



Christianity in Real Life-Part 11

The Importance of Admitting the Obvious

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, it is good to bring baptisms back to Sunday mornings at church. I trust, as Pastor Eliot said, you enjoyed that and that maybe, you know, it gave you a new voice to the old story that we constantly tell—which is not only about becoming a Christian to solve an eternal problem (although that’s certainly at the forefront of our minds when we think about putting our trust in Christ), but also inaugurating a new season of life—so much so that you can see your own life bifurcated into two pieces: before Christ and after Christ.

And that idea is so fundamental in the New Testament—not only to the image of baptism (which of course it is; in Romans 6 it talks about the idea of being buried with Christ and having that newness of life result as we identify with his resurrection; this is symbolic of that)—but the idea of, “Yeah, I know what it is to have that encounter with Christ that changes everything.” So much so the Bible takes those people that have had that encounter and those that haven’t, and says there are only really two categories of people here.

I want to show you a passage of Scripture that, if we really understand what’s being said here—and there’s a lot of background to it, obviously, that Jesus brings into this short little illustration—you can recognize what a huge thing it is for us to not only appreciate the kind of schematic that he lays out for us, but to say, “Where do I fit in all of this?” So I want you to grab your Bibles this morning, please, and turn to Luke chapter 6. If you didn’t bring a Bible, there’s one under the seat in front of you, or punch it into your tablet or your smartphone or whatever you’ve got with you and look up with me Luke chapter 6.

And let us see just how bifurcated Christ is about not just the Christian life—before and after meeting Christ—but humanity. Only two groups here. And sympathizing with our relativistic culture, I would like to say, “Well, I wish there were a third category somewhere in the middle, some gray zone.” That’s not the way it’s presented here.

Take a look at it. Drop all the way down to verse 43, as we continue our study through this sermon of Christ in Luke chapter 6, and we’re just going to cover three verses this morning. When he says in verse 43, “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit. For each tree is known by its own fruit, for figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good,”—now here’s what he’s trying to get to—“and the evil person out of the evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”



That's pretty—talk about, you know, dichotomy—that's a pretty big division just to say we've got good people and bad people. I know we talk that way, but if you really are pressed, we'd say, "Well, if I had to go through everybody in my neighborhood or in my office and start dividing them up, I mean, I don't know—there's got to be a third category there somewhere."

When the Bible talks about good and evil, I hope you understand it is exactly the way it sounds in our ears. There are only two categories of people: there are those that have been made good through a relationship with Christ, and there are those that are still in their sins—to put it in terms of what the rest of the Bible likes to say. And the Gospel's all about that: we're presenting the message that though we have a slate of sin against the God of the universe, though the holy God is offended by our lives, and we stand really condemned before that holy God, we can have that fixed. That's what they testified to in the baptismal tank this morning: "I once was lost, but now I'm found; was blind, but now I see." That idea of a clear transformation. And when Jesus speaks of people, that's the way he sees the world: there are people that have had this transformation, and there are those that haven't.

Now the focus of this is clearly the connection between that status and the evidence—the status of that heart and the evidence of that heart. Can you see that here? Take a look at the word "fruit" in verse 43. It is such a common analogy in the Bible—especially if you've been around the block a few times in Christianity, you don't hardly even think about it anymore. But you might want to jot down a passage like Jeremiah 17:10, just so that we're very clear on what this analogy consistently means throughout the Bible. I don't need you to turn there, but let me read it for you real quick: "I the LORD search the heart and test the mind"—there's the internal reality of someone's life—"to give to every man according to his ways," the ways that he lives, the ways that he decides, the ways that he thinks, "according to the"—here's our word—"the fruit of his deeds," his behavior, the fruit of his deeds.

When we talk about fruit in the Bible, we're talking about how you live your life. And we could rewind the video on your life this week and look back, and we would see the deeds of your life, the ways of your life. And if we had a brain-o-scope and we could focus it in on your forehead and look past all of that into your thoughts, we'd be able to see the ways of your thinking. We'd be able to see the deeds of your imagination. We could see who you are, and those slip out, as he says in verse 45 of Luke 6—even what you say becomes evidence of what's going on inside your life.

And so we want to examine, as we get started here this morning, the link between those two things—fruit and faith—because faith is the thing that makes the difference between good and evil. Faith is the difference between whether we're still in our sins, or whether we've been made, in Christ, a good person. That connection between faith and fruit, the connection between what it means to be right with God and the evidence of our lives—that's so important.



Let's call it this, number one in your outline: let's understand the faith/works link—the link between those two. Now, here's the thing about faith and works: clearly, you've got to have both. But have you ever jump-started a car before? You had to do that with the jumper cables, where you've got two cables there—you need them both. But as your dad taught you when you learned to do this, I trust, be very careful how you attach those. Lots of strange things happen if you accidentally cross those and put them on the wrong posts on the battery. So you have to be very careful about where you put those. You need them both. And so it is with works when we talk about Christianity, or faith. Everybody, in every form and every expression of so-called Christianity in the world, is going to deal with faith and works. The problem is, a lot of times the wires get crossed. And we cannot do that when it comes to works and faith.

