

# Round Top Church Christian Fellowship

## Sermon Series in James

### *Salvation Based on What? James 2*

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(All Scripture is from the New American Standard Bible NAS, unless otherwise noted.)

The goal of this teaching is to accurately convey what the Bible teaches and proclaims concerning salvation and baptism. This will shed light on James 2.

Many grow-up learning from culture and tradition conveyed by teachers and parents who were their authority. As adults we are all accountable to the Truth. We need to look-up teachings on our own without the filters of tradition and culture. If we find in Scripture the teachings of our youth, then we have been blessed. If we find in Scripture Light and Truth that has not been conveyed to us previously, then we have spiritual gain. Remember that fear is not of God, for God is love (1 John 4).

A historical note: It is observed that traditions in the history of the Church vary in their teaching of how to attain salvation and to keep or lose it. Traditions that teach that you can lose your salvation generally have a heavy emphasis on what you have to do to earn it. The historical path for these traditions, have produced large theological apparatuses to further these teachings. In addition, there is always a church official(s) to determine the issue. As a rule, these systems by default have reassigned authority to man. The Reformation broke from some of this authority, but then again some Reformation leaders reassigned this authority to their own theological systems. Jesus came to set the captives free (Luke 4) and give sight to the blind. Therefore, if you are in a church tradition or culture that has built a wall

of guilt that you never seem to break free, then you need to ask yourself a basic question: Who are you worshiping, a man-made system or the resurrected Lord? This study relies upon the Word of God for its authority and teaching. As you read and study, you will not be referenced to a church counsel or historic theologian(s) as proof of the validity of what the Bible teaches. You will be directed to engage the Scripture. Faith in prayer and living in God's Will produces an experiential life in God's Word that bears fruit of the eternal kind.

### **The Jewish teacher/ruler, Nicodemus, seeks out miraculous works.**

John 3:1-6 1 Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.

<sup>2</sup> This man came to Jesus by night and said to him,

"Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God,  
for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."

<sup>3</sup> Jesus answered him,

"Truly, truly, I say to you,  
unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

<sup>4</sup> Nicodemus said to him,

"How can a man be born when he is old?  
Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

<sup>5</sup> Jesus answered,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

<sup>6</sup> That which is born of the flesh is flesh,

and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

<sup>7</sup> Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'

<sup>8</sup> The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound,  
but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.

So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

Here is a great lesson from Jesus to the teacher of Israel, Nicodemus, and to all of us seeking to understand the way God thinks. Nicodemus asked one question anticipating an answer, but received an answer he did not anticipate. Nicodemus is a man of learning, but from a tradition and culture that is foreign to the spiritual message of Jesus. This is like the world we live in today. Remember, Nicodemus has to work through his perception of two thousand years of tradition from Abram and about fifteen hundred years from Moses and the giving of the Law. The question Nicodemus asked is in the form of a statement:

*John 3:3 "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him."*

Nicodemus does not frame the statement-question as concerning salvation. His reference is that he is a Jew who teaches God's Word, but he does not see the fruit (the works) in his life that he sees in the life of Jesus, who, by all accounts, is a no-body from a peasant village with no revered blood line. The statement-question is framed, "no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him?" Therefore, Nicodemus presents the observation that God has to be with someone and be willing to carry out God's Will for them to do the things that Jesus did. Jesus did not respond that you had to be water-baptized. Jesus directly stated that you had to be born again. Nicodemus's response clearly shows that he misunderstands the words born again. Nicodemus receives Jesus's question in a physical way, as a

fallen mind would, and equates the question to natural birth. Looking at the whole context, obviously Jesus is saying that to do the things He does a person has to be *born again*, but not in a physical sense. Jesus' response is spiritual.

A parallel to Jesus' response to Nicodemus can be read in James 2, that proclaims faith produces works. If you have no faith, then there will be no works. If you have no works, then you have no faith. Faith is synonymous with *born again*. If you are not *born again*, you cannot do the things Jesus did. In fact, being *born again* makes it possible for you to *see the kingdom of God*. A person has to be able to see the kingdom of God before they can perform acts in the kingdom of God. Jesus is telling Nicodemus that he cannot and never will be able to do the things that He does unless he is *born again*.

