

Doctrines / Demons and the Church

Our Text: “You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe—and they shudder” (James 2:19).

Some verses ought to scare us.

How can the demons “believe” and still be demons?

If they could “believe” and end up in hell, what about us?

We can say right up front this verse means exactly what it says.

The demons believe in God and even believe in the oneness of God, yet that belief will not save them. Strange as it may sound, this is a verse about the orthodoxy of hell and doctrines of demons.

There is a kind of belief that does not lead to heaven. There is such a thing as “demonic faith,” which is not believing *in* the demons but believing *like* the demons.

Demons are spirit beings created by God to serve him.

They were originally good angels who followed Lucifer in his rebellion against God. They are powerful spirit beings who now serve Satan and his evil purposes on the earth. Their purpose is entirely negative.

According to James, we can learn something important from their bad example. In this message, we’re going to answer three questions to help us learn from the strange case of the demons who believe and yet are still in hell.

1: What Do Demons believe?

James answers by saying the demons believe God is one.

That’s a good thing to believe. That was the starting point of Old Testament religion. The first readers would instinctively recall the famous “**Shema**” of Deuteronomy 6:4, “**Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.**”

To the Jews, this was the most important verse in the Torah. It was the foundation of their religion. Parents taught this verse to their children, they would write it down, recite it, memorize it, and build their lives around it. This verse meant there is only one God and the people were to love him supremely.

But consider this. What the demons believe about God is true. It’s 100% biblical. The demons know the truth about God. They know there is a God, and there is only one God. But we can go further than that.

The demons are not atheists.

They are not skeptics.

There are no agnostics among their ranks.

There are no “liberal” demons who doubt the truth.

There are no atheist demons!

When James says, “**You do well**” to believe that God is one, he is not being sarcastic or ironic. He was being entirely truthful, and his readers would have taken him that way. Biblical faith begins with acknowledging the one true God: “**In the beginning God**” (Genesis 1:1). True faith begins there. But it doesn’t end there.

What else do the demons believe? If we study the various encounters with demons in the New Testament, we learn additional things they believe:

They believe in the deity of Christ.

When they saw Jesus, they bowed down to him and cried out, “**You are the Son of God**” (Mark 3:11-12).

They know his human name. “**What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth?**” (Luke 4:34).

They know his divine origin. “**I know who you are—the Holy One of God**” (Luke 4:34).

They recognize true preaching of the gospel. “**These men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of salvation**” (Acts 16:17).

They recognize false preaching of the gospel. “**Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?**” (Acts 19:15)

Demons believe in hell

They believe in hell. **The demons infesting the man from the tombs begged Jesus not to send them to the abyss, the place of final punishment** (Luke 8:31).

They acknowledge Jesus as their ultimate judge. **Those same demons begged Jesus not to torment them** (Mark 5:7).

They believe in a set time for their punishment. They ask Jesus, “**Have you come to punish us before our time?**” (Matthew 8:29).

They know Jesus is sovereign over them. **They must ask Jesus for permission to enter the pigs** (Mark 5:11-13).

They know they must bow before Jesus. **When the demon-infested man saw Jesus, he voluntarily bows down before him** (Mark 5:6).

They submit to the power of Jesus’ word. **When he casts them out of a person, they must come out** (Matthew 17:18).

Taken together, that’s an impressive array of theological insight. No wonder R. C. Sproul said this:

Satan could make an "A" in my systematic theology course. He knows the information and knows that the information is true.

Don’t play Bible Trivia with a demon. He’ll win every time.

2: Why Do They Shudder?

The word “**shudder**” translates an unusual Greek word, used only here in the New Testament. It means **to have your hair stand on end**.

The English word “frizzy” comes from this Greek word. I call it a Halloween word because it describes how you would react in a haunted house at midnight when you hear a creak and then the sound of a door slowly opening.

Someone or something is coming, but in the darkness you can’t see a thing. You hear the sound of steps moving slowly in your direction, but who is it? What do they want? What will happen when they reach you? You hold your breath, hoping whoever it is will pass you by. Your muscles tense, your breathing slows. You strain to hear a sound. But the steps come closer and closer. They stop just behind you. You try to run, but your feet won’t move. Suddenly an ice-cold hand grips your shoulder. That terror you feel is what James means when he says the demons shudder.

The thought of God freaks the demons out

Stephen Davey points out that if you take the Greek word translated “shudder” and turn it into a noun, it gives us the English word “freaky.”

