

Christ Reformation Church

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A Faith that Works

The Epistle of James

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)

“Discerning Good and Evil in the Church”

August 23, 2015

Sermon Text: James Overview

Scripture Reading: Jude

Introduction-

Years ago a lady showed up one Sunday morning in our church who appeared to be a picture of a Christian woman. Her father had been a pastor for many years, so she grew up in the local church and developed what looked like a real zeal for serving the Lord.

We were happy to see her and her family plug into the church and begin to work hard. She developed a sterling reputation in the community as a model Christian. Everyone knew her. She could turn on a broad smile and made you feel good with her compliments.

This lady was trouble. She was not a Christian, and I can tell you how I know. Behind the scenes, where we eventually experienced her in her true person, she was as mean as they come. Her tongue was sharp and cutting. Her “service for the Lord” was merely a means for her to gain self-glory. She caused us all kinds of grief. Out of the blue you could incur her displeasure and she thought nothing of cutting you down right in front of others.

When a person has two personalities, one a sheep and the other a wolf, you can always be sure the wolf is the real person. Sheep never pretend to be wolves, but wolves make wearing wool an art.

Scripture warns us, as we have been learning, that evil will always be at work trying to creep in among Christ's people. It's purpose is Satan's purpose – to lie, to distort the gospel, to destroy. And so Christ calls us to be wise. Wise about evil and also wise about what a true servant of Christ looks like as well.

We read through the little letter of Jude earlier. What is the subject Jude wrote about? Evil. Evil where? In the church. Christ tells us to watch for wolves. Where? In the world? No, in the church.

Listen to 3 John. What is it about?

3 John 1:1-14 The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth. (2) Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, as it goes well with your soul. (3) For I rejoiced greatly when the brothers came and testified to your truth, as indeed you are walking in the truth. (4) I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (5) Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, (6) who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. (7) For they have gone out

for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. (8) **Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.**

(9) I have written something to the church, **but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first,** does not acknowledge our authority. (10) So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

(11) Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.

(12) Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true. (13) I had much to write to you, but I would rather not write with pen and ink. (14) I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face. (1:15) Peace be to you. The friends greet you. Greet the friends, every one of them.

Who is John addressing? The church! What is he talking about? Good and evil and how to tell one from the other. Where? *In the church!* He not talking about people in the world who do evil and thus are not from God. He is talking about people who claim to be Christians! And he gives his main principle in verse 11.

Let's do it again. Here is 2 John-

2 John 1:1-13 The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth, and not only I, but also all who know the truth, (2) because of the truth that abides in us and will be with us forever: (3) Grace, mercy, and peace will be with us, from God the Father and from Jesus Christ the Father's Son, in truth and love. (4) I rejoiced greatly to find some of your children walking in the truth, just as we were commanded by the Father. (5) And now I ask you, dear lady--not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one we have had from the beginning--that we love one another. (6) And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments; this is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

(7) For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.
(8) Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.

(9) Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God. Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son.

(10) If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, (11) for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works. (12) Though I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink. Instead I hope to come to you and talk face to face, so that our joy may be complete. (13) The children of your elect sister greet you.

Let's ask the same questions again. Who is John addressing? The church! What is he talking about? Good and evil and how to tell one from the other. Where? *In the church!* He not talking about people in the world who do evil and thus are not from God. He is

talking about people who claim to be Christians!

One more time –

2 Peter 2:1-22 But false prophets also arose **among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you**, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction. (2) **And many will follow their sensuality**, and because of them the way of truth will be blasphemed.

(3) And in their greed they will exploit you with false words. Their condemnation from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. (4) For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment; (5) if he did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a herald of righteousness, with seven others, when he brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (6) if by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes he condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; (7) and if he rescued righteous Lot,

greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (8) (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); (9) then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, (10) and especially those who indulge in the lust of defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme the glorious ones, (11) whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not pronounce a blasphemous judgment against them before the Lord.

(12) But these, like irrational animals, creatures of instinct, born to be caught and destroyed, blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant, will also be destroyed in their destruction, (13) suffering wrong as the wage for their wrongdoing. They count it pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are blots and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, **while they feast with you.**

(14) They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed

children! (15) Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing, (16) but was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness. (17) These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. (18) For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error.

(19) They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.

(20) For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. **(21) For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.** (22) What

the true proverb says has happened to them: "The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire."