Two passages real quick, just to drive this home. Let me take you to Romans chapter 4, a classic text that talks about faith and works, and then I'll turn you over to another passage that talks—just like Romans 4 does—about faith and works over in James chapter 2, which you may be familiar with. And let's just compare these texts. And what's helpful about these two passages, as we try to make sure we never get our wires crossed, is that they both use Abraham as an example. Abraham, we would say, was a good man. And by that we mean he was considered a friend of God, as James says. He was considered the person who did good things because his heart before God was good. Well, how did that work? How did that happen? What's the connection between the good things that he did and his standing with God?

Romans chapter 4—did you find it? Follow along as I read for you just the first few verses here, beginning in verse 1: “What shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?”—according to his life, his bio. “For if Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about”—now “justification” is the word that Paul's been using to describe what it means to have the transition from old life to new life, to have sins still on your account and then to have them removed so that you are, before God, a good person; you're forgiven, you're innocent, you're cleansed before God. Justification is an accounting term where the debt on your ledger gets wiped away—to be justified. Now, what's the relationship between that good standing with God—that act of justification—and the works that we do? Well, we want to know.

“Well, if he was justified by the things that he did, then he would have something to boast about—but certainly not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed’”—which, by the way, is the same word that translates “faith,” same word—the idea of him trusting—“he believed God, and it was”—here's a very big accounting word, *logizomai*—“to account or to credit; it was counted or credited to him as righteousness.” What is that? That's the description of good works. In other words, here is Abraham who needs to be made right before God, and here Paul says when he trusted God, God credited him as a righteous person. Now, did he gain that standing by his good deeds? Of course not. That's what's being said here.



In verse 4 he says, “Now to the one who works”—well, if something comes from the work that he does—“then it’s not counted to him as a gift, but it’s counted as his due.” You go to work; you earn money. Quid pro quo—exchange my hours for dollars. When they give me the paycheck, they don’t say, “Here you go, I’m giving you a gift.” Right? “Well, you owe that to me because we are contractually in a relationship; you work; our response to work is money.” And he says when it comes to being right, in right standing with God, that’s not the way it works.

Verse 5: “And to the one who does not work”—you might want to add the words “for this status”—“but believes”—there’s our word, trusts or has faith—“in him who clears the account and makes people right that are ungodly”—he justifies the ungodly—“his faith,” same word, “is credited or counted to him as righteousness,” just like it was with Abraham.

“Now David speaks of this blessing”—this gift from God—“the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from good works.” And he says this, and he’s quoting the Psalm: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are”—another accounting word—*aphiēmi*—it’s the word to have your debt released and forgiven. And that’s a good thing; that’s a gift from God. “How blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord does not”—*logizomai*—“count or credit his sin against him.”

You go to the bank—let’s say you’re really in debt because you’ve got a credit card from the bank and there’s all this debt on your account—and you go to the window and she goes to the terminal, and you have this discussion about your debt, and then instantly it is cleared with a click of a keystroke. That idea of having the debt removed and relieved from you—that’s the picture of you being made good before God, to be made righteous before God, to be justified. And the question is, did you do a lot of work to get all that debt relieved? Did you work it off? And the answer in this text is: No, of course not.

So we say this: if you’re going to get your wires crossed when it comes to faith and works, some people think it’s faith plus my works that gets me right with God. That’s how they teach it. We call those groups the cults, because they’ll say, “You want to get right with God? Well, that’s great. You trust him, and then you do all these good things, and you earn good standing with God. When you die, he puts all your works on a scale, and if you’ve got enough faith and works together here on your scale, God says, ‘Okay, finally, you’re good enough; now you can be in my family.’” That picture of earning your way into a relationship with God—this is being summarily dismantled in this text. Doesn’t work that way.

James chapter 2. James now is going to talk about the relationship between faith and works, and he is going to use Abraham as an example. He’s even going to quote the same Old Testament passage



back there from Genesis. But watch what he's very careful to point out to us in James chapter 2. There is a relationship between works and faith, and here's what he says.

Let's start in verse 14 as he ramps up to enlisting Abraham as an example: "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith"—"I trust God; I believe God"—"but does not have works? Can that faith save him?" Wow, wait a minute—that's a rhetorical question. That sounds like you want me to say "No," but I just read Romans chapter 4 and it seems to say "Yes." Now here's the thing. When you talk about getting a car started with jumper cables, you need both cables. The question is, how do they arrange themselves in this thing called Christianity?

Now watch what he does. "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed"—and you think about what it means to trust God, the God who commands us, for instance, to love each other in tangible ways; you see a need here in your brother's life—verse 16—"and one of you says to them, 'Hey, I'll pray for you, man, but I've got to go to church. Go in peace; be warmed and filled,' without giving them anything that is needed for the body, what good is that?" Now here's an analogy: you say you love someone—supposed to love them—but you don't do anything about that love that you say you have for them. What kind of love is that? It's not love. Love requires—if you have that love, you possess that love—the evidence, the fruit of that love is that you're going to do loving things.

