

**JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE**  
**Galatians 2:15-16**

Father in heaven, as we come now to worship you in the hearing of your word, as we come now to worship you in hearing your word taught, I pray that you would help us, O Lord. Please help me as I speak. Please help us all as we listen. Lord, we seek the wisdom of God, not the foolish thoughts of men. Please, O Lord, be willing and gracious to teach us by your Holy Spirit. Give us eyes to see, give us ears to hear, give us hearts to obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

We'll read Galatians 2, verse 11 through to verse 16, looking particularly tonight at verses 15 and 16.

“<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”

“<sup>15</sup> We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Amen. May God bless that word.

Words, as I am sure you are aware, can have different meanings in different contexts. If you went to the post office and said you wanted to buy a “tube,” they would give you a rolled up piece of cardboard with a lid on each end—something that you could roll a poster up, for example, and stick into, seal it, put a stamp on it, send it wherever you wanted.

But if you're speaking to someone who surfs and you spoke about a “tube,” they're thinking of a particular wave, a certain shape of wave, the kind of wave that a person can get between the back wall and the front wall of, and there's a tube of water around them—they're in the tube. And so the tube becomes the name of a type of wave.

Context tells us what words mean, in most situations. And Paul in our passage tonight, verses 15 and 16, uses the word “justified” three times. “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” “We also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

What is the context of the use of the word? You immediately see that the context of the use of the word was the context of law—by the works of the law no one will be justified. Every time he uses the word “justified,” he uses the word “law.” From that context, we can come to the conclusion that he's thinking of the word in a legal context—in a context that has to do with law.

The word justified, the word behind it, is *dikaioō* in the ancient Greek, and it does have a fairly broad range of meanings. For example, we would say it means vindicate. Someone has vindicated themselves, someone has shown that what they said was correct. There was vindication in it. It does carry that meaning. But in the context of law, and in the context of legal language, the word justify always means righteous, not guilty.

If you went to a court of law in the Jewish courts, before the Jewish elders, when someone had complained against you, claiming that you had broken the law, you had transgressed in some way against them, and if after investigation and taking witnesses the elders came to the conclusion that you were not guilty, they would “justify” you. They would pronounce “*dikaioō*”—not guilty; righteous. You are not guilty of the sin. That’s the legal meaning of the word justify. It’s to be proclaimed righteous, or not guilty of the sin. It’s the word that was proclaimed when you had won your case, when your name had been cleared. You were justified.

Now because in this modern age there’s quite a bit of confusion about this, what I want to do is sort of trace this out through the Old Testament. We already have started in our Old Testament readings. That’s why I sort of slowed right down as we read Psalm 143, and pointed out that verse 2 spoke of justification. And also in Proverbs, chapter 17 verse 15, it spoke of justification.

But let’s have a look at the context of the Old Testament, remembering that Paul before his life as a Christian was a Pharisee, one of those Jewish elders. He was one of those who was deeply involved in the study and the application of Jewish law. So he would draw his meaning from Jewish law. He would draw his definitions from Jewish law. He would draw his applications from Jewish law.

And as I’ve already told you, primarily they were studying the Septuagint. The Septuagint was kind of the equivalent to, I guess, the ESV of the day. If you had a scroll in your house, you could almost bet that it would’ve been of the Septuagint. It would not have been in Hebrew. The most common Scriptures in Judea at that time were the ancient Greek Scriptures, the Septuagint.

So let’s turn back to Exodus chapter 23. Now we’re right in the midst of the giving of law here in Exodus chapter 23. In Exodus chapter 20, we’re given the Ten Commandments, and then after the Ten Commandments, the law is applied in specific and particular situations—laws about how to make offerings, laws about how to care for slaves, laws about restitution, laws concerning social justice.

In Exodus chapter 23, the law is given on how someone is to pursue a lawsuit; how a case is to be decided. And I want us to look at verses 6 and 7: Exodus 23, verse 6: “You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. <sup>7</sup> Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.” For I will not acquit the wicked.

Now what’s the context? It’s a lawsuit. What’s the Greek word in the Septuagint that’s been rendered here “acquit”? *Dikaioō*—justify. I will not declare the wicked righteous—justify.

