



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | [believerschapeldallas.org](http://believerschapeldallas.org)

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Theology of the Reformers

TRANSCRIPT

“The Consequences of Justification by Faith, or James Versus Paul”

Our subject for tonight is “The Consequences of Justification by Faith, or James Versus Paul.” In evangelical circles, there is general acceptance of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. In almost all of our evangelical churches, if you were to say I do believe that salvation is by grace through faith, you would probably receive an impression that this was generally held.

You’ll often hear in evangelical circles people saying there are only two religions: the religion of doing and the religion that characterized by “done.” The religion of doing is salvation by works, whereas the religion that is characterized by the word “done” is that which has as its central piece the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now of course, there is a great deal of confusion in evangelical circles. You’ll often hear them saying they do believe in salvation by grace through faith, and they then say that the decision that we make is of our own free will. They have not come to understand that to affirm the doctrine of free will is to contradict the doctrine of grace. Confusion in that case exists, and I would not want myself to say that a person like that is not saved. If he really believes that salvation is by grace even though he is confused in his own mind concerning that aspect of it, I would be inclined to think that he probably is a genuine Christian. But he is confused.

For example, if I believe or if I say that Dallas is in Texas, I’m right. If I say that Dallas is in New York, I’m wrong. But if I say that Dallas is in Texas and in New York, I’m confused. [Laughter] Now, when a person says that salvation is by grace, he’s right. When he says salvation is by works, he’s wrong. But when he says salvation is by grace through faith as a result of our decision of our own free will, which is on the works side, he’s confused. That’s really his problem; confusion. He needs to understand that the will is in bondage to sin and cannot of itself respond to the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation. So we say then that justification is by grace through faith.

But what about James 2:14-26? Does not James contradict this? Does he not say in chapter 2 and verse 17, “Even so, faith if it hath no works is dead, being by itself”? And then in verse 20, he says, “But are you willing to recognize you foolish fellow that faith without works is useless?” And then in verse 26 he says, “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

Furthermore, in the fourth chapter in the second verse of Paul’s letter to the Romans, he says with reference to Abraham, “For as Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.” So it’s clear that the apostle is justified by works, and the remainder of the chapter proves that. But then when we turn back to James chapter 2 verse 21, do we not read here, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” So you can see that in James, James insists that faith without works is dead. He says that Abraham was justified by works. Paul says he was not justified by works, he was justified by faith, for Abraham believed God and it was imputed to him as righteousness.

G. Campbell Morgan used to say, “The way to preach was to create a dilemma and then solve it.” Well, that is a dilemma, for James says that Abraham was justified by works, and Paul denies it.

It’s well known that Martin Luther had difficulty with the Epistle of James, and undoubtedly this was one of the primary reasons. When he translated his New Testament

into good German – it influenced the German language for centuries – he said in the preface to the New Testament that the epistle written by James is a “right stroy epistle compared with other ones.” So in other words, he said that he did not think it was too valuable a part of the word of God.

In fact, he gave the impression that he did not really believe that it belonged to the word of God. Now, he did drop that remark in 1530 and again in 1546 when editions of his New Testament came out. But in 1533, he also said that he would give his doctor’s beret to anyone who could harmonize James and Paul, fully believing that no one could do it. In 1540 he said that James’ teaching on justification by works was “absurd and against Scripture; someday I will use James to fire my stove.” And then in 1542, he said, “The Epistle of James we have thrown out of this school,” he refers to the theology faculty of the University of Wittenburg in Germany, “Because it has no value” – *sind sie voll nicht*.

It’s also well known that the famous Tubingen School of Biblical Criticism was built upon this supposed contradiction of James and Paul. These scholars, who cut a wide swath in scholarship some time ago, believed that you could not understand the Bible and you could not understand the epistles and the Book of Acts if you did not understand that the early church was split between the followers of James and Peter and the followers of Paul. And it was Paul who taught the doctrine of justification by grace, but it was Peter and James who had a different idea concerning the salvation that we have through Christ.

In fact, it was the opinion that one of Tubingen scholars that when, in verse 20, James says in the second chapter, “You believe that God is one, you do well; the demons also believe and shudder. But do you also recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?” it was their opinion that James was thinking about Paul when he wrote those words, “you foolish fellow.” And it was Paul who should be thought of in that way. So, Paul was thought to be the vain man, as the Authorized Version renders it.