Now, he drives this home—verse 17: "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." That faith—though it may save you—is not a faith that will stay devoid of works. We like to say, you know, in the heritage of the great Reformation of the church, "We're saved by faith alone." But hear what James is saying: the faith that saves is never alone. Oh, it doesn't do anything to get right standing with God, but the faith that gains right standing with God is the faith that always proves itself by the evidence of your life.

Verse 18: "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works" (and that's the key word—"show"), "and I will show you my faith by my works." That's the evidence. That's a key word to underline as we get down later to the analogy of Abraham—the word "show." It shows; it's evident; it is fruit; it manifests itself. If you just want to talk about belief, if there's no manifestation of that belief, then you're like the demons.

Look at verse 19: "You believe that God is one"—that was the great doctrinal statement from Deuteronomy 6 of the Old Testament, called the Shema, because in Hebrew the word "Shema" means "to hear," and it started with "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one." That's the thing that said, "I'm an orthodox Jewish person believing the right things about God." He says, "You believe that God is one? You do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder." And they're not known for their good works. They're not known for expressing faith in God. Oh, they have the right doctrine. By the way, their theology—demons' theology—is even better than your theology.



Did you know that? They've got it wired; they know these things. The problem is, that's not the kind of saving faith we're looking for—where we align ourselves with Christ and we trust him as our Lord. Because if that's the case, you're not going to live like a demon; you're going to live differently. You're going to have evidence of that.

“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person”—getting personal now in verse 20—“that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father”—now underline this word—“justified by works?” Now I had you underline a word up there in verse 18—“show.” Justification in this particular context clearly is not the declaration of someone being righteous by God, but it is the evidence of that justification, which is another kind of justification. What's that kind of justification? I can see by your life that you trust in God. I, now as an observer of your life—even if I'm Abraham—I can look at my own life, and I can see, “Hey, look, here is evidence of my relationship with God, my faith in God.” I now have the sense of being justified by the life that I'm living—it justifies the fact that I can claim to have faith.

Now there are some very helpful words here that are coming up, so let's keep reading. “Was not Abraham our father justified by works,” particularly from Genesis 22, “when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?”—this unthinkable sacrifice. He did it in obedience to God. Well, he must have trusted God. “You see that faith was active”—it wasn't dead faith; it wasn't a faith that he just said, “Well, yeah, I love you,” but didn't do anything about it; “I trust God,” but didn't do anything about it. No—he trusts God in a way that is active—“and that faith was completed along with his works.”

And therefore his faith was—here's a word to underline, and if you've been around here, we like to talk about this word because it's almost an untranslatable word with the words that we use. We use the word “perfect” or “completed.” It's the word *teleios* in Greek and *teleiōsis*. I've taught our congregation it's that idea of something being “just right.” It's just right—ah, that's just right. I like to translate the word “ah,” because you sense that—“Oh yeah, that's just perfect; that fits just right.” I often talk, when I define the word *teleios* for you, about a tool that fits the job just right. You know, if you have, I don't know, whatever it is—a wrench—and you're just trying to put it on and it's not the right size, you get the right one, it's just right.

See, faith is the thing that we have before God that makes us right before God—it's the thing, the trigger, the key that makes us right before him—and then here come our works, and it just fits perfectly. It fits just so perfectly as an expression, as a complement, of the reality of our faith. You see, verse 22 says that faith was active along with his works, and his faith was *teleios*—it was completed by his works. “And the Scripture was”—this is another good one—“fulfilled,” that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”



Now wait a minute—you said he believed; God credited him his righteousness; it was apart from works in Romans 4. I get that his standing before God was already a reality when he took Isaac and put him on an altar. What was the idea here, though? My justification before God is now a justification before myself and before the world. Everyone now can see the evidence of it. Something inside of my heart now has been given some kind of visible manifestation in my life. “Abraham believed God; it was credited to him as righteousness,” and “he was called a friend of God”—by who? By people. I see that: “Look at Abraham. What an amazing example of faith.” He was already a friend with God because of his faith.

“So you see then,” verse 24, “that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” Now, wait a minute—you said that the great cry of the Reformation is “We are saved by faith alone”—*sola fide*. Faith alone is what saves us. I get that. Faith alone is what saves us if you want to talk about the technical point of our turning to Christ and being made right before God. See? But our faith is not completed—our justification in other areas of people looking at our lives and seeing, “Hey, if you say you love the person, where’s the loving actions? If you say you trust God, where’s the life of trusting? If you say you’re a follower of Christ, where’s all your following?”

I’ll give you an example: the thief on the cross. Here’s a man hanging next to Jesus and dying. Jesus looks at him—because of something that happened in his heart—and he says, “Today you’ll be with me in paradise.” At that moment was he cleansed from his sin and made acceptable? Was he now, this lifelong criminal, a good person according to Luke 6? The answer is yes, absolutely. Now, had he been able to get off that cross, you would have been able to see a long life of good works that manifest his faith. But what’s interesting about the Gospel writers is they’re even careful to include—in the short little couple hours he had to live—that he is even producing good fruit on the cross. Remember—what does he do? He starts defending Christ from the cross—great personal risk to his own reputation as the cool-guy criminal. He’s not a cool-guy criminal, but, I mean, you know, you’re certainly stepping out of your fraternity to start yelling and rebuking the other guy on the other side of Christ and defending the Christ that’s crucified in the middle. You’re willing to do that—that’s a manifestation of his faith.