What's the context that it's put in? A lawsuit. "You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit." You see it's being used in a particular context, and the particular context that it's being used in is legal. It's the idea of a case being tried, a complaint being settled. You will not acquit—*dikaioō*, justify—the wicked.

Now let's turn to Deuteronomy chapter 25. The word "deuteronomy" literally means "the second giving of the law." It's basically Moses preaching the law to the people before he departs. Verse 1 of chapter 25: "If there is a dispute between men and they come into court and the judges decide between them"—so stop. It's legal; a dispute; a court; judges—"acquitting the innocent and condemning the guilty." Well what's behind the word rendered in the ESV "acquitting"? *Dikaioō*, justify. Justifying the innocent and condemning the guilty. It has a legal context.

Now what did our earlier reading in Proverbs chapter 17 say? That God hates those who justify the wicked. Do not justify the wicked. Do not declare the wicked to be innocent. And as I said, we looked at Psalm 143, particularly looking at verse 2: "before you no flesh will be justified." Turn back there to Psalm 143. The use here is really quite important, because it speaks of God and God's judgment. "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you." As I said, "for no one living is *justified* before you." "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is *justified* before you."

Now this is the Old Testament, and this is David praying to the Lord God. "Enter not into judgment"—enter not into legal proceedings against me, he's saying. If you enter into legal proceedings against me, I cannot be acquitted. I cannot be justified. Why does he say that? Because he knows that he's a sinner. It's important that we understand that the context from which Paul is speaking is a legal context. That's the most natural use of the word that he would have known.

Furthermore, if we turn back now to Galatians, as I've already pointed out, each time he uses "justify," he sets it against the works of the law. You see, it's a legal context. That's what we need to understand. And why have I made the point? What's so important about this? Basically, there is a line of teaching going around called "the new perspective on Paul," and the new perspective on Paul messes with the idea of justification. Their idea is that justification is basically nothing more than entry into the covenant community. They say that justification for people serves the same purpose in the New Testament era that circumcision was serving in the Old Testament era. It just makes you a part of God's people. It doesn't actually come with imputed righteousness. It's not a declaration of innocence, in other words. It's not a declaration of righteousness. It's not a declaration that the person is clothed in the righteousness of Christ. It's simply just your entrance point into the covenant community, and you must obey in order to build up righteousness.

So that's why I've so carefully wanted to ground this word in its legal context, because Paul is using it in its legal context. And he's using it in the rabbinic context, the context in which he himself was trained as a Pharisee.

Galatians 2:15: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.” Now the way I want to read that is, “We ourselves are Jews by birth”—he’s speaking of Peter and himself; he’s speaking of the original apostles—“and not ‘Gentile sinners’.” I think the Gentile sinners could potentially have been put in scare-quotes. That’s what the Jews used to call the Gentiles—they were sinners, they were dogs. And Paul’s saying, We ourselves are Jews—not Gentile *sinners*.

“<sup>16</sup> Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” So what’s he saying here? It would appear that he’s continuing what he was saying to Peter when he was rebuking Peter for publicly sinning against the Gentiles in the church. It appears that this is further commentary upon that sin. “We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.”

So what’s Paul saying in the context of immediately speaking to Peter? He’s saying, “We weren’t saved just because we were Jews. And we weren’t saved, Peter, because we were circumcised. And we weren’t saved because we were raised in the synagogue. We weren’t saved because we went to Sabbath school. We weren’t saved, Peter, because we learnt Scripture. We were saved because we put our faith in Jesus Christ. Even we Jews were saved by faith in Jesus Christ and in the righteousness that comes from Christ. We were saved by faith in Jesus.”

“<sup>16</sup> Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law”—repetition. He’s basically repeated exactly the same words in a different order. It’s the same point being made twice. Now in Jewish literature, when the same point is being made again and again, that’s their major form of emphasis. When they say something twice, they mean it. When they say something three times, they’re dead serious.

So Paul basically repeats himself. “Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law”—that’s one; “but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law”—that’s two—double repetition. Same point being made twice. But then just in case we didn’t get what he was saying, he comes back and he hits us a third time: “because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

Now that reference to Psalm 143:2, that’s actually it. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. And it’s when you look at the ancient Greek text of Galatians, and then you look at the ancient Greek of the Septuagint of Psalm 143, verse 2, that’s when you see that Paul is making a reference back into Psalm 143. And that’s a very important connection in helping us to understand that this word “justified” is about a legal finding. It’s about a declaration.