But tonight we want to win Luther’s doctor’s beret. And so I want solve the supposed contradiction between Paul and James, but before we look at that specifically, it’s necessary for me to make just a few more comments concerning justification by grace. And I won’t take much time on this, but I think for our studies to complete, it is necessary for us to notice these things.

Now remember what we have been saying is this, that not only is justification a legal doctrine, it is grounded in the imputation made possible by penal substitution – the Lord Jesus Christ’s work on the cross – on the principle of grace. That’s what we’ve been saying, that justification is a legal pronouncement by God, possible by virtue of the work that Christ did on the cross, and through that work, God imputes to his people a righteousness that satisfies him.

We’ve been talking about the “gospel of the five only’s”: Scripture alone, grace alone, faith alone, by Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. So that God’s salvation work is a work which he himself has accomplished.

Now the first thing that I want to add to what we’ve been saying is that justification does not require the presence of good works. Now let me explain what is meant by that. When we say justification does not require the presence of good works, I am not saying that the man who is justified will not produce good works, but what we are saying is that faith justifies a person when he has no satisfactory works before God. Justification does not require the presence of good works.

If you’ll turn back to Romans chapter 3 and verse 28, you will see, I think, what I mean. The apostle writes, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” So that in man’s justification, there is present at the moment of his justification no works that pleases God. And if you’ll turn over a page to the fifth chapter of Romans, the apostle says, “But to one who does not rely on works but on him who justifies the ungodly (notice the expression, justifies the ungodly, not the godly) justifies

the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.” So, justification does not require the presence of good works.

Faith is never alone in the sense that works are always produced by saving faith, but it always justifies alone. Now that’s important. The Latin is *fides nunquam est sola sed justificat sola*. Did you get it? [Laughter] Faith is never alone, but it justifies alone.

Second, or capital B, Justification has no Degrees. For example, we cannot say, he’s justified but she’s more justified. And he is most justified. Justification has no degrees. The reason I say that is because there are some who believe that once a person is justified that his life is constant growth in justification. We know of course that the Bible teaches that we grow in sanctification, but the Romanists believed that our justification is in degrees. It is not in degrees. And the apostle states in Romans chapter 4 and verse 7, “Blessed is the man whose sins are forgiven.” He uses a tense which suggests a forgiveness that is definite and complete. So justification does not have degrees.

Luther put it far better than any exposition could put it. He said, “Justification does not come in pieces, but in a heap.” [Laughter] You can tell that Martin had a lot of acquaintance with what happened out in the little villages in Germany.

Capital C, Forgiveness of Sin is the Entire Justification, not Merely a Part of It. Now let me say that what I mean by this is when we say that a man is forgiven, we are not distinguishing justification from forgiveness except in emphasis. When a man is forgiven, he is justified. When he is justified, he is forgiven. Forgiveness of sin is the entire justification, not merely a part of it.

I’d like for you to turn to Romans 4:7. Romans 4:7. Because I think this is one of the passages where the apostle makes this plain. We read here, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not impute.” Now, here look at the context above, and it has had to do with justification. The context that follows has to do with justification. But

he says, in order to prove what he’s been talking about – notice verse 6, “But just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckoned righteousness (that is, justifies apart from works) – blessed are they whose lawless deeds have been forgiven.”

So, for Paul, forgiveness involves justification; justification involves forgiveness. There are some people who say, forgiveness is negative but justification is positive. That is an error. It is true that we are inclined to think of forgiveness as the wiping out of negatives that may be against us. A lot of minuses. And we think of forgiveness as being, simply, the cancellation of these minuses, but justification is that which gives us the pluses, so that we have forgiveness, and we are, all of our negatives are wiped out, our sins. But we need to be declared righteous in order to have acceptance with God.

What this explanation fails to understand is something that a person who was used to the Shorter Catechism would immediately catch. Because, in the Shorter Catechism and also in the Westminster Catechism, we were taught – that is, those of us who grew up listening to the catechism and studying the catechism – we were taught that sins were sins of commission and sins of omission.

Now one of these is negative, sins of omission; that is, the things that, say, we should have done but did not do. I guess we could even call those positives, and these are the negatives, the evil things that we did. So, sin is not only what we have done, but sin is also the failure to do the positives. You get the point? It’s very simple. We sin in two ways. We sin by committing certain acts, and we sin by not doing certain things that we did do.