Now, he was already declared righteous by Christ on the cross—so righteous that he could walk through the gates of the presence of God in paradise. But now he’s starting to manifest that, and in people’s eyes. And we read it to this day, thousands of years later—we look at that man as a changed life. How long did he have to bear fruit? Not very long. But he started to, and the Gospel writers were careful to record it.

We’re saved by faith alone—but that’s a faith that is never alone. We’re not saved by works—but if there’s no works, then what kind of faith is that? It’s not saving faith. Why, by the way—faith and fruit, faith and works—you know, that link is so well illustrated by trees and their produce. If you take this idea of fruit—you take grapes from the supermarket and you lay it on the broomstick in your utility closet, and you say, “Look at that broomstick producing those grapes”—doesn’t work



that way. There's nothing—there's no organic connection between the broomstick and the grapes that you bought. You can put them all around your broomstick, but it doesn't make it a living piece of wood. But if there's a real vine with real sap and a real connection, those branches will produce grapes. And that's the idea.

And a lot of you, as you listened to the testimonies this morning, can say, like a lot of folks testified to in the baptismal tank, "You know what? I've tried a lot of external conformity to the standards of Christianity." Maybe, like some of our baptismal candidates this morning are up there saying, "I even went to Christian school"—we had some last night—"I taught Sunday school; I was leading in the church," and yet no real life. Well, they know that because they can look in the mirror of God's Word into their own lives and see, "My life's not changed; my heart's not changed." That's the kind of hypocrisy we've dealt with already in this sermon in Luke 6.

But I want us to see the link. If you want to talk about how this works—this is a familiar analogy to a lot of you; it's a safeguard for you if you've heard it a hundred times. And if you're new to this, it might be helpful. The response to the Gospel plus my works equals salvation—not right. That's not the equation. That's the cultic equation. That's in violation of Romans chapter 4. "Well, how do the works fit in? You just erase them from the equation—faith to the Gospel then is salvation." That's not right either. James is saying that faith—that the response to the Gospel equals salvation plus good works. Those have to go in sequence, or the equation is not balanced.

Back to our text, verse number 45—it's printed on your worksheet there—Luke chapter 6. Let's jump into the first half—really two-thirds of this verse in verse 45. And let's leave the analogy behind—that you can't get figs from a thorn bush; the tree is bad, you're going to get bad fruit. He now starts to speak about something that I think is unsettling and not very comfortable for people to read, particularly if you've grown up in a certain segment of Christianity. When you read in verse 45 that Jesus is referring to people as "good" and "evil"—"The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good"—and you want to say, "Well, I think I'm a Christian, but I would never call myself a good person—not in the pages of the Bible at least—because I've read enough theology to know I'm wicked and sinful and evil and awful and just a lowly worm before the throne of God."

And with that, I need to caution you, because we need to take the words of Christ at face value and recognize there's something here that we must affirm about this. "The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, but the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil." The two people producing fruit, organically from within them, is defined first of all as a "good person." And that may just blow your mind, because you can think, "I don't get that—even as a Christian, I'm not a good person."



Now, catch this carefully. Part of the problem with Christianity as it's defined in people's minds these days is they see themselves as just some kind of whole unit that cannot be divided. And that's wrong. We are divided into two basic parts. The Bible has made this clear that when we see the creation in Genesis, here we have people made out of the dust of the earth—which is where all the compounds and proteins and everything comes from; it's just the stuff of the dirt. And we have this amazing mechanism called the human body. And then God breathes into that human person a spirit, and that really is who he is, and he becomes a living being.

I mean, if you want to talk about the three parts—really all we're dealing with is the material part, the immaterial part, and those together we can describe as a living being or a soul. But the reality is, there's an immaterial part we call the spirit (which is also sometimes called our heart or our mind), and then we have the material part. And that's the hardware. And, as I often say in Orange County at least, we'll be able to be specific in the twenty-first century: the hardware/software division is helpful—when you are hardware and you are software.

And because you know that your life is not perfect, you stand back and look against the holy standard and benchmark of heaven as it's described in the Bible, and you say, "I'm a bad person—even as a Christian, I'm a bad Christian." Careful with that. Because this text, in defining a good person and an evil person, you need to understand, is describing the real "them"—who they really are.

See, now, here's the reality: if you're a non-Christian, your software is all messed up, and if you're a non-Christian, your hardware is also messed up. Christians, now—the Bible teaches—get a new heart; they get new software; they become, as Paul likes to say, a "new man." But they're still encased in fallen hardware.

Number two on your outline—let's just put it this way: we'll leave the analogy out of it; we'll talk in terms of our heart—note the impact of a changed heart. So much of an impact is that on the person that Jesus can look at a person with a new heart—even though they're still messed up in their hardware—and say, "There's a good person." They're good because they've been made good by the work of God.