To be justified is not to be born again. It’s not to be regenerated. To be justified is not to be sanctified. It’s not to be made Christ-like or set apart as a dwelling place for God. It’s not the ongoing process of sanctification, where you grow in Christ-likeness. To be justified is to be declared righteous in the eyes of God. It’s to be declared not guilty, and not only not guilty, but positively righteous. It’s to be seen as being clothed in the righteousness of Christ, because before God, in His absolute perfection and holiness, only God’s own righteousness is good enough.

We can do, at a human level, good things. All of us can do good things. All of us have done good things—I hope we have, anyway. But my friend, when we read the Sermon on the Mount, and when we read Jesus talking about how the law is broken in the heart—hatred being murder, lust being adultery—or when you read the Tenth Commandment, “you shall not covet”—apply those things to our hearts.

Ask the question: Whilst I may have done some things that can be said to be good, whilst I may do things that can be said to be better than other things, have I done them from a pure and holy heart—have I done them expressly for and only for the glory of God, because God has said that they are right things? God looks upon the heart. God looks upon the motivations. He looks upon our very thoughts. Our hearts are wicked—and they’re the words of Jesus, not the words of Paul.

We’re in the gospel of Mark, those of you who are here in the morning. In the gospel of Mark, Jesus Himself said that the heart is desperately wicked and deceitful above all things, quoting from Jeremiah. God looks upon the heart. So works done outside of Christ, good things done outside of Christ, are not acceptable. They’re just not acceptable. Who among us can say that we have ever done anything only, purely, totally, truly, for the glory of God—anything? The answer is, None of us can say it. Even as regenerate Christians, we can’t say that.

Having said that, I want to give you encouragement. Does God look upon our works done in Christ and see them as better than they are? And the answer is, Yes. He sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ. And He sees the things that we do in obedience. He makes much of very little, and His recognition of our obedience done in Christ is beyond all proportion of what it is. But we’re talking about the state of the heart of a sinner. And no one outside of Christ can do anything, anything at all, that pleases God.

Turn to Romans chapter 8. I’ll just read from verse 1 down to verse 8: “<sup>1</sup> There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us”—now stop. “In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us.”

Understand, there’s a requirement of righteousness. “...who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup> For those who live according to the flesh”—now the people who live according the flesh are the people outside of Christ—“set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup> For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup> For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. <sup>8</sup> Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

“Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” But there is a righteous requirement that the law be fulfilled in *all*. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. So works done outside of Jesus Christ cannot please God. Yes, in the flesh, as human beings, we can do some good things.

We can do better things. But these things are not works that God accepts, and these things cannot purchase salvation. These things do not put God under any debt. God is free. He is totally and utterly free in His dealings with sinners. So to be justified before God, we must be justified *by* God. Our works cannot justify us. We must be justified by God.

Turn back to Galatians chapter 2. We must be justified through faith in Jesus Christ. Now faith in itself is not a good work, it's a gift from God. We're told that in Ephesians chapter 2, and also in the book of Philippians. Our believing is a gift from God. Remember, we were dead in our sins. Dead people don't believe. Dead people don't exercise faith.

Now in the name of our church, we call ourselves the Cooma Reformed Bible Church, and this is the Reformed part. What's the most basic simple sentence with regards to Reformed theology? Regeneration precedes faith. God must give life before life can be exercised. Remember in John chapter 3, Jesus said to Nicodemus, You cannot see the kingdom of heaven unless you be born again. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven unless you be born of above. You must first be born before you can even see it. You must first be born before you can enter it.

Now how does one enter into the kingdom of heaven? By faith. So God must grant life. God, in His gracious mercy, must grant life. By the power of the Holy Spirit, dead sinners are called to life. And the first thing that a dead sinner does when being called to life is exercise faith in God.