Now, if our sins are forgiven, if they’re truly forgiven, both these sins are forgiven. And if our negatives are forgiven, and our positives are forgiven, so that we are reckoned to be cleansed of the negatives and we are reckoned to have done the things that we should do. And to be reckoned to have done the things that we should do, is to have a positive righteousness. That’s why Paul can say, in supporting justification, blessed is the

man whose sin, or whose lawless deeds, have been forgiven. So there is no difference then between forgiveness and justification. It is merely one of emphasis.

So then we say, forgiveness of sin is the entire justification, not merely a part. So next time you hear somebody saying, forgiveness is the negative, what we need is the positive, well you can just put it down he hasn’t studied the longer catechism, doesn’t understand really the nature of sin which is both a sin of commission, a sin of omission.

Now let’s turn to the problem of justification by works in James. And wish that you would turn to James chapter 2, and we will read verses 14 through 26, this very unusual passage that has created quite a bit of misunderstanding among all of those who tend to believe that salvation is partially of grace and partially of works. This is one of the great, favorite passages.

In fact, it is one of the few that the Jehovah’s Witnesses know anything about [laughter]; they will always know about this. They may not know who wrote it, but they know about it. One of them called on our home many years ago and I was still in the insurance business and had the misfortune to speak to my wife, who has no mercy on anyone like that [laughter]. And they immediately got into an argument over the way of salvation, and she said salvation was by grace through faith, and they said, but Paul says faith without works is dead. She said, “Paul didn’t say it; it was James.” [Loud laughter] And their faces fell, and they kind of turned around and just quietly left. That is about the limit of their understanding of biblical doctrine, too.

But you will often hear people when you expound the doctrine of justification by grace through faith, they will say, But doesn’t the Bible also say, faith without works is dead? Well, it does say that. Let’s read what James says.

“What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give

them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one, you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,’ and he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.”

You know from your study of the Book of James that believing and doing go hand in hand. The man who believes a certain thing manifests he believes it by the things that he does.

Now the method of argument that James uses in this section is, I think we could divide it into two cycles. From verse 14 through verse 17 is the first cycle, and then from verse 18 through verse 26 is the second cycle. And in each one of these two cycles there are two movements. There is an argument. There is an illustration, and there is a conclusion. It’s a very beautifully structured little paragraph in James’ epistle. He lets us know that he was a very careful man, and he thought through what he was saying with a great deal of care.

So, we look now at the first of these cycles, and we call this, Faith Without Works is Dead. Verse 14 through verse 17. The argumentation is in verse 14. “What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?”



Now it’s important for you to notice the little word, say. What use is it, my brethren, if someone *says* he has faith but he has no works?

Now that happens to be emphatic. If a man says he has faith and has no works, it’s emphatic because the sentence makes good sense without the word save. I could read this, “What use is it, my brethren, if a man has faith, but he has no works?” You see, it makes beautiful sense leaving out the say. So, it’s evident the say is there for purposes of emphasis. If a man say he has faith, but does not have faith.

Furthermore, the following illustration is an illustration of a man who makes a profession, but there’s no reality. Look at what follows. “If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, (notice it: *says* to them) ‘Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,’ and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?” So it is a case of a person who has used pious words of inoperative profession in the natural realm.

If someone were to come into Believers Chapel, one of the saints, one of our saints, who was in great need and in desperate need, and should ask some of the saints for help and they should say to them, Depart, depart in peace. Be warmed, be filled, but give them nothing – what good would that do? They would simply be pious words of an inoperative profession.

Well that is what is meant in verse 14, “What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but he has no works?” Can that kind of faith save us? In the Greek text, the word is simply the article and not the demonstrative pronoun, “that,” but that’s the meaning of it. Can the faith that says and does not do, can that kind of faith save the man? Well, the conclusion follows in verse 17. Even so, faith which has no works is dead, being by itself. So, that kind of faith cannot save because it is dead by its own choice.

