



7

Saved by Grace

Key Theme

- God provides salvation from sin through Jesus.

Key Passages

- Ephesians 2:1–10; Titus 3:3–7; Galatians 2:16; James 2:14–26

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Describe how sinners are saved.
- Explain the relationship between faith and works.



Lesson Overview



Come On In

Write on the board, “How are faith and works related?”

Students will complete the Memory Verse Review Sheet. If time allows, have them recite the verse together.



Studying God's Word

The Bible says that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. But the good news is that God loved us enough to send Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. So, by the grace of God through faith, anyone can have eternal life with God. God works in the lives of all believers to accomplish His good works.

Study the Prepare to Share section.

Go Before the Throne.



Activity: Fruit Inspectors

Students will look at selected Scriptures that use the analogy of fruit for works and the role of inspecting fruit to avoid false teaching, grow in holiness, and encourage others toward godliness.

Student Guides

Pencils



Prepare to Share

SCRIPTURAL BACKGROUND

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages listed above with this background.

A sinner becomes a Christian when he has trusted and believed the gospel of Jesus Christ. That gospel message includes Jesus's life, His death suffered for forgiveness of sins, and His Resurrection guaranteeing that believers will live even though they die.

The sinner who has been redeemed by this gospel message lives his life as a Christian through faith. We know from Hebrews that faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen (Hebrews 11:1). The Bible tells us that as Christians, we walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7) and that the just shall live by faith (Galatians 3:11).

This faith in Jesus Christ is the means by which God grants His children grace. And the Bible makes it clear that none of this is possible by human effort. It is a free and glorious gift given by God through Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8). The grace our holy and merciful God gives to believers is His free and unmerited favor which leads to eternal life. The gifts of grace, faith, and salvation cannot be earned by any human works, and therefore, redeemed sinners cannot boast in anything they have done—these are gifts from God (Ephesians 2:9). Sinners are not saved by works of righteousness (Titus 3:5). They are not justified by works of the Law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:16).

And yet believers are to live lives of obedience. We are to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15). He said, "You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14). These statements seem to indicate that salvation in Jesus is dependent on our obedience. These might seem to be two different and contradicting ideas. To understand this, we must look into the full counsel of God's Word.

The truth is, before salvation no one can obey God or honor Him. The hearts of all men are deceitful (Jeremiah 17:9), and all are slaves of sin (Romans 6:16–17). But, by grace through faith, sinners are brought to repentance and the realization of the gospel—what Jesus accomplished for sin on the Cross. The believer is then sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who guarantees his eternal inheritance (Ephesians 1:13–14).

We see that in all true believers, it is God Himself who works both to will and to do for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13). Believers can be confident that He [God] who began a good work in them will complete it

until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6). Christians are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand for us to do (Ephesians 2:10).

Obedience is wrought in the hearts of believers by God Himself! When God grants His grace through faith, the sinner repents of sins and turns to the only one who can save for all eternity. The realization of salvation, forgiveness of sins, and eternal life humbles the believer and produces a heart that overflows with love and gratitude for God who would send His only Son to die while we were still sinners (Romans 5:8). This love for Christ simply cannot be separated from the desire to live a life pleasing to Him.

A true, forgiven believer, who has confidence in the hope of heaven, would have no other response but to pursue a life of holiness and obedience while knowing, at the same time, that his life is in the hands of the omnipotent, sovereign God directing him to live just such a life.

HISTORICAL/APOLOGETICS BACKGROUND

One of the beautiful truths of Scripture is the truth that we are justified by faith alone, not by works. In Romans 3:28 Paul states, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." And in Romans 4:4–5 we read, "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness." The Apostle Paul made it clear that God's verdict of "not guilty," and the imputation of His own righteousness to those in Christ, is by faith alone, with nothing else commending us to God. It is God's free grace that forgives us, acquits us, and counts us as righteous because of the work of Christ.

However, what we read in the book of James seems to contradict Paul's clear statements. Look, for example, at James 2:21: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?" And in James 2:24, James states, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Just reading these verses, it appears that James not only says that a person is justified by works, but he seems to deny that justification is by faith alone. At least the words James uses in these verses appear to be very different from Paul's.