Now this is simultaneous. It's not like there's a half-second here and a split second there, and you count it off. I mean, we systematize our theology for the sake of understanding it. You have to. But the simple fact of the matter is that these things are simultaneous. Upon the granting of regenerating life, faith is practiced. Faith is practiced, the sinner is justified. The sinner is justified, the sinner is sanctified, or set apart. From the time that the sinner is sanctified, there is then an ongoing process of sanctification.

All of these things happen instantaneously, but justification, strictly speaking, is simply the legal declaration that the Christian is righteous. It's not the process by which he or she becomes righteous, it's the legal declaration, from God, in the sight of God—"I look upon that one as just. I look upon that one as not guilty before my eyes. I look upon that one as, indeed, being positively righteous as my Son Jesus Christ is positively righteous." That's justification—the "not guilty" declaration, after investigation.

We've explained it many times, and we've very quickly just run through it again. At the cross, what have you got happening in order that a sinner may be justified? What does Christ bear on the cross? The sins of the elect. He bears the sins of God's people. He is bearing, or dying for, the sins of God's elect. Our sins go to Jesus. It's called, in technical terms, imputation.

Imputation comes from the world of accounting, and it's simply balancing something up by moving figures from one column to another. And so our sin has been imputed to Jesus Christ. But there's an imputation the other way at the cross—the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to the Christian, imputed to the believer, imputed to the elect, imputed to all whom God will save.

Imputation goes two ways: Sin goes to Jesus, righteousness comes to us. Jesus upon the cross was treated as though He had personally committed the sin of every Christian, that every Christian can be treated by God as though he or she had personally lived the righteous life of Jesus. That's justification—the two-way imputation, the bringing someone into a right standing before God. That's the gospel. That's the cutting edge of the gospel. That's the thing.

If you want to know if you're in a gospel-preaching church or not, work out whether or not they're preaching justification by faith alone—whether or not they're preaching that in faith, in exercising faith in Jesus Christ, you're covered in the righteousness of Christ. And if they are preaching that, well they've at least got that big, great big plank of the gospel in place. They've at least got their feet on the ground in that, because it's the first thing that goes when the gospel is not preached. It's the first thing that disappears when the gospel is not preached, and people start to think that they must do works in order to have a right relationship with God.

Justification is the central aspect of the gospel. It's the most important part—being justified, being declared right in the eyes of God, being reconciled to God. The chasm, the enmity, the division that there was—that which was so broad that no one could cross it—Christ has crossed it, closed the gap, brought us into a right relationship with God—God is our Father, Christ as our brother.

Can you believe that Scripture tells us that Christ is our brother—our older brother? That He spoke to the disciples and called them his friends? Evil sinners—they confessed they were evil sinners. Paul: “I know that no good thing dwells in me, that is, within my flesh.” Evil sinners justified, reconciled, brought into a right relationship, now in the family! That's the cutting edge, as I said, the major part of the gospel.

From here I wanted to have a look at the book of James. One of the biggest objections that's been thrown up a few times, and I've heard it more than once, people will say the book James says that there's no such thing as justification by faith alone. It kind of goes like this. They say, You'll never find the words “justified by faith alone” in Scripture. The only place where you do find “justified by faith alone,” in the book of James they say, is presented in the negative. James says that you have to have works to be justified.

So we'd better have a look, then, at James and sort this out. We're going to start in James chapter 2. The first question I want to ask is, Did James believe in depravity—in human depravity? Did he believe in human sinfulness? Did he believe that no one could please God through their own righteousness? Well let's read chapter 2, verses 8 to 13.

“<sup>8</sup> If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well. <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. <sup>11</sup> For he who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

What do we get there? What does he say about the law? “If you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” Jump back up: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” So what’s he saying? Who’s loved their neighbor as themselves? Who can put up their hand and say, “I’ve got nothing to worry about? Perfect is my love for my neighbor, and I have never shown partiality”? I can’t. I see no hands. Why? Because we know we’re not innocent. We have not loved our neighbor as ourselves.

“But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” So he’s saying there’s sin in the heart, isn’t he? You’ve shown partiality, you have committed sin, and you are convicted by the law. And he says that if you’ve failed the law in one point, verse 10, you are accountable to *all* of it. James believes in depravity. James believes that no one can be justified by the works of the law. There it is.

