

# WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

## Life Application Sunday School Class

### Book of James - Session 9

March 24, 2002

#### SUMMARY:

The relationship of the believer to the law:

1. We are not justified before God by keeping the law. Our justification is by faith in Christ alone – apart from the works of the law. We can never stand before God and be accepted by any work that we perform. Only the work of Christ is sufficient to make us acceptable to God.
2. However, those who are in Christ have the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit, which enables them to fulfill the law!

*Rom 8: Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,<sup>2</sup> because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*

Before we were in Christ, we were condemned! We were under the law of sin and death. Because we fall short of God's law, and have rebelled against God's law, God's law declared us guilty, under His wrath, and headed for eternal judgment. But God in His mercy provided salvation from that condemnation, through faith in Christ. Now that we are in Christ, we are set free from the condemnation that the law brings to sinners – because Christ has borne that penalty for us. We are no longer under the wrath of God for violation of His law, because Christ suffered that wrath for us. We have been released from the penalty of sin, which is death.

<sup>3</sup> *For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man,<sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.*

The law is not bad, it was just not able to save us because we can't keep it. We are born sinners, being the descendents of Adam, and we willfully express that sinful nature in disobedience and rebellion toward God. Before we are saved, we are totally consumed with our selfish desires and stand condemned, guilty, and powerless to be made right before God. But what the law could not do, God did! He sent Christ to remove the thing that keeps us from obeying God and being able to live a righteous life. He sent His Son to carry away our sin at the cross. And then He sent His Spirit into our lives that enables us to obey the law.

<sup>5</sup> *Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires.* <sup>6</sup> *The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace;* <sup>7</sup> *the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.* <sup>8</sup> *Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.* <sup>9</sup> *You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.*

Notice that Paul plainly says that the true believer lives according to the Spirit of God. He is led and

controlled by the Spirit of God, and therefore he submits to God and obeys the law of God. The same Spirit that we receive and that marks us as belonging to God also enables us to live righteous lives.

*12 Therefore, brothers, we have an obligation—but it is not to the sinful nature, to live according to it. <sup>13</sup> For if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, <sup>14</sup> because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.*

Here is the heart of the passage; our obligation. Because we have the Spirit, and have been set free from the bondage of sin, we no longer bound to our selfish desires. In fact, we can now live righteous lives. We can choose to be led by the Spirit and live lives that are pleasing to God and reflect His glory. This is the purpose of our salvation! God has saved us to display His glory.

For the true believer, the law is no longer a source of condemnation, but rather a source of life. We experience the blessing and life of God as we obey from the heart the righteousness expressed in the law. And this obedience is walking in love toward God and toward one another. We have been set free to love. We can enjoy the freedom and blessing of serving Christ and others. We can experience the privilege of being filled with the expression of God's glory, kindness, love, and goodness towards others. We can come to know God intimately as we experience His life flowing through our lives to bring mercy and hope to others. This is what James means when he says that mercy triumphs over judgment! As we walk in love and mercy towards others, our obedience demonstrates that we have received the mercy of God in our lives. Obedience to the law brings freedom, and now we can obey the law by the enabling grace of God shown to us through Christ.

You may be wondering at this point, how does all of this truth concerning the law and freedom and righteousness affect to my day-to-day life? What does this mean in practical terms?

As we face choices on a daily basis to either be selfish or serve someone else, we must remember that God has filled us with the ability and capacity to love supernaturally. When we encounter people with needs, we have before us the opportunity to experience the very presence and life of God flowing through us to bless that person. God has providentially sent that needy person our way and given us an opportunity to be a vessel of His glory!

It's when you see a stranger this morning, and choose to give of your time and attention instead of turning the other way, or when you see a brother in need, and meet it. It's when you choose to write that note of encouragement, or wash those dishes, or visit that person in the nursing home, or choose to help with the prison ministry, or clean that bathroom floor for your family, or offer words of thanks or encouragement to someone that has been a blessing to you. Realize this – those are the things that God has saved you and empowered you to do. Not only do you receive a blessing from serving someone else, you are fulfilling God's purpose for your salvation. Ephesians 2:8-10 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God has prepared in advance for us to do.*

That brings us to the next section in James, that addresses the relationship of faith and works.

### READ James 2:14-26

*14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup> But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."*

*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. <sup>19</sup> You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.*

20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? <sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. <sup>23</sup> And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? <sup>26</sup> As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

This is a central theme in the book of James: The relationship of faith and works. It is imperative to closely examine this section to come away with the truth. We must affirm that this is no contradiction with the other New Testament teaching. To better understand the relationship of faith and works, let's look at some other passages in the New Testament.