The thought of God freaks the demons out. Now take that and apply it to the demons. Remember, they are not heretics. They know who Jesus is, and they know he will sentence them to eternal doom someday. Everything about him terrifies them.

They hate Jesus.

They fear him.

They cannot deny his true identity.

They cannot escape the coming judgment.

- Think about this. *The demons know the truth about Jesus.*
- They shudder continually.
- They live in constant fear of their impending eternal doom.
- They know the ugly future that awaits them.
- But knowing all that and living in fear of it cannot deliver them.

Never play Bible Trivia with a demon

When Dr. Criswell preached on this text, he imagined a scene where the devil himself walked the aisle and asked to join the church. The pastor was shocked by this turn of events, but began to ask a series of questions:

- “Do you believe the Bible?” “Yes, I do. It’s all true.”
- “Do you believe Jesus is the Son of God?” “Without a doubt.”

- “Do you believe the Virgin Birth?” “Yes, I was there watching it all in Bethlehem.”
- “Do you believe Jesus died on the cross?” “Yes, I saw it happen.”
- “Do you believe Jesus rose from the dead?” “Absolutely. No question about it.”
- “Do you believe Jesus is coming again?” “Of course. He said he would.”
- “Will you be faithful in attending church?” “I’ll be here every time the doors are open.”

Hell will be filled with good theologians

Finally the pastor says, “You have been going to and fro throughout the world, wreaking havoc, causing pain, sowing discord, breaking up marriages, stirring up death and destruction, and dragging people down with you into hell. Do you here and now repent of your sin? Will you turn from your sin, bow your knee, and trust Christ as Savior?” To which the devil replies, “Oh, Oh, I don’t know about that. That is something else!” (From “The doctrines of the Devil.”)

Knowledge of the truth, even believing the truth, even living in fear of what the truth must mean, that alone is never enough. Consider the demons who believe and shudder and are doomed forever.

This is what James wants us to ponder.

3: What Should We Learn From This?

This solemn verse stands as a warning to every religious person. *The more religious you are, the more you stand in danger of having demonic faith.*

To make it more personal, the thought occurs to me that I stand in grave danger myself. I have been a Jesus-follower for 60 years. But before that I was a church member.

- I’ve been “in church” all my life. I feel comfortable there. I know the routine, understand the language, know the songs, and know how to pray the prayers. I know what’s going to happen on Sunday morning. I know how to take the little cup and then take the little wafer when we observe the Lord’s Supper.
- I have memorized Scripture. I started out in the Cradle Roll, graduated to the Beginners, then on to the Juniors, then to the Intermediates, then to the Junior High, and finally to the High School department.
- I knew all the verses to “Just as I Am” by the time I was 12 years old.
- I went on youth retreats and knew all about “rededication” services.
- I walked the aisle, joined the church, and was baptized by Brother Butterworth, my childhood pastor.
- Later I attended a Christian college, then went to seminary,
- Then pastored three churches, wrote a few books, started a ministry, preached around the world, and now here I am.

That's my life (part of it, at least) in one paragraph. It's very easy when you know all of that to subtly begin to rely on your religious pedigree in place of having a living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me say it this way. I subscribe to the great creeds of the church, I believe wholeheartedly in what evangelical Christians believe, I can sign the statement of faith of every church I ever pastored, and I can happily sign my seminary's statement of faith.

I read the Puritans I quote Spurgeon, I am a happy member of a Gospel Believing church, and I love watching videos of Billy Graham preaching. I learned the gospel when Roger Wood explained it to me, and when I read it on the pages of the *Sword of the Lord* 48 years ago. I call myself an evangelical Christian. That's my ecclesiastical home.

Even good religion can be a snare

So what's the point? Well, we all have a story, don't we? Some were raised Catholic or Lutheran or Methodist or Church of Christ or Presbyterian or Charismatic or Brethren or Anglican, or maybe you were raised without any religion. But you've got your own religious history. We all do.

It's fine to have a history, good to know theology, great to read esteemed Bible commentators, wonderful to be part of a good church, and it's very good if you can pass those theology quizzes that pop up on Facebook.

But it's a huge mistake to think you are going to heaven because of your knowledge or your religious background or even because you went to such-and-such seminary and made straight A's under Dr. So & So & Wrote-Many-Books.