Again, the same questions. Who is Peter addressing? The church! What is he talking about? Good and evil and how to tell one from the other. Where? *In the church!* He not talking about people in the world who do evil and thus are not from God. He is talking about people who claim to be Christians!

Let me, as forcefully as I can, suggest to you that the vast, vast number of people who profess to be Christians, who sit in church pews each Sunday, who say their prayers and teach Sunday School or sing in the choir or faithfully serve in some other capacity, are entirely ignorant of huge, huge portions of God's Word, and this is one of the most common they are oblivious to. They think that these Scriptures we have just read and the many others just like these, ARE TALKING ABOUT EVIL PEOPLE OUT THERE IN THE WORLD, BUT THAT THERE IS NO WAY ANY OF THESE THINGS COULD BE TRUE OF ANYONE IN THEIR OWN CHURCHES.

And you want to know one chief way we can be sure that I am not

overstating the seriousness of the case? Just watch when one of these wicked counterfeits is exposed and dealt with biblically and properly. Most church members will still insist that such a person is a true brother in the Lord “with problems” but surely not someone to be put out of the church or identified as a child of the devil crept in among Christ’s flock. Many of them will even follow him and scream injustice when he is put out.

Now, let me recommend to you that this is a serious, widespread, and destructive plague in the church that calls into question the very reality of professing Christians who think like this. Where is *faith* in them? James has said, as we saw last time, that faith without works is dead. Faith that does not really believe the Word of God, specifically these many, many warnings about evil creeping in among us so that in this age and era a local church can EXPECT to be attacked and must be on guard always, is faith without works. And a person whose faith is without works is not saved. They are not a Christian. That is James’ teaching.

Did you see that in these Scriptures? The either/or teaching? This is good. This is evil. This is a righteous person, this is a child of the devil.

So then, let’s come back to James and let’s do a bit of a review and overview so that we can all see that this is the very same thing James is doing.

James 1:2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

James 1:22-27 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. (24) For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. (25) But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (26) If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless. (27) Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

James 2:1-4 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. (2) For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, (3) and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," (4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 2:14-17 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? (15) If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? (17) So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Now, this next passage is not easy to grasp and I believe that in fact it cannot be made sense of if we fail to understand that James is addressing people who profess to be Christians, but who are in fact a "mixed" group in that some are not saved. He is showing us still another way, this time

concerning the tongue, that what a person truly is reveals itself.

James 3:1-12 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. (2) For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. (3) If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. (4) Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs.

(5) So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! (6) And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. (7) For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, (8) but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (9) With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we

curse people who are made in the likeness of God. (10) From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. (11) Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? (12) Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.

Let's consider something very important. Many people have been taught and firmly believe that a person can be a Christian and still walk, live, habitually practice sin. This is one reason why these warnings of Scripture are dismissed so regularly. It is why our churches become infested with and controlled by the wicked. But James here is not teaching us that a Christian's tongue is restless evil, full of deadly poison. He really clarifies what he means in verse 12. He is telling us exactly what the rest of Scripture teaches – that a tree with bad roots cannot bear good fruit.

This means then that if a person is a reviler, he or she is not a Christian. A reviler is a person who strikes with his speech. You have all been around such a person I am sure. They assault people and wound people with their words and they do so intentionally. Regularly. It is who they are.

1 Corinthians 5:11-13 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler--not even to eat with such a one. (12) For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? (13) God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you."

Here one more from James:

James 4:1-10 What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? (2) You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. (3) You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. (4) You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (5) Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us"? (6) But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God

opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (7) Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (8) Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. (9) Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. (10) Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.

Once more let's understand very clearly what James is doing. People read what he says and then they teach others that a Christian can be characterized by fighting and quarreling, coveting and murdering, loving the world, etc. Of course, this simply cannot be!

What James is doing is addressing people who profess to be Christ's church, knowing full well that some of them are not in Christ at all. So he is exposing them, and teaching genuine believers what and who is of the Lord and who is not.

The more I study James, the more I think that this verse states the central theme of this letter the best. James is teaching us God's wisdom. Listen to him one final time again:

James 3:13-15 Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. (14) But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. (15) This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.

It is quite possible, and very probable, that this true wisdom of God that is able to discern Christ from Satan, good from evil, is sorely lacking in the church today. Don't let that be true of you. We are promised here that if we ask for this wisdom in faith, the Lord will give it to us. And it is by this wisdom that we are enabled to see the beauty of Christ more and more clearly, and able with increasing clarity to reject the false.

Wisdom From God

James 1:5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him.