Jot this down, if you would: Ezekiel 36:26–27. It speaks of who we really are in terms of our heart, and it says because we're lost and born into sin, our heart is messed up. But God, by his grace and Spirit, when we get made right with God, gives us a new heart—the heart of stone is removed, and a heart of flesh is put inside of us. And we become a new person from the inside out. Does that sound like one of the testimonies this morning? That's the testimony of everyone—articulated so well—as we thought about the reality of the change that's organic from the inside.



Now, I know I used the hardware/software analogy before, but let me take it to another level, because if you're starting to yawn through it—no, it's simple—but let's, for the computer geeks, let's get a little geeky this morning—talk about BIOS and microchips for a second. If you're really going to take this to the next level and think this through, you need to recognize when it comes to the body, it is not just some passive, inanimate thing. When we talk about the problem that we still have as Christians—even though we have a new heart; we've got the old hardware—you need to recognize it's not just talking in the Bible, when it speaks of a fallen body or the flesh; we're not just talking about tendons and bones and cells and tissue. We're talking about something that is a part of that human body that has its own thing going, that creates desires.

Now, if you really think about hardware, hardware is not devoid of some software—only we don't call it software because it's hard-wired into the motherboard. What do we call that kind of software? We call it—computer geeks—firmware. The BIOS is in there. But what are we talking about? The motherboard has some software in it, but it's not software because you can't change it—you can't input it; it's built into the chips. The motherboard has firmware in it. Now, you can change the operating system and put new software into the computer, but you're still going to have to interface with a motherboard that has its own code in it. Your body is like that.

That's why it's so difficult for you to see yourself as hardware and software and not say, "I'm all messed up; I can't be the good person producing good things out of the good treasure of my heart." Oh, but you can. Jesus knows—and it's very clear in the Bible—that your hardware is filled with firmware that is built into the hardware of humanity, that even though you get a new heart, you're still struggling because it still has desires; it's still shooting out codes of instruction. That's why in Galatians chapter 5 it says the desires of the flesh set themselves against the desires of the Spirit. As a new person in Christ, you have a new heart; you are a good person. Oh, that sounds heretical. Jesus just said it—you're a good person in that God has made your heart clean; he's made you new; you are a new man in Christ. Now, you're stuck in the old hardware. Recognize that that is the thing that makes you feel like a filthy worm before a holy God. But you need to separate the two. Because the thing that's going to change when Christ comes back, according to Romans chapter 8, is the final step in this thing, and it's called "the redemption of the body." And when that takes place, and you get a new motherboard that has all the firmware that works perfectly with the new software—man, you'll be doing really well. Was that too geeky and techy? I have an illustration for you guys—you are in South County in the twenty-first century. Hopefully that helps.

One text on this that may be helpful—I mean, I quoted a few already: Ezekiel 36; Galatians 5:17—turn with me though, if you would, to Colossians 3—just one text on this that might be helpful. I want to show you that when we talk about the good person, we're talking about Christians—Christians that have a new heart, which takes place because of your baptism, number one. Baptism that matters—the baptism of being placed into Christ by the Spirit—that changes who you are. And the Bible's always saying, "Listen, you've got the new software; keep making sure all the updates are updated; keep on making sure it's clean; keep making sure it doesn't get infected; keep it from



viruses—be careful with that new software.” You’re going to have a battle with the old hardware because it’s got a lot of firmware in it—there’s a lot of code firing; there’s going to be a battle.

Now, with that in mind, look at this description in verse 1 of Colossians 3: “Since then”—who’s the “you”? That’s you, the real you, the software; that’s who you are—“you have been raised up with Christ.” That’s the picture from Romans 6—you now have had your sins forgiven and you have been made new; as it ends in that passage there at the beginning of Romans 6, you now are called to walk in newness of life because you’re a new person. “Seek the things that are above;” keep the software focused on its task, “where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds”—that’s the hard drive; that’s the idea of my software being focused on—“keep it focused on things above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died”—the old you is gone—“and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” You’re completely new in Christ—you are a good person; you have new software. “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” Thankfully with a new motherboard. It’s getting ridiculous—sounds ridiculous if you’re just popping into the middle of the sermon. Sorry.

Verse 5: What do I do? Well, when you interface with your motherboard here, be really careful because there’s code getting pointed at you and thrown at you that you’ve got to just say “No” to: “Put to death whatever is earthly in you.” Now the “you” becomes the totality of you—software and hardware—and there are parts of the “you,” your hardware, that are trying to do things that are not set on things above—earthly things like what? “Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness”—that’s just idolatry. “On account of these things the wrath of God is coming.” Remember, these have no place in the Christian life. Think back, before you became a Christian—you “walked” in these; you lived in these; you just gave away—the software and the hardware were all compatible when you were living in them. “But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from your mouth.” So think back to Luke 6:45—when Jesus says whatever’s in your heart starts coming out—that has no place. “Do not lie to one another.”

Why would I not do any of this? Remember your new—“seeing that you have put off the old self”—who you were was evil and depraved and fallen—but not anymore. You put it off, and you should put its practices off—“and you have put on the new self.” Now, this is an amazing phrase—catch it—“which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.” Whoo—that’s a big phrase, really. “It’s being renewed,” who I am, “in knowledge after the image of its creator.” Who created the new me? The Spirit of God—God, the perfect God, the Holy Spirit. He’s made me new. My core desires, as I like to say, have been rewired with a brand-new mind. And that now has to win these battles, and I need to keep that thing updated and constantly free from viruses, if you will, as I constantly have it renewed according to the image of the one who created it.