What was James particularly interested in? Well, he was dealing with Jewish Christians, and these Jewish believers had been exposed to a lot of rabbinic teaching, and

some of them were statements like these. There is a rabbinical citation, and this is it, “As soon as a man has mastered the thirteen heads of the faith, firmly believing therein, though he may have sinned in every possible way, he still inherits eternal life.” It’s that kind of rabbinic doctrine that James has in mind. So, he’s talking about the kind of doctrine that was built upon the special privilege of the Jew which in effect says, because we’re Jews, we’re saved, and it doesn’t make a bit of difference what we do. That’s the thing that he has in mind.

Many years ago, I was in Canada for a Bible conference, and I was invited by Dr. Alden Gannett afterwards to his home. He was living in London, Ontario at that time, and that’s where the meetings were, where Bill McCrae is at the present time. And after the meeting, we went out to Alden’s house, and it was in January or February. Ice was all over the ground. It was very, very slick, and Alden had a driveway that went down into the underpart of the house next to the basement. And so as you turned down the street, you went down a rather steep incline into the garage. And occasionally, Alden would not use that garage, because if he started down it there was no way in which he could stop if he lost control.

But, when a mutual friend of ours arrived – we were standing outside the house just after the meeting – and Alden said to this person, because he had some ladies in the car, go on down in my driveway and go on under the house and you won’t get wet. And so they engaged in this running conversation. And Noah Alloway who was the person said, “Alden is it safe? It looks very slippery.” Alden said, “Oh, it’s perfectly alright; go on Noah.” He said it looks awful slippery. It’s perfectly alright; go on ahead, it won’t be any trouble at all.

And I can still remember Noah just pulling the car out front and saying, “I believe you Alden, I believe you, I believe you, and turning off the ignition and not going down [laughter].” That’s the kind of faith which does not have works and is therefore dead being alone.

Well now, the second of the cycles is in verse 18 through verse 26, and here James lets us know that faith without works is demoniacal. It’s the faith that the demons have, and nothing else. Verse 18, “Someone may well say, ‘You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ You believe that God is one, you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” Now what he is saying is simply this. You have the doctrine, and you have faith, but there is no works. But you cannot prove that you have faith if you do not have works. I can prove my faith by my works that I do.

But if you’re a person who do not have any works but are simply making a profession of faith, there is no way that you can show me that you have true faith. So that’s the argumentation.

And then the illustrations follow, and there are two of the illustrations. First, the illustration of Abraham, and then the illustration of Rahab. Verse 21, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?” You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected. And the Scripture was fulfilled which says that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he was called “the friend of God.” So, you see what he says is, if you look at the illustration of Abraham, you will discover the case of a person who had faith and who proved his faith by his actions.

We know that in Genesis chapter 15 God took Abraham out and showed him the stars of the heaven and said to him, “So shall Thy seed be,” and Abraham believed in the Lord and it was imputed to him for righteousness. But there was no way for that to be proven. It was simply an act of faith. But later on, Abraham had a chance to prove that he really did believe in God, for God said to him, Abraham, I want you to take Isaac and I want you to offer him upon the altar. And you’ll remember he went to Mt. Moriah, and he offered up Isaac upon the altar, and at the conclusion of it, when God prevented him from slaying Isaac, and instead, a ram was substituted for him, God said, Now I know that

you love me, because you have not spared your only son. Those are the words that Paul uses in Romans chapter 8 when he says, “For he that spared not his own Son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” So Abraham demonstrated his faith by what he ultimately did in the offering up of Isaac.

It is very important, I think, to notice in connection with this that he says in verse 22, you see that faith was working with his works. In other words, it was the faith that produced the works. And as a result of the works, faith then came to its perfection.

Incidentally, I did pass by one thing that I think is rather important. Notice the 19<sup>th</sup> verse that says, “You believe that God is one, you do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.” To believe what God is one is what all Jews believe. “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is one,” – the great *Shema Yisrael* proclaims in Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 4. And the Hebrews were very fond of saying the *Shema Yisrael* in their liturgies. And they loved to stress the unity of God. And that was the way they did it: “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord.” In the Hebrew text there is evidence of plurality because it does say, “Hear O Israel, the Lord our Gods is Jehovah, one,” so that there is an evidence of plurality in the very text that they proclaimed, from which they proclaimed the unity of God.

But the important thing from James’ standpoint is that the demons believe that too, and they shudder and tremble, but demons don’t have saving faith. That would have been a startling blow to the Judaists who laid great stress upon the fact that a man was saved because he believed in the unity of God.

