

HAS INTEGRITY VANISHED?

Psalm 12: 1-8 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was the writer who created the character called Sherlock Holmes. He was a man of wry wit like Mark Twain. Once he wrote a short, unsigned telegram to twelve of the best known men in England. The anonymous message was the same to them all--only six words - six scary words, "All is discovered. Flee at once." Within 24 hours, the report was that not one of those men could be found. I can't attest to the truth of this story, but it illustrates a strong point. Many people, including you and me, can at times have something we are hiding in our lives; something that we hope never is found out. How many of us would flee if we received such a telegram? Do any of us live with a lie we try to bolster up with hopes that given enough time, the truth will never come out? Charles Haddon Spurgeon once wrote to the Prime Minister of England these words. "You do not know how those of us who highly regard you, feel it a joy to live when a Prime Minister believes in righteousness. We believe in no man's infallibility but it is restful to be sure of one's integrity." Those were kind and honoring words to the Prime Minister of England. What a compliment it was! The fact that God built this universe on truth because He is the living Truth, is easily verified by a simple device called a lie detector. We are all created in God's image. That which differs from truth registers in our conscience. A lie detector test works on the basis of the fact that people who tell lies and know they are telling lies become extremely anxious and uncomfortable, and this anxiety is then picked up by the machine. Why does telling a lie make a person anxious? It is because God built us all for telling the truth. Any departure from truth registers on the inside of us in a way that can be picked up on the outside. Lie detectors are not infallible, as they occasionally are fooled because a seared conscience can make a man believe his own lie to be truth. Nevertheless, what can never be fooled is the soul of the person who is lying. The worst thing about being a liar is knowing that you know the person telling the lie—and you know it is you.

A lie is never right, no matter what attempts we make to justify it. God cannot lie, and He will never appear to any of us or speak to our spirits with a word from the Lord or prompt us in any way with a lie. Did you know that something dies and it dies in us when we are dishonest and fail to be a person of integrity? Self-respect dies within us. Death begins to eat away at our heart the moment dishonesty comes in. Honesty and integrity are the oil change we all need in the inner mechanisms of our lives. Dishonesty is sand in the machinery of life. Lies are grit in our engines. If we start lying, our moral joints will creak. God made us for integrity and we cannot function well without being honest. What do you think is the great need in

the field of business today? Yes, it's integrity. The world takes the posture that dishonesty is only a problem, if it is found out. No, truth is truth is truth. All else will be found out in the final analysis. The apostle Paul declared in Romans 3: 4, "Let God be true though every man a liar." When others speak dishonestly, remember you can always trust God's Word.

One of the keenest pains of living near to the heart of God is that low living shocks us, pains us, and it reeks to high heaven in our souls. That's why David, the man after God's own heart was so pained in Psalm 51 and 32 after his awful sin of adultery, murder, and then his seeking to hide the truth, his lack of integrity. David lived his life near to the heart of God. The truth of his short year of living a lie broke his heart. As we come to Psalm 12, we have no occasion that for sure prompted the psalmist to pen these words. Yet, every age has in it a reality of knowing that lying lips are not only an abomination to the Lord, but they are a bane and a stunning affliction we all must live with as falsity surrounds the believer. If we live close to the Lord, we can become sick of the clatter of godless tongues and the babble of empty speech and the flapping of flattering lips. Today as we turn to this psalm, there appear to be three voices, the writer's voice in verses 1-3, and verses 6-8. There is the sinner's or liar's voice in verse 4 and then there is the Lord's voice in verse 5. The simplest way I know to approach this psalm to understand it, is to divide it into five parts, answering 5 questions. First, (1) What is the prevailing condition of our world in relationship to truth?—verses 1, 2 (2) What is God's plan in the face of the lack of integrity?—verses 3,5 (3) What is the difference in the word of liars and the word of the Lord?—verses 4, 6. (4) What should be the conviction of God's saints in the face of no integrity in the world?—verse 7 (5) What must we learn to live with in spite of our confidence in God's protection of His honest saints?—verse 8. Let's jump into the water of God's Word and explore the answer to these five questions:

WHAT IS THE PREVAILING CONDITION OF OUR WORLD IN RELATIONSHIP TO TRUTH?