If you think, “It can’t mean that the real me is good,” put this in the margin—it’s probably already there in a reference Bible: Ephesians 4:24. Ephesians 4:24 says that “new self”—it’s a parallel passage—“is created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” That is an



amazing statement and maybe will help you when you read passages that are head-scratchers—like in 2 Peter 1 when it says you “become partakers of the divine nature.” What in the world are you talking about? The Bible says here, my new self is created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Now, don’t get a big head about this, but you are, in Christ—if you are a Christian—in the core of who you are, created new in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Now, that doesn’t mean that everything you do through the working of your life—because you’re also encased in bad hardware—that everything you do is going to be considered righteous. Certainly not. As a matter of fact, the call of the Christian life is often “fight the hardware impulses, and do what is righteous,” because that’s your core desire—remember who you are. That, though, will win because your software is going to battle for it to win. You will consistently—albeit imperfectly—you will consistently obey your core desires, because the Spirit of God has not left you to your own devices. Even though you were created in the image of God in righteousness and holiness, his Spirit now is going to work within you. There’s a constant line—this illustration is getting out of control as I continue to build on it—but you’ve got a constant, hard-wired line to the manufacturer that’s going to continually direct your software and make sure that you win these battles.

Is it going to be hard? It’s going to be hard. I mean, look at the words in verse 5: “put to death whatever is earthly in you.” It’s going to be a battle. “Put off,” in verse number 9. “Put away,” verse number 8. These are hard things.

We’ve got to note the impact of a changed heart. And that’s why it’s so important to make sure that your righteous battle is prompted from the inside. And so many of us—I mean, I grew up in the church—I know what it’s like to try and conform externally to a standard, and my heart wasn’t in it—because my heart was old. I just tried to conform to an external standard. And I remember—by the way, do I have time for this? Probably not. That’s not going to stop me, though. When I became a Christian—you’ve heard my testimony; doesn’t matter—but there was a time I was dating a girlfriend who is now my wife, and she had become a Christian before I did. And when I became a Christian, it’s funny to hear her talk about that, because we were at that time separated by 2,000 miles and in college. But just by the conversations on the phone—now, I had an external conformity of Christianity before I became a Christian—but the change from the inside out? If you just listen to her talk about how obvious it was to her that something had happened in who I really was—it was just evident; it was obvious. The core desires of her boyfriend had changed and now were directing him from the inside out instead of the outside in. Now, you couldn’t bring a big rap sheet and say, “Look at this terrible punk of a kid.” No—I was conforming to the standard of Christianity on the outside, but ask the person that knew me best, and she said, “You know what? When you became a Christian, everything changed just about how you live life from the inside out.” That’s what we’re looking for. That’s the sign of a changed heart.



And when Jesus says, “The good person out of the good treasure that’s in his heart produces good, as opposed to the evil person out of the evil treasure of his heart producing evil,” it’s an obvious distinction; we need to see it for what it is.

Lastly, just real quickly here at the bottom of verse 45, Luke 6, Jesus adds this as an example. Now elsewhere in the teaching of Christ, he gives lots of examples about the kinds of things in your heart that come out, and they’re all over the map; but he simply gives us one example: “Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Okay—speaking is one of the clearest windows into your heart. How you talk—what you say—the things you focus on, the kinds of things you’re commenting on, the content of your commentary—all of that is one of the clearest windows into your heart.

With that in mind, turn with me to James chapter 3. I think it’s helpful that Jesus chose something that he said, “You should be able to look at this indicator and see whether or not the heart is good or the heart is evil—the words of the person.” Now, here’s the thing: if you can hear my sermon this morning—and maybe you’re ruffling at it, because to you it was about signing up on some card or praying a prayer or walking an aisle, or, I don’t know, whatever it was you’re hearing in your mind—or to a creed—if Christianity was mental assent to a bunch of facts—well, you may be grating against this sermon. And one of the arguments against what I’m preaching this morning—what the text, I think, is clearly saying—is that you’re going to say, “Well, no one’s perfect. Nobody can do—are you guys claiming to be perfect?” Not perfect. I understand that. I get that. Jesus understands that better than any of us; he understands that we’re not perfect—even the good person—because the battle rages on, and we’re not going to win every battle with the firmware in our hardware. We get that; God gets that.

Jesus knows that. That’s why the Spirit inspires James here—this text that James is writing—the Spirit inspires this text; he breathes this text through James to make this very clear: when it comes to your mouth—one of the clearest windows into your heart—your mouth oftentimes interfaces with the hardware of who you are. And unfortunately, that’s not always going to be perfect even for Christians.