The rabbis also had some interesting statements on the reading of that particular text in Deuteronomy 6:4. They said, “For him who reads the *Shema* with scrupulous precision as regards its several letters, they cool Gehennam.” That means they cool Hell. And then they said “The very parchment on which the *Shema* is written is efficacious in keeping demons at a distance.” So all you need is just a little copy of Deuteronomy 6:4

and you won’t be bothered by the demons. James says the demons believe that God is one, and they tremble.

You know, people often say, I’m alright because I believe in God. Very untaught people often say that. They will say that belief in God is the way to salvation. But belief in God is not the way to salvation. The demons would be safe if that were true. It’s belief in a certain God. It’s belief in the God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has offered a penal, substitutionary sacrifice. That’s saving faith. The demons believe in God, but they tremble, and they are lost.

Many years ago, about twenty-five, the Gallup Poll took a poll on belief in God among various denominations. It was very interesting. I remember just the general outline. I think the Methodists, if I understood it, were at about 82% of the Methodists believed in God. That was all it was. Not the Christian God, just “believe in God.” The Methodists about 82%, some of the other denominations were down below that. Some around 56%.

And I remember being impressed by the fact that the demons – oh my – the Baptists [laughter] were the strongest of all. Now what me associate that? [Loud, sustained laughter] The Baptists stood at the top of the entire list, but only 96% of them believed in God. And I remember chuckling over it, because evidently I had been studying James because if we had a list and we started with various denominations, came on up to the Baptists, 96%, then put demons 100% at the top. So, James is simply pointing out that it isn’t enough to believe that God exists.

Abraham is a man who through his faith worked. Incidentally, Abraham was a man universally admired. And so he’s the first illustration. And Rahab is the person who illustrates a type of profession that is universally abhorred. But James puts the two together. Rahab and Abraham. And in the case of Abraham, his profession is shown to be living faith when he offers up Isaac. And then in the case of Rahab, her profession is shown to be true, saving faith, because she receives the messengers and sent them out

another way. Notice verse 25, “And in the same way was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?”

Respectability and faith are not equivalent, incidentally. Rahab, no doubt, had a lot of disrespectability if there is such a term after her salvation. But she became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and ultimately came to be within the family of our Lord himself. He became a descendant of her.

Finally, James concludes with, “For just as a body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.” Now Rahab’s faith was simply the faith to believe those promises that God had given the Israelites that they were going to take the land. And so when the spies came in, she received the spies. She hid them from the people of Jericho, and she made them promise that they would save her, the Jews, when they took the city. And that is what they did. She manifested her faith by her actions.

Now let me to try to harmonize James and Paul. The problem that people have with harmonization of James and Paul revolves around these three words: faith, works, justified. How does Paul use the term, faith? Well, Paul uses the term, faith, as living faith. When in chapter 4 and verse 5 of Romans we read, “But to the one who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness” – he’s talking about living faith. He’s talking about a vital relationship to the Lord Jesus.

He’s not talking about the kind of faith that the demons have in the unity of God. He’s not talking about the kind of faith that the Jews had in the *Shema Yisrael*. But he is talking about living faith. So whenever Paul is talking about a man is justified by faith, and by faith alone, he means living, vital faith.

But it’s evident that when James talks about faith, he’s talking about a dead faith. He’s talking about faith that does not have works. He’s talking about a profession. So that while they use the same words, they use them in a different sense. Paul: living faith. James: dead faith.

Now what about works? Well, when Paul uses the term works, he means the works of the Mosaic law. For example in Romans chapter 3 and verse 19 through 20 we read, “Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those that are under the law that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God, because by the works of the law (Romans 3:20) no flesh will be justified in his sight, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.” Notice the expression, “the works of the law.”

When he says, “For grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works,” he means the works of the law, the works of the Mosaic law, keeping the Ten Commandments. So that when Paul, uses the term, “works,” it’s the works of the law.

Well, what kind of sense is behind James’ use of the term, “works”? Well, when we look in this context here, it’s evident he’s talking about the works of faith, not the works of law. Look, he says with reference to Abraham, “You see that faith was working within works, or faith wrought.” In other words, it’s the faith that works. It’s the faith that was there first that produced the works. So when James uses the term, “works,” he’s talking about the works of faith.