The next question Nicodemus asks Jesus is exactly the response the average person would ask. (Verse 4) "How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?" This tells us that Nicodemus was blind to seeing the kingdom of God and totally misunderstood Jesus' teaching on being *born again*. The physical world is all around us as a reference to our present temporal reality. Nicodemus could not see past this physical fallen world, because he was not connected to God spiritually. He only knew about God. Jesus corrected his misunderstanding about *physically being born again*. Physical water baptism is part of this physical world which anyone can physically do apart from God. Nicodemus' response is totally in the mental concept of the physical fallen world which man can control to some degree.

Jesus then tied His next teaching to not only seeing the kingdom of God, but to entering the kingdom of God. Jesus acknowledges Nicodemus' observation that people are brought into the world by the water (breaking of birth water) as reference to his note about entering a second time into his mother's womb. Jesus responds, **"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born**

of water . . . Jesus then clarifies His teaching by stressing the “and the Spirit.” Remember, Jesus is teaching about not only seeing the kingdom of God, but, in addition, entering the kingdom of God. Obviously, in this context, being able to enter the kingdom of God is a way to say that only those that are saved (salvation) by being born again spiritually can see and enter into the kingdom of God, and this is not accomplished by the physical act of water-baptism or by simply being born into the world by the breaking of birth-water. To further clarify that Nicodemus’ re-born reference is a connection to physical birth, Jesus responds in verse six with “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”. This response by Jesus directly associates the Nicodemus response to physical birth. Therefore, Jesus’ response connecting Nicodemus’ birth with flesh is not a spiritual saving statement. It clearly distances flesh-birth from being reborn of spirit which is the point of salvation.

Remember, Nicodemus’ original question was about performing acts and miraculous works, not salvation. However, Jesus turns the discussion into salvation. In other words, Jesus is saying that the only way to do the things you see me do is to be saved (reborn of spirit), and this is accomplished by spiritual rebirth. There is nothing physical you can do.

If physical water-baptism was the demarcation point of salvation or a defining requirement, Jesus would have clearly stated to Nicodemus that he must be water-baptized. In fact, and once again, the reference to water being born of water is the reference to the breaking of the birth-water at birth. This is not a reference to an adult being immersed under water for a religious reason. In this whole passage, Jesus never once stated that you had to be physically water-baptized to see or enter into the kingdom of God. Again, the text does not exhibit water-baptism as the gate to salvation. Jesus specifically positions spirit-rebirth as the entry point. Now, once a person is reborn of spirit by the holy nature of God’s Spirit working inside a person; who will catapult them into a desire to witness God’s Spirit presence inside

their heart, they then seek believer's water-baptism. This is where faith produces works, James 2.

### Lawyer's Eternal Test

Likewise, in Luke 10:25-29, the lawyer put Jesus to the test and asked Jesus how to inherit eternal life. Jesus never told the lawyer that he had to be physically baptized by water. Instead, Jesus asked him, "What is written in the Law?" (Luke 10:26). Remember, Jesus stated clearly that He came to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17). The Lawyer responded to Jesus's question:

Luke 10:27-28 <sup>27</sup> And he answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." <sup>28</sup> And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live."

See also Matthew 22:36-40 Jesus is teaching disciples and adds . . .

<sup>40</sup> "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

The Lawyer quoted Deuteronomy 6:5 (Love God) and Leviticus 19:18 (Love your neighbor) which are part of the Law that Jesus came to fulfill. This passage was so important to quote. Jesus wants them to change their hearts and minds and to see how they misunderstood God's redemptive plan. It is this very passage that the Jews were instructed by God:

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 <sup>4</sup> "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. <sup>5</sup> You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. <sup>6</sup> And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. <sup>7</sup> You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. <sup>8</sup> You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as

frontlets between your eyes.<sup>9</sup> You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Leviticus 19:18 NAS 'You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

Note the first element of application in these words is to ðlove with their heartö. This is why Moses, as Godðs hand, writes in Deuteronomy 30:6 that God will circumcise their heart and also the heart of their decedents.

<sup>6</sup> And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.