It’s why, by the way, you shouldn’t be very anxious to sign up—verse 1—to be a teacher. “Not many of you should become teachers”—and I can say a hearty amen to that. Why? Because we’re going to incur a stricter judgment—you know that we who teach are to be judged with greater strictness. We’re talking about speaking for a living. “For we all stumble in many ways.” The problem with the teacher is he’s always talking. “If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle his whole body as well.” In other words, if you could really make sure that everything you said was always righteous and always good—reflecting the good, new heart that you have—you would be perfect; you’d have no problem in any area of your life. And of course this whole passage is about, “That’s not true; you’ve got problems.”



Now think this through: if the Bible is very clear that you can never perfectly have a track record of perfection, and yet Jesus is saying, “Good out of the good heart produces good”—things that’s called fruit, and you’ll know a tree by its fruit—then we know whatever he’s talking about in terms of this change of life—number three: we’re talking about direction and not perfection. And you need to be able to distinguish those two. When Jesus talks about good fruit, he is not talking about a track record of perfection. There is no one who comes up this morning and testifies in the baptismal tank that will now live a perfect life. They will never attain that on earth as long as they’re encapsulated in fallen hardware. They will never do it. But the direction of their life will radically change. The trajectory of their mouth and their language and their commentary will change. And you will be able to stand back and say, “The preponderance of what this person does is in the direction of righteousness,” although it’s imperfect.

So, before you object to this teaching about the link between faith and works and say, “Well, no one can be perfect, so I don’t want to hear that,”—that’s not it. No one’s claiming perfection. The Bible says—not only here in James 3, but in 1 John chapter 1—if you claim to be perfect or reach perfection, you’re a liar and the truth is not in you; you’re not even honest with yourself.

This is worth pointing out a few other things in James 3, as long as you have it open. He talks about the fact that the tongue is a small thing, and yet it directs the whole life. It’s like the bit you put in a horse’s mouth—verse 3—and it obeys us; it guides the whole body. Ships also—so large—strong winds drive it, and yet it’s guided by a little small rudder; it takes the pilot wherever he wants to go. “So also the tongue is a small”—now underline this word—“member”—that means part of the body. The body, in the theology of the New Testament, is this corrupted human humanity—this sinful fallen flesh—and we still have it as Christians. And here’s part of it: my tongue. “Yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness.” Ooh—that’s starting to scare me. Now think about that: I’ve got a part of my hardware that just is out of control. You want to talk about the firmware being out of control? It’s out of control in your mouth. “The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and it is set on fire by hell.”

This is strong language to say, “Watch out.” Now, here’s a part of your body that’s hard to control—your mouth. It’s so easy to say things that do not reflect the core desires of your heart. It is so easy to say things that you shouldn’t say that reflect the sin of your hardware.

Keep reading: “Every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue.” It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. You want to talk about having to go to war with a part of your life? It’s your language. It’s the things that you say. “With it we bless our Lord and Father”—so we’re talking to Christians here, are we not?—“and with it”—once we get out on the patio or in the car on the way home—“we



curse people who are made in the likeness of God.” “From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.”

Let’s read that again: from the same mouth, producing fruit of a good heart in worship, is now also producing some of the bad things of our old life that we would say if we were corrupted by bad software. Well, that shouldn’t be. “My brothers, these things ought not to be so.” By the way, “cursings”—if you’re thinking, “Well, I’m not a sailor; my language is not that colorful”—that’s not what we’re talking about here. We’re talking about the tearing down of people. We’re talking about speaking against these folks. We’re talking about the hyper-critical attitudes that we have and the gossip that we share. This is not as insidious or as dramatically sinful as you might be thinking—we’re all guilty of this.

Verse 11: “Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree”—to get back to our illustration, Christ’s illustration—“my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water.” Now, you’re thinking to yourself, “Well, how does this work, then? You’re basically saying, in the holy pages of the Bible, that even though your heart is good, you’re still going to make mistakes in your language.” That’s right. That’s why you need the next section of this book: “Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works”—bear that fruit—“in the meekness of wisdom.” You’re going to have to think this through a lot; you’re going to have to be directed and corralled by the truth of God’s Word.

“Bitter jealousy and selfish ambition”—if you see that starting to infect your hardware—ooh, that’s not good. Don’t boast about it; shut up about it; swallow it; bite your tongue. “Do not be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above; it is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above”—if we’re going to be patched into headquarters and have our software continually purified—“is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” “And a harvest”—to get back to our idea of fruit—which, by the way, this is the word “fruit” in Greek—“of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”

Clearly on the table in James’s mind is all the bickering in the church, and he’s saying, “Guys, this ought not to be. It ought not to be.” You’ve got to fight this. You’ve got to win this battle. You’ve got to continually show the preponderance—the trajectory, the direction—of your life to be righteous. Good people produce good fruit. Changed lives produce righteous behavior. Is it perfect? Never said it. You need to distinguish direction from perfection. You will never be sinless, but as I often say, our calling is to sin less.



And before I leave this sermon—just because Jesus brought up the idea of the speech that we have—it'd be good for us to think about that part of the good fruit of your life is how you respond when you don't bear good fruit—when you say something that you know is wrong. It could be any sin, but let's just pick the sin of our mouths.