*Eph 2: <sup>8</sup> For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*

*Rom 4: What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup> If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. <sup>6</sup> David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. <sup>8</sup> Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."*

*Gal 3: <sup>6</sup> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>7</sup> Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." <sup>9</sup> So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. <sup>10</sup> All who rely on observing the law are under a curse, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." <sup>11</sup> Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith." <sup>12</sup> The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, "The man who does these things will live by them." <sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." <sup>14</sup> He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

If we only take a superficial look at these passages and compare them with James 2, there seems to be a contradiction. Whenever we come across what appears to be contradictions when studying the Scripture, we may be tempted to ignore one passage and hold firmly to the other. Instead, we need to affirm both, and see that we have an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a truth. So which is it? Are justified by faith apart from works, or are works necessary for our justification?

Let's take a closer look at our passage in James 2. One of the keys to answering this question is in verse 14. <sup>14</sup> *What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?* The word "claims" is essential to understanding this whole passage. That key word teaches us this: There are people who claim saving faith, but they don't possess saving faith. How can you tell if a person possesses saving faith? It is not merely by what they say. This passage in James teaches us that there is a

deficient faith, a faith that does not have the power to save. This deficient faith is exposed by what it does not produce. On the contrary, true saving faith that justifies produces something – corresponding works. These works do not save the person, they are a result of true faith and serve as proof that true faith is present. Saving faith is a gift. And if a person has been given this gift, he will exhibit a change in his life.

In verses 15-17, James gives an illustration of "dead" faith. If a brother or sister is in some type of physical need, and you wish them well, and offer to pray for them, but you give them no tangible help, your words of faith and love are useless and empty – they have no value. We can't see faith and love, but we can sure see the evidence if they are present. If we truly love, we will meet needs. True love results in action. True faith results in works.

James further describes this non-saving faith. This false faith may include a belief in sound doctrine. A foundational teaching of the Old Testament is that God is one. This belief set the Israelites apart from all of their polytheistic neighbors. James states that demons, who certainly don't have saving faith, know and believe in one God. When Jesus walked the earth and encountered demon spirits, they would cry out and profess Him to be the Son of God, the Messiah. They confessed that Jesus is Lord of all, and the coming Messiah, but that belief and affirmation certainly did not save them. An affirmation and belief in right doctrine is not sufficient evidence of saving faith.

How do you know that an apple tree is an apple tree? Is it merely because it has leaves, or a trunk, or roots? You know for sure that it is an apple tree when it bears apples. What is the evidence that Abraham was justified by faith? It was because he trusted and obeyed God to point of being willing to offer his son Isaac.

How do we know a person has saving faith? Is it merely because they say the right things about Christ, or profess a faith in the Lord, or because they hold to sound doctrine? It is not merely because they have the proper belief and profession. Their belief and profession is proven genuine as it produces works of righteousness.

Another way to think about this dynamic is cause and effect. The cause is the unmerited, free gift of salvation that comes to us through faith and is based solely on the work of Christ. The effect is that the person who has received this faith begins to produce good works – foundationally love for God and love for others. A person who has been declared righteous by God will exhibit righteousness in their life.

Turn to Hebrews 11 – the faith chapter.

Verse 4 says Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice – proving that he was righteous

Verse 5 says that Enoch walked with God by faith

Verse 7 says Noah prepared an ark by faith.

Verse 8 says Abraham left his homeland by faith

Verse 17 says Abraham offered Isaac, because he believed that God could raise him from the dead if necessary

Verse 23 says Moses' parents hid him believing God

Verse 24 says that by faith Moses' identified and suffered with God's people

Verse 28 says they kept the Passover by faith

Verse 29 says they passed through the Red Sea by faith

Verse 31 says the Rahab was saved by faith, and demonstrated her faith by receiving the spys.

All of these verses make this point – saving faith produces action. We are not saved by the actions we take, but rather, this gift of faith that we received is expressed in the way that we live.

So here is the application from this passage. True saving faith produces works of righteousness. If the faith that a person professes doesn't produce a love for Christ and His Word, and a love for God's people, then that person doesn't have the real thing. They have a dead, substitute that is powerless to save.

How does a person get genuine saving faith, the faith that produces love for God and others? It comes by admitting their need, and recognizing that only God can provide the righteousness necessary to be accepted by Him. It comes by understanding and accepting that this righteousness was provided only through Christ. It comes by abandoning all self-righteous efforts to please God, and crying out for God to be merciful on them, a sinner, and to forgive them and remove their sins based on the righteous sacrifice of the Son of God. It comes to those who entrust their lives fully into the hands of Jesus Christ.

There is an application for believers as well. We need to depend on God to produce the works of love and righteousness in our lives, and realize that the faith that we have been given has the ability to produce those works. The Christian life is a life of dependence upon God. We are not only saved by faith, we need to walk by faith. As we face the challenges of life to love others, and to place our selfish desires aside and be servants, we need to call on the Lord in utter dependence on Him to enable us to do what we know is right and is pleasing to Him. And we are assured that when we pray such prayers that are in accordance with His will, that He will answer and abundantly supply the strength to live lives that will glorify Him. We serve a living Savior that has given us a living faith that will produce works of righteousness in our lives to the glory of God.