Once again, Jesus did not teach the lawyer that the entrance into eternal life hinged on being physically baptized by water. Jesus would surely have stated this to him if it were so. However, Jesus did emphasize that a personðs heart had to be circumcised. How does a person get their heart circumcised? This is only accomplished spiritually by Godðs Holy Spirit. Man cannot do this. In addition, man cannot love God unless his heart is circumcised. So, when Jesus answered the lawyerðs question about gaining eternal life, when the lawyer was looking at some physical act in the Law for a response, Jesus shifted to the spiritual once again as he did with Nicodemus. Loving God has nothing to do with keeping the Law first. Loving God has everything to do with a personðs heart being circumcised first. Therefore, a person that loves God has surrendered their heart to God. Under this surrender God circumcises their heart, and then they can keep Godðs commandments. This is the order in Deuteronomy 30. Verse six comes first, declaring Godðs desire to have our hearts circumcised; and then verse eight states, "**And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today.**"

Once again, James, the Jew, knew what he was writing when he made the point that works without faith is dead. Your works without Godðs Spirit

behind them are dead works. Live works are works that are produced out of the love of the Lord, because a person's heart has been circumcised.

ōCircumcision of the heartö in the Old Testament equates to a rebirth of spirit in the New Testament. This is why the language in the Old Testament book of Ezekiel 36 presents the same truth, but uses more of what some may consider a New Testament choice of words. The same is that God gives people a new heart, a circumcised heart, a re-born heart.

Ezekiel 36:25-28 <sup>25</sup> "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

<sup>26</sup> "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

<sup>27</sup> "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

<sup>28</sup> "You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God.

The Ezekiel passage is a connection from Deuteronomy 30:6, (circumcision of the heart) to David's heart-felt prayer of forgiveness in Psalm 51, then to Jesus teachings. David writes in Psalm 51:10, 11, 17 (NAS) <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. . . . <sup>17</sup> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. . . . In addition to David addressing his heart condition to God, he also asked God not to remove His Holy Spirit from him. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from Your presence And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me. These are very important passages written one thousand years before Jesus was born that Ezekiel wrote (593-571 B. C.). Therefore, when God incarnates himself as Jesus, He teaches

the same plan of redemption. Jesus tells the disciples in Matthew 22:36-40, and the Lawyer in Luke 10:27-28, that they have to love God with all their Law? No! With all their heart! Jesus elaborates more in [Matthew 22:40](#) when He says . . . "[On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.](#)" Love trumps Law. Notice the order of who to love first. Without loving God, we cannot love our neighbor. By loving God first, we are given the ability to love our neighbor. This is so important that the Law becomes secondary to love. The love takes place, because the heart has changed. The heart has changed, because a person surrendered their soul and mind to the conviction of God's Holy Spirit.

Now, how does this apply to our day-to-day lives? If you have not already, focus on God and your relationship with Him, and how that relationship is based upon love. Then you need to focus on Him more. When you are focused on your love-relationship with God, it is hard to hate or be disgruntled with your neighbor. Therefore, God has not changed His heart-changing redemptive plan.

### Matthew 22:36-40

<sup>36</sup> "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?"

<sup>37</sup> And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.'

<sup>38</sup> "This is the great and foremost commandment.

<sup>39</sup> "The second is like it,  
'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'

<sup>40</sup> "[On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.](#)"

Other New Testament connections to Deuteronomy 3:6 (circumcision of the heart) is when Stephen gave his defense in Acts 7:51, when he called the Jewish religious leaders "stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart". Peter, in Acts 15:8, declares "God knows the heart" and gives the His Holy Spirit to those that have surrendered. Like Peter, Paul, in Romans 2:29-31, states that a Jew is one inwardly "and circumcision is not the physical" cutting and removal of skin, but that which is of the heart accomplished by the Spirit. He further declares this is carried out by God and not men.

**Stephen** in Acts 7:51 <sup>51</sup> "You men who are stiff-necked and **uncircumcised in heart** and ears are always resisting the **Holy Spirit**; you are doing just as your fathers did.

**Peter** in Acts 15:8 "And God, who knows the **heart**, testified to them giving them the **Holy Spirit**, just as He also did to us;

**Paul** in Romans 2:29-31 <sup>29</sup> But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and **circumcision** is that which is **of the heart, by the Spirit**, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God.

Therefore, if you are a person from a religious tradition that has a physical path to salvation which includes mandates like water baptism, educational classes and acts of work/merit, then you really need to ask yourself if you are being indoctrinated into a man-made religion or into the eternal life God declared in the Bible. God calls us out to join Him in an eternal life, not a social, cultural or religious club. If you also notice that the merit/works-based system directs you to constantly show/prove your salvation by keeping on . . . keeping on . . . with works to retain your salvation, then you should realize that what you are practicing is more, if not all, about them who are the religious leaders who have made themselves into the god they want you to worship. With the man-made religious groups is where the book of James can be taken out-of-context from the rest of God's Word. James is

not saying that if you do enough works you will gain saving faith. It is the saving faith that produces the works. Works do not save. Faith saves. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that works save. So, we quote Ephesians 2:8 time and time again:

**<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

This Ephesians passage in the Bible is in the context of the whole Word of God. This is why Scripture from Deuteronomy (Law) through the Psalms, to Ezekiel, to Jesus, through Paul, Peter, Stephen and James, all say the same thing. Our hearts have to be spiritually changed, which is an accomplishment by God, not man. Once our hearts are changed, faith abounds in us; and we then can follow God's commandments and produce the works He has planned for our lives. Like Abraham and Rahab, their faith produced the works, and the works were there because they had faith working in them. The reason James points to the demons in James 2:19, **"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."** In other words the demons have faith; that is they believe that God exists, and He is the Creator, and He is the incarnate Word in Jesus Christ. However, the demons do not perform works for God or in the name of God. The faith of the demons is dead and useless. This is why James states clearly that faith alone in a person is insufficient, for the Demons too have faith. But it stands alone. James writes, in 2:18 **"and I will show you my faith by my works."** The demons cannot say this. They only believe that God exists, they do not follow Him. They have no works in God's name. When Paul writes about justification by faith, he attaches it to the plans God has for you in this life (Ephesians 2:10). Therefore, faith produces the works in your life. Paul writes to the believers in Ephesus, **"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."**

(Ephesians 2:10). God created His good works in us before we were born. God's intent for our lives is for us to walk in those good works.

Again, Demons believe, but they do not carry out God's plan. Anyone who positions James 2 as a works-based path to salvation is taking the Scripture out-of-context with the rest of the Bible, which does not contradict itself on the issue of justification and salvation. Time and time again, we stand on Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus.

Ephesians 2:8-10

<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

<sup>9</sup> **not as a result of works**, so that no one may boast.

<sup>10</sup> For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

(Read also Romans 4)

## **A Religion of Works**

Again, the word "religion" in the English language has been diluted down to mean whatever a person wants it to mean. God is God of the 66 book Bible. But "self-made-man" religion is man's own pursuit. Man has created his own god and has a 73 book bible in the Roman tradition. The Eastern Church puts forth 84 books. The point here is that these groups have laden their people down with unnecessary religious works. To be clear, this is not saying these groups are not Christian. In addition, man can write another book that takes the place of the real 66 book Bible, like the book of Mormon (created by man in the 19 century A.D.) or the Quran (created by man in the 600's A.D.). As anyone can see, religion is man's attempt to be God or to create and manage a path to God. To do this self-deification a person has to add to the 66 book Bible and create additional text, and then stand on the

tallest mountain, and perhaps with the biggest army behind him, and force their religion on desperate minds for the world to follow. And, you can bet your last breath that all those who have created their own self-deification have a path where you work and pay them a fee to gain access to their god; which is nothing more than them.

Note: Most people never study how we have received God's Word. They too easily accept what they are told by today's academic and media anti-bible crowd. This is truly sad. Most people will not objectively study how God has preserved His word throughout history.

Man-made works-based religions are inconsistent with James 2 and the rest of God's Word as found in the 66 book Bible. These wolves will position works every time that they claim will lead to faith. For them, works pave the path to your redemption, which you will never reach under their self-induced system. Remember, that any system that you have to earn your redemption by works will also teach that you can lose it. Therefore, there is a built-in work-till-you-die to achieve and maintain your salvation. A person that falls into these baggage-religions will die with doubt in their heart about their eternal salvation. They will die not possessing the peace God intended for them to have. Many are true believers who have been laden-down with bad teaching. These souls will be surprised to find the waiting arms of Jesus in heaven waiting for them. They will then find out that they had been working to satisfy a debt that had already been paid by the Lord himself. Those wolves who weighed them down always present themselves as the determining authority in all things. Jesus correctly identifies these people in Matthew 23, when He chastises the scribes and Pharisees. These seven woes apply to all religious despots throughout history and today. Read the whole section of Scripture in Matthew to receive the full affect of Jesus's words. This was not the peace-loving, always-accepting Jesus of today's politically correct secular humanists who have redesigned Jesus; however, most of today's detractors simply do not acknowledge that Jesus lived.

Matthew 23:15 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel around on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves.

The Word of God does not call us to a religion. The Word of God calls us to a life of faith-freedom that grows in us now (sanctification), fulfilling that growth in our eternal life in heaven with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (glorification).

AMEN