The demons know good theology, and they are in hell anyway

The demons made straight A's too. They know theology better than you do. They know the Bible backward and forward. And they even "believe" in the sense that they acknowledge the truth about who Jesus is.

They know good gospel preaching when they hear it. And they know the fake stuff because they are the ones inspiring those Candyland TV preachers.

In one sense, the demons are wiser than some of us. Because of what they know about their future, they shudder in fear of their coming judgment.

Gordon Keddie poses this question:

"Why is it that demons tremble, while sinners can sail on in blissful unconcern?" The answer is that the demons are not so blind as people. They know their latter end ... They really fear the

wrath to come. But careless sinners say they believe in God positively, go on in daily life to live as if he did not exist and yet can dream that they are safe in the everlasting arms!”

There is another way of looking at this. *Many of us take ourselves and our religion too seriously.* We look at our own record, we judge our own sincerity, and we compare ourselves with others. We are very impressed with ourselves and consequently not so impressed with Jesus. It’s very easy for us to become “careless sinners” even while pursuing a life of outward piety. We may even think our faith is real because we have a seminary degree.

There will be many good theologians in hell. In fact, hell is populated with good theologians already. They are called demons. Make sure you don’t join them.

- Knowledge alone will never save you.
- Checking the right boxes will never save you.
- Living in fear of hell will never save you.

Let this be a somber warning to you and me. Don’t make the mistake of knowing a lot and yet doing nothing with what you know. That brings me to me my second application.

The Great Blondin

We need true biblical faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. True saving faith involves the intellect, the emotions, and the will. The faith that saves us involves all we are in coming to Christ. Faith starts with knowledge, moves to conviction, and ends with commitment.

Faith = knowledge + conviction + commitment

In the nineteenth century, the greatest tightrope walker in the world was a man named Charles Blondin. On June 30, 1859, he became the first man in history to walk on a tightrope across Niagara Falls. Over twenty-five thousand people gathered to watch him walk 1,100 feet suspended on a tiny rope 160 feet above the raging waters. He worked without a net or safety harness of any kind. The slightest slip would prove fatal. When he safely reached the Canadian side, the crowd burst into a mighty roar.

In the days that followed, he would walk across the Falls many times. Once he walked across on stilts; another time he took a chair and a stove with him and sat down midway across, cooked an omelet, and ate it. Once he carried his manager across riding piggyback. And once he pushed a wheelbarrow across loaded with 350 pounds of cement. On one occasion he asked the cheering spectators if they thought he could push a man across sitting in a wheelbarrow. A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. Spying a man cheering loudly, he asked, “Sir, do you think I could safely carry you across in this wheelbarrow?” “Yes, of course.” “Get in,” the Great Blondin replied with a smile. The man refused.

That makes it clear, doesn’t it?

It’s one thing to believe a man can walk across by himself.

It’s another thing to believe he could safely carry you across.

But it's something else entirely to get into the wheelbarrow yourself. That's the difference between knowledge, conviction, and commitment.

Don't trust in your religious pedigree

If you know what it means to believe a doctor when he says, "You need surgery," you know what it means to have faith. If you know what it means to step into an airplane entrusting your safety to the captain in the cockpit, you know what it means to have faith. If you know what it means to ask a lawyer to plead your case in court, you know what it means to have faith. Faith is total reliance upon another person to do that which you could never do for yourself.

Knowledge alone will never save you

How much faith does it take to go to heaven? It depends. *The answer is not much, but all you've got.* If you are willing to trust Jesus Christ with as much faith as you happen to have, you can be saved. But if you're holding anything back, thinking that maybe you need to do something to help save yourself, forget it!

Five Words

Here are five words that will take you all the way to heaven: **Only Jesus and Jesus only.** But it is not enough to say those words or to memorize them or to write them on a card. You must trust Christ and him alone.

Don't fall into the trap of demonic faith. That's the trap of thinking you can recognize Christ without having a relationship with him. It's the trap of acknowledging him without accepting him. It's the trap of fearing him, but never trusting him.

Only Jesus and Jesus only!

No demon will ever trust Christ. But you can!
 No demon will ever repent. But you can!
 No demon will ever believe and be saved. But you can!

God help you and me, each of us individually and all of us together, to trust in Jesus Christ. Let us say, "I am trusting Jesus so much that if he can't take me to heaven, I'm not going there." Let us wholly lean on Jesus' name. He is a great Savior. Jesus never turns away anyone who comes to him in true faith.