Just real quick—let's juxtapose two passages in your mind—you can jot them down; don't turn there; no time. Job chapter 40—the end of Job (which, by the way, is most of the book)—a record of Job's deteriorating words toward God. Have you noticed, if you read that book carefully, it just gets worse and worse and worse? Well, he gets confronted in Job 38 and 39 by God, and now God in chapter 40 calls him and says, "Hey, faultfinder—hey, argumentative one who wants to complain about me—you've said a lot of things. Now it's your time—face me." And you know what Job says? "No more." I love the way he puts it—let me read it for you. He says, "I lay my hand on my mouth." Love that. Have you ever felt like that? "I've just got to get those words back; I wish I could take it back. I put my hand on my mouth. I have spoken once, and I will not answer; twice, but I will proceed no further." "I will shut up." I love that about the honesty of Job. When he recognizes the conviction of the Spirit in his life, he knows he's said wrong, and he says, "Stop it." That's an indication of righteous behavior.

Unrighteous behavior—I said I juxtaposed another passage: Psalm 2. When people with bad hearts get called on the carpet for their language, they don't put their hand on their mouth—they keep on justifying, rationalizing, and trying to prove that what they said was right. And in that text you have the people raging against God, who breaks into the scene in Psalm 2, and they keep on railing against him. And the idea is—and those are examples in specific settings—but the idea is: how you respond to your stumbling is going to prove whether or not you're a good person—and by that I mean a redeemed person with a new heart—or you're still an evil person, still set in your sins—clearly not as bad as you could be, but bad off as you could be—because your heart is still alienated from God. How you respond.

"Hey, you say I'm a Christian, but you've kind of made me wonder because I do have memories—recent memories this morning, last night, yesterday—of sin." Especially, if we need to talk about what I say, I get that—we all stumble in many ways. If you never stumbled in what you said, you'd be a perfect man. The problem is that you just can't sweep that under the rug. When you find yourself a violator, the response is—let me put it in terms of a proverb—Proverbs 28:13: we don't conceal it; we don't cover it up. If you do, you will not prosper. But if you confess it and you forsake it, then you'll obtain mercy. Next verse, verse 14: "Blessed is the one who fears the LORD always, but whoever hardens his heart will fall into calamity." That's the picture. How soft-hearted are you in response to your failures? Concealing, covering, and hardening your heart—that's a sign that you don't have a redeemed heart.

Stand with me real quick—we're out of time. Let's think this through, just in terms of our prayer here, on where you're at. I said Jesus is very specific because he wants you to know where you



stand. We've talked about two kinds of people. We're talking about people that have a heart that is still alienated from God—he calls them the “evil person.” Doesn't mean you're making your way up to the courthouse tomorrow to answer for some felonious crime—I'm just saying you don't have a new heart. And because of that, your life still expresses—in the preponderance and direction of your life—a lot of things that are selfish and self-serving and doing whatever you can get away with. If you're in that camp, there's a solution: repentance and faith. Come to Christ today and put your trust in him.

Then you say, “Well, I'm in this camp, Pastor.” And some of you are on a meteoric rise of bearing fruit—wow, amazing fruit. Fantastic. What I have to say to you this morning: congratulations; great job. I might say, if I had time for another sermon, it'd be good for you to prepare for some pruning—because when you bear a lot of fruit, the Bible says the Lord will come and prune you so that you will bear even more fruit. So prepare for pruning, meteoric fruit-bearing Christians that are here this morning. Great—different sermon.

But maybe you're in that camp, as a Christian, and there are a lot of things in your life that, when you hear these things—particularly about the fruit of your mouth—that you have that line from James really burned into your mind, and that is, “These things ought not to be.” Let me just end with where you're at on that spectrum: growing like a weed—fantastic; conforming externally—get saved; a Christian, but there are a lot of things that ought not to be—well then, Proverbs 28 is good, man. Don't conceal it; confess it; forsake it; fear the Lord—and you'll see mercy; you'll obtain mercy, as the text says—and be blessed.

Let's pray. God, I know we all can see some level of that failure in our lives, because as James says, we can never bear fruit consistently, perfectly, in our lives. So we all need to come to you. And honestly, we just don't want to rationalize and justify our sin like the non-Christian world does. So help us with this, God—to be honest with you, to bear more consistent fruit in our lives.

And for those that are here that are like me as a kid, and so many other people just kind of conforming to the church that really don't have a changed heart, I pray that it would be a day for them to get right with you. It's not difficult—certainly not complicated—but it's profoundly hard—that is, to come to you, as we've heard in our testimonies this morning, and just give up the control—to say, “God, you're God; I confess my sin; I put my trust in you; I want to be changed, and I'm willing to let you be God in my life.” That kind of calling out with a pure heart and a sincere heart for cleansing and forgiveness and life-changing—that's what you're in the business of doing. So may that be the reality for some people even hearing my voice right now.

God, we love you for your time of mercy—as old-time preachers have said, that open door of mercy that's still there. One day it'll close, but for now we have the opportunity to come to you and get



right with you. And even when we stumble as saints, we have the opportunity to be cleansed and obtain mercy afresh every day. So make us soft-hearted and repentant toward you, that we might work and see more good fruit borne through our lives as you work in us and through us. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.