Before we address this apparent discrepancy, let's first keep in mind that we believe the Bible is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16). It is the very Word of God. It does not teach things that are false. It cannot contradict itself. Jesus Himself said that the Scriptures cannot be broken (John 10:35). He commissioned His apostles to teach the church, and He promised to lead them into all truth (John 16:13). So, we have come to receive His Word—the Bible—as the very Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13), free from error and contradiction, because God is true; He cannot lie, and He is not a God of confusion.

Another thing we must realize is that we are finite creatures; we are sinful; we are culturally biased. And language itself can confuse us because different words often can carry the same meaning, and sometimes the same word can carry different meanings. Plus, we are removed from the historical setting of Scripture as well as from its cultural context and language.

Therefore, when we come to seemingly contradictory texts, we must, first, be humble enough to realize that we may not understand God's Word completely, given the deficiencies mentioned above. And second, we must do our best to interpret God's Word within the context of the whole of Scripture. Since God's Word cannot contradict itself, there must be a resolution between Paul and James, and we want to carefully consider God's Word. We want to be "a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15).

Actually, the resolution between Paul's teaching and that of James is not difficult once we understand the context. Paul was speaking against the Judaizers, a group of Jewish Christians in the early church who held that circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic Law were necessary for salvation. Paul wanted to make it clear that there are no works that we can do to commend ourselves to God. We are not saved by rituals or any works of our own but by faith alone in Christ and His work on our behalf.

James, on the other hand, was responding to those who were abusing Paul's teaching of justification by faith alone by saying that it doesn't matter how a believer lives. Some were distorting Paul's teaching by saying, "If we are justified while we are ungodly by faith alone, and this magnifies the grace of God, then let's just keep sinning so that God's grace gets more glory!"

Paul teaches that works are unnecessary, but James teaches that works are essential. But, when understood in context, Paul and James are saying the same thing. The

apparent contradiction is solved when we realize that Paul was speaking of those good works that an unsaved person tries to do in order to win God's favor or work his way to heaven. James, on the other hand, was referring to those good works that a saved person performs, which gives evidence of a real, living, saving faith.

James does not teach that good works are necessary in order to gain salvation, and Paul never teaches that good works are unnecessary after a person is saved. On the contrary, Paul agreed with James that for the person justified by faith, good works are essential (Philippians 2:12–13; Titus 3:5–8; Ephesians 2:8–10). Likewise, James agreed with Paul that the only condition for inheriting the kingdom is faith and faith alone (see James 2:5 and also Acts 15 where at the Jerusalem Council James never expressed disagreement over Paul's teaching that salvation was by faith and not by the works of the law).

Those who see a disagreement between James and Paul forget that it was Paul who wrote, "What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not!" (Romans 6:15); and ". . . having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness" (v. 18). Thus, Paul condemns the same error James was exposing. Paul never advocated any concept of dormant faith, but rather an active, working faith.

We can thank God that we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own works or righteous deeds. But it is also true that true, saving faith will manifest itself in works. As is sometimes said, "We are saved by faith alone, but true faith is never alone."



BEFORE THE THRONE

Lord Jesus, I love how clear you are in your Word about salvation and works. Man has twisted this subject for 2,000 years. But you clearly say that salvation is by grace through faith. There is nothing I can do to earn such a priceless gift. But salvation isn't the end. It's just the beginning! You continue to work in the hearts of all believers to accomplish your good works through them. Our own good works can never be good enough to earn your approval. Help me clarify this important truth to my students. Allow them by your grace through faith to come to understand the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Review

As we have been talking about the ministry of Paul and his contributions to the canon of Scripture, we have seen how God used this man to be an important part of the foundation of the church, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:19–22). Over the next four lessons we are going to be focusing on what the Scripture teach us about living our lives as Christians in light of the salvation that we have received in Christ. Within the epistles we have a wealth of information about living a godly life, just as Peter reminds his readers in 2 Peter 1:2–4.