The truth is, the saints are crying out to God for hope and help and the world is lying through its teeth. Listen to David's words in verses 1,2. "Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man. Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart." Looking around him, David noticed what we often notice. It was hard to find exceptions to the rule that evil lying lips were prevailing in his world. Like Elijah felt he was the only one left, David here felt like integrity had vanished, as the faithful or true witnesses to truth had vanished off the face of the earth. The picture is that David could find no human help to run to find hope—that's why the Psalm begins with "save, O Lord, for the godly one is

gone, for the faithful or trustworthy folks have vanished from among the children of man.” David didn’t know who to run to, to stand up for truth. Have you ever felt like you were stumped to know who to turn to for a defense of the truth? The Hebrew word for “godly one” is **khosed**. This is best translated the merciful or man who has within him God’s lovingkindness. All around us today in 2012, it keeps getting harder to count on a loving or merciful man or woman who stands for the truth. It’s a dark picture David paints that loyal members of God’s covenant people who love, trust and stand for truth are hard to find. Basic virtues like faithfulness are no longer easily evident. The situation was so bad that it pressed a strong cry from the psalmist’s lips. Crying “Help!” or “Save, O Lord,” is the cry of a drowning man—a cry in a desperate situation. Do you remember Peter as he walked on water until he took his eyes off the Lord and began to sink. Then he cried, “Help, Lord!” David’s cry is no less desperate than Peter’s cry as he was sinking into the stormy waves.

The Hebrew word for “vanished” is **gamar**. It can mean to be cut off by death, or it can mean to be so cut off that those who should be standing for truth are no longer willing to try to exert their influence. It speaks of a time when wickedness is so prevalent that those professing to be friends of the Lord have gone into hiding. So what is the picture when the godly, merciful folk who normally shine with lovingkindness are missing and faithfulness in the saints has all but vanished and disappeared? David’s answer to what the problem is—what the prevailing condition of the world is in such cases is—the world is overrun with sins of the tongue. People are deceitful, v. 2—everyone utters lies to neighbor. They speak with smooth lips—they “smooze” their neighbors with whatever they like or think their neighbors would want to hear, and they have double tongues—don’t put confidence in their claims to being pious. This phrase, “flattering lips” is the Hebrew word **khalak**. It means to divide, to distribute, to make all things equal or smooth, to shape things into whatever form you desire, and to make everything smooth with the tongue—the essence of flattery. The truth David is saying is that when people so speak, you can place no confidence in what they say. Their words have no certainty or solid foundation of truth they rest on. The intent of such speech is to deceive. The Hebrew phrase for a double heart is a heart and a heart. The idea is that speaking with two hearts, one heart is to give utterance to pleasant kind words, while the other heart has a sinister motive, a treacherous design. The Hebrew phrase, “a stone and a stone,” that is translated in scripture, divers weights means one stone to buy with and one to sell with. You know the picture. When you want to sell something, the stone you sell with is the flattery of how wonderful your product is, concealing the whole truth—not telling the buyer that the transmission on the clunker is about gone. When you want to buy, you pick the

product apart, trying to get the car for little or nothing. With one heart or stone, deceitful people can impress and flatter, but with the other heart or stone, they conceal their real purpose and design. Now I ask you, has the prevailing condition in this world changed that much since David's time? Hardly! We can wisely also with David cry out, "Save, O Lord, for the godly one is gone, for the faithful have vanished..." As I studied this psalm, I came across an interesting historical fact. On the 16th day of August, 1593, before any of us were born, a ship named Tobie, from the London shipyard that weighed 250 tons, was manned with 50 men, and set sail for a port named Blackwall. The ship encountered a terrible storm and was cast ashore on the Barbary coast. The ship was ripped apart so fast that there was no time to make a raft. The crew began clinging to the shrouds of the sails. As the ship started to go under the water, some on the crew began singing Psalm 12— "Singing "Help, Lord, for the godly men are perishing." As they sang the psalm, the storm ceased instantly and twelve of the men, by God's providence and miraculous intervention, made it to shore. As far as integrity, the good ship Integrity like the good ship Tobie is in a violent storm in America. It is high time to start singing Psalm 12. There is a second question the psalm poses:

WHAT IS GOD'S PLAN IN THE FACE OF THE LACK OF INTEGRITY?

Look with me at verses 3, 5 "May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts... Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, "I will now arise," says the Lord; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs." When God arises for us, the victory is won. When God arises against us, the battle is lost. Verse 3 rings with the certainty that God will in the final analysis cut off or bring to judgment those with flattering lips. Like Isaiah, if we have honest lips, our lips will be touched with hot coals from off the altar of God. A live coal touching our lips sounds painful. Believe me, telling the honest truth at all times is only accomplished when a live coal from off the altar of God has touched our tongues. I'd much rather be touched by a live coal from God's throne to speak the truth than to be cut off because of lying lips that are an abomination before God. Either God will touch our lips so we can praise Him or He will touch our lips and cut us off so we are mute, unable to speak. It ought to strengthen our nerve to know that God has the power to subdue those who speak without integrity. And He will in His timing. The combination of flattering lips and a boastful tongue is not a rare occurrence. This is the common description of the arrogant. The Hebrew word for cut off is the Hebrew way of saying "disown or excommunicate." Beloved, don't court the idea of having God disown or excommunicate you. Only God can remedy the situation, when life becomes desperate in the face of little integrity. Boastful flattery is especially repugnant to God. In the face of it, our only appeal is to God, saying, "Lord, may you cut off all flattering lips and tongues that make