Or when he refers to Rahab, she was justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way. Now to stress the fact and to enable you to see it even clearer, what kind of works were there, or were the works that justified Rahab and justified Abraham? Would you like to be justified by that kind of work today? I’ve sometimes asked Jehovah’s Witnesses that, when they cite that text. I’ve sometime said, Yes, it’s true, you can be justified by works as Abraham was. He offered up his son Isaac on an altar. Would you like to engage in that kind of work? That’s the work that justified Abraham.

Or, why not receive some spies and send them out another way? That’s the kind of work Rahab did. It’s obvious these are not works of righteousness, per se. Good

works, when we think of the term good works, those two works are not like that at all. What he’s talking about is any kind of work that proceeds from a basic faith that is already there. So, when Paul uses the term, works, then, he means the works of the law. When James uses it, he means the work that are produced by faith.

Now when we come to Paul and “justified,” we read in the beginning that Abraham was justified by works, Paul said. Well if he were, he has, he might glory but not before God; he denies it. But James says he was justified by works. Broadly, Paul and James have the same sense for justified. But, they locate the place of justification differently.

In the case of Abraham, his justification in Genesis chapter 15 verse 6 when he looked up and believed what God said about the stars in the heavens. And it was demonstrated later as a true, living faith years later when he offered up Isaac. Paul stresses the initial act which pardons and sets us on the way to justification. James, then, lays stress upon that later act or acts which are evidential and show us and others that faith is a real, living faith.

Perhaps I can best illustrate what I’m saying by using an illustration – homely one which I made up myself. When James says a man is justified by works and not by faith alone, he uses words that Paul uses, but he uses them in a different sense.

Now, we’ve all heard the expression, “cold wave.” Let’s suppose for the sake of illustration that I reach the age of 72 and in the next few years, I become world famous. And as a result of becoming world famous, I take it upon myself to write a book of miscellany, just things that occur to me, and people will just buy the book because it’s from the pen of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., because I’m so famous.

And in this book I have a chapter on beauty parlors. I have a chapter on the weather, because I’m from Texas. And then I have a chapter on surf-bathing. And in the course of my chapter on beauty parlors, I say, I love cold waves. In the midst of my discussion on beauty techniques, I say, I love cold waves. But in my chapter on weather,



I say, I am indifferent about cold waves. Whether it’s hot or cold, it doesn’t make a difference. I’m indifferent about cold waves. But in my chapter on surf-bathing, I say, I hate cold waves. So, I’ve said, I love cold waves, I’m indifferent about cold waves, I hate cold waves.

You might say, Dr. Johnson contradicts himself. You could take those three sentences out of context and say, See, he says he loves cold waves, he’s indifferent about them, he hates them. He’s just what he’d say about two people who believe things that are contrary. He’s confused. [Laughter]

But of course, I wouldn’t be. I’d be using cold wave in a different sense. It’s the same word, but it’s a different sense. So, when we read in Paul’s literature, over and over again, for by grace are ye saved through faith and that not of yourselves. It is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast, he’s simply saying, we are not saved by the works of the law. We are saved by faith. And it is the faith that justifies. It’s a living faith. It’s a vital faith. And it’s the kind of faith that will produce works because, he goes on to say in the very next verse, “But we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus, for good works, which God hath before prepared that we should walk in them.” So, he believes then that faith is a living faith and that the living faith will produce works.

When James says a man is not justified by faith alone, he means the dead faith that simply says, but does not accompany it’s saying with acts that flow out of a living, vital relationship with God. In other words, dead profession. Paul and James agree. They just use the terms in a different sense.

Now I would like to go on and say one final word or two concerning justification. And this will be very brief, but I think it’s part of our study, and therefore I would like to bring it to your attention.

The effects of justification. There are several effects that flow out of justification. And first of all, we stand in the grace of God. The Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 5 and verse 2 says, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our

Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into the grace in which we stand, and we exalt in the hope of the glory of God.” Well I think you can see from this that the apostle states that having believed in the Lord Jesus, we do stand in grace. A monster of uncertainty has been overthrown. We have peace with God. No man could ever have peace with God if he were justified by works, as we’ve been saying.