? In the early church, they did not have the New Testament writings readily available in all areas, so how did these believers resolve questions about how to live their lives to honor Christ? *We have the example of churches appealing to Paul for clarification about certain issues in 1 Corinthians 7:1, and others sent to Paul who brought news of what was happening in their local churches and then carried letters back to various churches. While these early Christians had the Old Testament writings, there were*

still many situations that needed to be ironed out as these Gentile believers sought to understand how to honor Christ in a time when the laws God had given to the Jews were replaced with freedom in Christ.

As these epistles were circulated among the churches, one body could learn from the instruction that had been given to another body. This is explicitly laid out in Colossians 4:16 and carries on to us today. After nearly 2,000 years, we are still using these inspired and inerrant writings to understand what it means to live a life that is pleasing to God.

Today we are going to look at the relationship between our faith in Christ and the works that we do as Christians. There have been a number of conflicts throughout church history regarding this issue, and many denominations and sects teach different things. Our task today is to seek to faithfully understand what God has said on this issue, drawing those ideas out of the text of the inspired Word of God.



► Write on the board, “How are faith and works related?”



Studying God’s Word

READ THE WORD

Let’s read Ephesians 2:1–10 together as we try to understand what it means to be saved from our sins and how works are related to our salvation. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is the “you” in verse 1 referring to?** *This refers back to the recipients of the letter—the saints who are in Ephesus. More broadly, we can understand this to refer to all believers in Christ.*
- ? **What do you notice about the words “He made alive”?** *In the KJV (“hath he quickened”) and NKJV, this phrase is in italics. In other translations it is absent. None of the Greek*

manuscripts include these words here, so the translators have chosen to bring them into view in verse 1 rather than making the reader wait until verse 5 where the idea is completed with “made us alive.”

- ? **What condition is being referred to in verses 1 through 3?** *These verses look back before the believers were saved.*
- ? **What was true about these believers in the past?** *They were dead in trespasses and sins, they walked according to the course of the world, they were sons of disobedience, and they pursued their own lusts.*
- ? **Who is the “prince of the power of the air”?** *This is referring to Satan as the spirit being who is working in those who are disobedient to God.*
- ? **Why were they “children of wrath”?** *Their sinful nature had earned for them the wrath of God in punishing sin. Their nature caused them to be disobedient and pursue their own lusts.*
- ? **How is it that they can be described as “dead” in verse 1 and yet “walking” in verse 2?** *“Dead” describes their spiritual condition of having a sinful nature and being separated from God while “walking” describes how that spiritual condition plays out in their physical lives.*
- ? **What term can we use to describe these people before they have been made alive?** *Those who are spiritually dead are referred to as unregenerate, not having been regenerated (made alive) to new life in Christ. Regeneration is one of the elements of salvation, so those who are made alive are those who have salvation in Christ. This parallel is explicit in verse 5 where being “made alive” is equated with “saved.”*
- ? **How are the lusts of the unregenerate described?** *The lusts are of the flesh and of the mind and are fulfilled by the actions (conduct) of the individuals.*
- ? **How many of the believers used to be unregenerate?** *Verse 3 makes it clear that it was all of them, including Paul, as do the plural pronouns “you” and “we” used throughout the passage. Romans 6:20–23 affirms this idea.*
- ? **What things had God done for the saints in Ephesus in their salvation?** *God had made them alive, saved them, loved them, raised them to sit with Christ in the heavenly places, and shown them mercy and kindness.*
- ? **According to verse 7, what was the reason God raised us to new life in Christ?** *That the riches of God’s grace would be evident in the kindness He has showed us by giving salvation to the spiritually dead through the death of Christ.*
- ? **What phrase is repeated in verses 1 and 5?** *Dead in trespasses.*
- ? **How is God’s disposition toward the Ephesians described in this passage?** *His wrath was upon them before they were regenerated, but there was an element of love upon those whom God would bestow His mercy upon even when they were dead in trespasses and sins. Ultimately, there is a movement from wrath to favor as an enemy of God is seated with Christ in the heavenly places.*

► **Pace your lesson!** Use the clocks to mark the time you want to finish each section. This will help you stay on track and finish on time. You may need to shorten or drop sections as necessary.



➤ There is disagreement about how to understand this passage and exactly what “the gift of God” is referring to. You may wish to teach your church’s position on applying and interpreting this verse at this point.