great boasts.” In verse 5, the God who sees the picture with the plundered poor and the suffering needy who groan, God steps up to the plate. He says, “I will now arise” says the Lord. God has a plan in the face of no integrity. He goes on to say, “I will place the poor and needy who are plundered and groaning, I will place them in the safety for which they long.” Never forget that the manipulation of the proud who flatter stirs up the wrath of the Lord. He hates smooth and deceptive words. God comes to a place of resolve when He has had enough. He comes to say, “Now I will arise. I promise deliverance. I will place in safety the one who is panting for it.” Aren’t you glad, beloved, that God has a time when He has had His fill of proud arrogant boasting that flatters? I am. When does God make such a resolve? It appears in our text that it is when promises are made to the poor and needy only to be broken, with promised obligations never to be fulfilled. When employers promise a living wage, and yet refuse to pay their employees, with them going without pay, families suffer. Such companies should hear the word of the Lord in Psalm 12—God is getting up from His throne. He is standing up to do something. When He stands up, the saints shout for joy crying not just “Save, O Lord, but in essence, “Arise, O Lord.” “Bring me Your safety.” Question # 3 is:

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE IN THE WORD OF LIARS AND THE WORD OF THE LORD?

Notice the contrast between the voice of liars in verse 4 and the voice of the Lord in verse 6. Listen as I read the contrast. “Those who say, (the flattering lips of the liars) “With out tongue, we will prevail. Our lips are with us; who is master over us?” That’s the word of liars. Now notice the voice of the Lord in verse 6, “The words of the Lord are pure words, like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.” What’s the difference? It’s the difference between night and day. The words of liars may not be their open speech but the speech of their conduct. Liars frame their lives on the assumption that they can get away with whatever they say and do. Their design is that whatever they say will prevail as they haven’t lost their lips. The picture is that their lips are their own masters. Who else can be the master over them? When liars say “Our lips are our own,” the picture is that they can speak whatever they please. Three things the lying lips profess in verse 4—(1) With our tongues we will do heroic things—we will prevail. The design is that heroism will come from their deceit and flattery. They claim great victories from their unholy words. How fooled they are! (2) They believe their lips are under their control. “Our lips are with us.” They actually believe no one is strong enough to interfere with their words and plans. They forget about God. (3) They say, “Who is Lord or Master over us? They acknowledge no superior in heaven or earth. Their attitude is pride and arrogance with full confidence in the evil use of their tongues. What foolish confessions these are! Contrast the word of the Lord. Verse 6 tells us God’s words are pure—there is no

mixture of falsehood with them. All the dross is removed like the dross of silver is skimmed off after being purified in a furnace of fire on the ground—purified and skimmed off seven times. Beloved, the words of liars is wholly false contrasted with the Lord’s words which are perfectly pure. God’s word has no falsehood, no flattery, and no deception. Bear in mind that God’s word has no alloy. There’s the ring of pure silver in the coinage of God’s currency and truth. When God speaks, let all the earth keep silence. His words are pure and precious. Question # 4:

WHAT SHOULD BE THE CONVICTION OF GOD’S SAINTS IN THE FACE OF NO INTEGRITY IN THE WORLD?

Bank on this beloved in verse 7. David cries out to God, “You, O Lord, will keep them—(the oppressed poor and needy); You will guard us, David includes himself and we can claim this for ourselves as God’s people. You will guard us from this generation forever.” No matter to what extent evil prevails, the righteous may always reckon on the keeping power of God. God will keep His watchful eye on those who suffer oppression at the hands of those without integrity. He will keep His protective hand upon us and guard us from this generation forever. This promise to us who are oppressed by liars and flatterers and arrogant boasters is for all time—including today, yesterday, today and forever. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13: 8) We must not live in fear. God is our refuge and help in every trouble. God is our defender. David’s further words, on his reliance upon the Lord, in the face of evil and deception, are found in Psalm 37: 3-7. Question # 5:

WHAT MUST WE LEARN TO LIVE WITH IN SPITE OF OUR CONFIDENCE IN GOD’S PROTECTION OF HIS HONEST SAINTS?

This glorious psalm ends with a realistic view of the picture David painted in verse 2 when he spoke of the flattering lips and double hearts of so many. In verse 8, David closes his psalm saying, “On every side, the wicked prowl, as vileness is exalted among the children of man.” By common consent, wickedness prevails today. By popular vote, the flatterers have gotten into office, in many cases. Such folk sit on their thrones and rule in their positions with a dominant force. But the balance of verse 7, tells us that the wicked will not prevail. Yet, the truth of the picture at hand is that it looks like they will. Don’t look at things as they are, but ask God to see as He sees. Paul says in II Corinthians 5: 16-18, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.” God seal it to our hearts! I love you. Amen.