There’s the first argument. How can one be justified who’s a lawbreaker, when all that Scripture tells us is someone cannot be justified by the works of the law? And remember our Old Testament reading—Psalm 143:2: “If God enters into judgment with a man, no one will be justified before him.” So there we go. James believes in sin. He believes in depravity. He believes that all are guilty before all of the law, that even if you’ve only transgressed one, you’ve transgressed the whole law.

Now let’s have a look at James 2:14. James here starts speaking about faith. <sup>14</sup> “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” The most important words here are “that faith”—that empty faith, that pretense of faith, the faith that is not accompanied by any fruit—*that* faith. “Can *that* faith save him?”

Look forward to verse 19: “You believe”—and there’s that word about faith—“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” So the faith that believes that there is a God, and that, therefore, because I believe in God, I’m saved—well, James is saying, No. That kind of faith qualifies you to be demon. Wonderful. You know, you’ve stepped from humanity into demonology. You’re qualified to be a wicked one. You believe in God. Good for you. You say you believe in God, you live like a wicked person, there is no work accompanying your faith—well, you’re qualified to be a demon. *That* faith. He’s speaking about a particular type of faith. What type of faith? Demonic faith. Evil faith. Pretending faith.

Faith is not just knowing that there is a God, and saying, “I believe in God.” The Devil knows that there is a God. Satan himself knows that there is a God. He actually once knew Him. He actually once entered into the throne-room of heaven, according to the book of Job.

The Devil knows there is a God. That is not saving faith. There’s more to faith than just knowledge. It’s not just knowing about something, it’s knowing God, actually knowing God; not knowing *about* God, but knowing God and being known by God. Knowledge, submission, and trust—these things make up faith.

Now let’s keep looking in James. Here we come to the big argument. James chapter 2, reading verses 21 to 26:



“<sup>21</sup> Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?” And there you see the phrase “justified by works.” “<sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; <sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

Well there, you see, that’s the big objection. Verse 24: You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. “Scott, everything you were just teaching is wrong. A person’s justified by works and not by faith alone. It’s there in the Scripture—it’s black and white! How can you not see that?”

Well first of all, let’s look at the context. What did I say at the very start about words and context? Context gives meaning. From verse 14 down to verse 26, which is the passage that contains this thought that James is giving us about faith, does he set it in a legal context? Does he mention law? Does he mention being declared righteous? Does he mention being tested, or tried? Answer: No, he doesn’t. He doesn’t mention law. He doesn’t give it a legal setting.

Remember what I said about the word “justified”—it can also mean the word that we would use, “vindicated”—vindicated: shown to be right, shown to be in the right. It’s a subtle difference, but it is a different meaning. “<sup>23</sup> ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is”—let’s try “vindicated”—“vindicated by works and not by faith alone.” What’s vindicating? It’s proving that something is real, for example. Abraham’s faith was vindicated, or proven to be the genuine article by his works.

Now just in case you think that I’m drawing a long bow, it’s actually used that way in Scripture in another place. Turn to Luke chapter 7. Jesus is teaching and preaching with regards to the critics of himself and John the Baptist. We’ll start reading at verse 33 of Luke chapter 7:

“<sup>33</sup> For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, ‘He has a demon.’ <sup>34</sup> The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ <sup>35</sup> Yet wisdom is justified by all her children.” “Justified by all her children.” Now wisdom is not being declared righteous in the use of that word there. There’s no accusation against wisdom. “Wisdom, you’re in the wrong! Wisdom, you’re a sinner!” That’s not the context. The context is that wisdom is being shown forth. Wisdom is being vindicated. The children of wisdom are showing that wisdom is right.

So in Scripture, using context, we can see that the word “justified”, *dikaioō*, does have another meaning. It does not have to mean “right at law,” declared innocent or righteous. It can mean vindicated. Back in James chapter 2, “<sup>24</sup> You see that a person is [vindicated] by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute [vindicated] by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? <sup>26</sup> For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

What's James dealing with? A false faith; a pretending faith; a pretender's faith. It's not a real faith. He's not dealing with justification. He's not dealing with what's called soteriology. The question of soteriology is, How does a person get saved? That's not the question James is answering. James is answering the question, How does a saved person live?