And secondly, having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, and having been justified, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In Galatians chapter 4 and verse 6 we read, “And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into our hearts, saying ‘Abba, Father.’” And in verse 14 of the preceding chapter, he said, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us; for it is written, cursed is anyone who hangs on a tree, in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.” The context makes it plain that one of the effects of justification is the indwelling of the Spirit.

The third of the effects is that there begins the progressive sanctification that is not completed until we reach the presence of God. Inward spiritual change is the unfailing fruit of justification. That’s the point of Romans 6 verse 1 through verse 11. And isn’t a wonderful thing to realize, my Christian friends, that once I am justified by grace through faith, and I have received the benefits of eternal life and the presence of the Holy Spirit, from that moment on, God, the Holy Spirit, works within my heart to bring me, ultimately into conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Isn’t that great? To realize that I stand in salvation, and also that the work of God is constantly going on in my heart, and it will be completed. “Being confident of this very thing, that he who has begun a good work in you will perform it unto the Day of Jesus Christ.” Salvation is by grace through faith. Sanctification is by grace through faith. They both flow out of God on the same bases.

Fourth or D, Liberty from Tyranny. The apostle in the epistle of justification, Galatians, says in chapter 5, “It was for freedom that Christ set us free. Therefore, keep standing firm and do not be subjected again to the yoke of slavery.” For when a man comes into the justification that was given us on the principle of grace through the instrumentality of faith, he’s free from the doctrines of men. He’s free from the customs of men. The word of God becomes his only rule of life. He’s a free man, and he’s free because he recognizes the true servitude of the servitude of a servant of our wonderful Lord.

And finally, he is a member of the body of Christ.

Well, let me review, then. Justification is not by works. Paul refutes that. Justification is not by faith that stands alone without any works that flow from it. James refutes that. What is, then, the means of justification? Why, justification is by a faith that works.

We said last week that justification comes through the instrumentality of faith. But now we must answer the question, is that faith living faith or dead faith? And tonight, we see it answered by James, it is living faith. We are justified by grace through living faith. Or to put it simply, we are justified by a faith that works. Not by works, not by faith alone, unless we mean a living faith which must issue in works, not by faith alone – by a faith that works. That was the Reformation battle cry: *sola fides justificat sed non fides qua est sola*. Thought I’d get an Amen out of that [laughter]. Faith alone justifies, they said, but not the faith that is alone. Faith alone justifies, but not the faith that is alone.

It is faith only that justifies; but it’s living faith, and that living faith must produce good works. Must. If it doesn’t, it’s not the faith that saves. Luther said, “It’s not against works that we content, it’s against trust in works.”

Now, I’m not going to claim Luther’s beret. I really don’t think it’s so hard to solve that difficulty, and I sometimes wonder how it is that Luther did not come to realize the

simple solution that I’ve suggested for you tonight. And of course, it’s not something unique with me.

There was one of the strange phenomena of Luther that in other contexts he would say things that if he had applied them to the second chapter of James, he wouldn’t have had to offer his doctor’s beret at all. Listen to what he says in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Now this is Luther, mind you. He says, “Oh, it is a living, active, energetic, mighty thing this faith. So that it is impossible that it should not work what is good without intermission. It does not even ask whether good works are to be done, but before one asks, it has done them and is ever-doing. But he who does not do such works is a man without faith, is fumbling and is looking about him for the good works, and knows neither the one nor the other, yet chatters and babbles many words about both. If this is not the voice of James, whose is it, even down to the chatter and the babble.” So Luther himself harmonized James, but he harmonized him in Romans and never seemed to see that it applied to what James was saying in the second chapter. So I’m not going to demand his doctor’s beret. I don’t imagine it would look too good if I were to wear it today. [Laughter]

Next week will be the conclusion in our series of studies in justification, and we will talk about some of the attacks that have been made on this doctrine. Let’s close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the Scriptures, and we do thank Thee that it is made very plain to us that we are justified by grace through a living faith, and that that faith by which are justified is a faith that must produce good works.

We know now why the Apostle Paul said that those who have believed in God must be careful to maintain good works. Help us, O God, to allow the faith that Thou hast implanted in our hearts to produce the good works that Thou dost desire. Go with us as we leave tonight.

“The Consequences of Justification by Faith, or James versus Paul” by S. Lewis Johnson  
Copyright © 2007 Believer’s Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.