacher for he used common everyday examples and illustrations to make his point. The Lord Jesus did that too. Bits in horses mouths control and steer them, rudders steer great ships (and airplanes). Little things can have power to do great good or to do great harm,

far beyond their size. A little flame can destroy whole forests and whole cities. A little poison or a little germ can kill whole populations. Similarly a little lie believed can send millions to hell. Satan is the father of lies. Look what he did to the human race, John 8:44.

James assures us the tongue cannot be tamed. What it says defiles the whole body, the whole person. The Lord taught us that.

*Matthew 15:11 Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man.*

Not only is the tongue destructive, it mixes good and evil together. Blessing and cursing out of the same mouth. More illustrations; fountains and what flows from them, fruit trees and their fruit, salt water and fresh. God created everything after its kind. He is not the author of confusion. He created a physical universe consisting of different identifiable elements and atomic particles which combine in certain limited ways. Men have contrived to make a fountain that gives either water or carbonated drink out of the same faucet. A simple lever controls which comes out. Would that my tongue were even that controllable. Better far will be the day when only the clean, sweet water of blessing comes out. The reservoir of cursing once hidden inside will have been permanently removed instead of only temporarily shut down.

Our hearts are like the cache on our computer browser that records and holds everything we see on the Internet whether we have intentionally saved it or not. How often our hearts contain such "treasures" tucked away, some of them impure, ready to spout out uncalled when we are frustrated by even some trivial thing. Driving in traffic will illustrate the point for most of us with no further comment needed. In fact we can sometimes handle the big things by faith and self control better than the trivial. But the fruit of the Spirit includes self control, Galatians 5:22-23. James calls for that.

By Ron Canner, August 13, 2008

NOTE: the ways of God are such in His Creation the good can be ruined mixing in a little contamination, but the bad cannot be purified by adding a little good. Exception: Even one ray of light destroys darkness but the light is dimmed by dirt or by hiding it, John 1:5; Matthew 5:15. As to mixtures: See Leviticus 19-19; Deuteronomy 22:9-11; Haggai 2:11-14; 1Corinthians 5:6; Galatians 5:9; 2Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1; 2Timothy 2:19-21. R.. C