James is expounding, if we want to think of it this way, on the saying of Jesus that you will know a tree by its fruit. He's saying, If there ain't no good fruit, there ain't no good root. If they're not living as a Christian and growing in Christ-likeness, they're not actually Christians, no matter what they say. He's not speaking of conversion or how one is made a Christian or how one is declared righteous before God, he's speaking of how one should live the Christian life, how one lives who *has* been justified—justified in the legal, theological sense.

Paul, in the book of Galatians and in Romans and in other places in Scripture, is dealing with the problem, How is a person declared right before God? James is dealing with the problem of, How do you detect the false profession of faith, how do you pick out the hypocrite from the crowd? They're two completely different questions.

And going back to the fact that James says that all are guilty of breaking the law—and *all* of the law—and that all of the law falls upon the head of anyone who breaks even but one of the laws, how then could he be saying that someone can be justified by works when all are under the curse of death from the breaking of the law?

Turn back to Galatians chapter 2. A person is justified in the sight of God through faith in Jesus Christ—faith not being a work, but faith being a fruit of the life of God within us; God granting life. Adam was dead when he hid from God. And think of the foolishness and the stupidity of his hiding from God in the garden—hiding behind trees. “You can't see me—I'm behind the tree.” He's speaking of God!

His faith was dead. His mind was blown. I mean, can a man hide behind a tree from the sight of God? No. Did he know that before he sinned? Yes. Did he know that after he sinned? Well, he may have been suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, but he wasn't exercising faith. He was hiding from God. He wasn't trusting God to save him. There was no faith there. He was dead. “In the day that you eat of the fruit, you will die.”

Now I've had young people in Sunday School classes and youth groups complain, “Well why didn't he die on the spot?” He did. The heart kept beating, but towards God and before God, he was dead. He had lost faith. He had not kept up his faith. He was dead before God.

Faith is not a work, it's a gift. That's another good question: When you listen to teaching, is someone trying to screw you up? Is someone trying to wind you up like one of those little wind-up, spring-loaded toys? “If you just had the faith! Build up your faith! If you only believed! If you only believed, you wouldn't get sick. If you only believed, you wouldn't have monetary problems. If you only believed!”

That's not actually talking about faith, as Paul is speaking of faith. That's turning faith into a human work. It's turning faith into a work of man. And that's nonsense. We've spoken before of what were considered to be the three classic elements of true saving faith. There was knowledge—you know the truth; there was agreement, or submission—not only knowing the truth, you accept that the truth *is* the truth and you submit to the truth; and there was trust—you trust in Christ, trusting that Christ has done the work; Jesus Christ Himself has done the works.

When we speak of salvation, we can say that we're saved by works, as long as we understand something: God did the works. God in Christ did the works. The works that God requires, God did. The works that God requires in an ongoing sense, God is doing, in us and through us. We're saved by God's own works, and the works that we do are God working in us and through us. God gets all the glory. We get none. That's the way it works.

No one can boast before God. There's no one in heaven who thinks they got there because they did the right thing, they believed hard enough, they were smarter than everybody else. There's no one in heaven thinking that way. God gets all the glory. Everyone who's there, in the presence of the living God, understands and knows that they are there because God Himself took them and made them His own.

We must cling desperately to justification by faith alone in Christ alone. There's nothing else. There's no other way that person can be saved—the grace of God being shown in giving the gift of life and faith before God, that a person can look to Jesus Christ and see the Savior—“There is my Savior. There is my Redeemer. There is the One who loved me and gave Himself for me.” That's the only hope for humanity. That's the cutting edge of the gospel. That's the message that must be preached in any church that wants to call itself a gospel-preaching church: Justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Justification. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, wondrous things have been opened before us. Your word, O Lord, is wonderful. Your grace is wonderful. Jesus Christ our Savior is wonderful. We thank you and we praise you that you have given the gift of righteousness in Jesus Christ, that all who are saved and all who are being saved may stand before you rejoicing, knowing that you look upon us with love; that you bless us beyond all measure and all understanding; that we can rest secure in you, knowing that the works have been done. The works that you require have been done by your Son, Jesus Christ. Thank you, O Lord. We praise you. Please, O Lord, use us to share this word. Lord, may we all be preachers of the true gospel. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.