Titus 3:3–7

- ? **What have they been saved from?** *They have been saved from God's wrath against their sin.*
- ? **What phrase is repeated in verses 5 and 8?** *By grace you have been saved.*
- ? **What formula of salvation is described in verse 8 and 9?** *Salvation is by grace through faith as a gift of God and not of works.*
- ? **Whose grace?** *God's grace.*
- ? **Whose faith?** *The faith of the individual.*
- ? **What is “the gift of God” referring to?** *There is disagreement about how to best understand this text, but all can agree that the gift refers to the salvation of God. Some would argue that grace and faith are both aspects of the gift of salvation given by God while others argue that only salvation is in view and that the faith is exercised by the individual. In light of the spiritual condition described in verse 1, some would say that the individual must be made alive (regenerated) before they can exercise faith unto salvation. Others would argue that man's spiritual condition allows for him to exercise faith unto salvation resulting in regeneration so that faith is not a gift of God, but salvation in general is. This regeneration is attributed by both views to the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the individual (Titus 3:5).*
- ? **What is excluded from man's salvation?** *Works.*
- ? **What does “works” mean in this context?** *A person cannot do any acts that will earn him any favor in God's sight and contribute to his salvation since salvation is a gift of God alone.*
- ? **What is excluded if salvation is from God alone?** *No person can boast about their own salvation since it comes from God alone.*
- ? **What similarities are found in Titus 3:3–7?** *This passage describes the corrupt nature of man, the grace and mercy of God in salvation through Christ, the rejection of works contributing to salvation, and the regeneration of those who are saved.*
- ? **Who is responsible for regeneration according to verse 5?** *The Holy Spirit renews and regenerates each person. This reflects the language of the new birth in John 1:12–13 and 3:1–21.*
- ? **What word is used as a synonym for righteousness?** *Verse 7 uses justification instead of righteousness, but both share the same Greek root (dikaio).*
- ? **Looking back at Ephesians 2:10, what is the end of our salvation?** *We were created to do good works.*
- ? **Based on this verse, what is the relationship between works and salvation?** *We are saved unto good works not by good works. In other words, good works proceed out of our salvation, they do not lead to our salvation.*
- ? **How long has God had these good works in His mind?** *The fact that He had prepared them “beforehand” indicates they have always been planned for us. In the context of this epistle, especially 1:4, this refers to things in the mind of God before He had even created the world.*
- ? **Why did God prepare these good works?** *He intends for us to walk in them—carrying out the good works He has planned for us.*
- ? **How are the works of the unregenerate contrasted with the works of the regenerate in this passage?** *The unregenerate are doing works of disobedience and walking in their own lusts while the regenerate walk in good works that God has prepared for them to do, walking in obedience to God's will for them.*

- ? **What parallel ideas are found in Colossians 2:11–15?** *Writing to the Colossian believers, Paul uses the same imagery of being dead in trespasses and sins and being raised to new life with Christ through faith. Since these epistles were written at the same time, there are many parallels throughout.*

Discover the Truth

Isn't it amazing how much truth we can draw out of 10 verses! And there are many more ideas we could cross-reference with other passages to help us understand the true nature of salvation and its relationship to faith, mercy, grace, works, and righteousness. At the time of the Reformation, there was a sharp disagreement between the Roman Catholic view of salvation and the Protestant view. To help clarify these distinctions, the idea of the Five Solas was developed, often given in their Latin forms. When we speak of salvation as described in the Bible alone (*sola scriptura*), we say that salvation is by grace alone (*sola gratia*) through faith alone (*sola fide*) in Christ alone (*solus Christus*) to the glory of God alone (*solus Deo gloria*).

- ? **When we speak of salvation in these terms, how are God's attributes displayed?** *Discuss various answers including how God's eternal nature is evident in preparing our salvation and good works before the foundation of the world, His grace and mercy in providing salvation for those who were His enemies, His triune nature revealed in the scope of salvation, and other attributes.*

Paul reminds us often in His epistles that our salvation is not related to our obedience to the laws He has given, but only through what Jesus has done on our behalf. He reminded the Galatian churches that “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified” (Galatians 2:16). It is through faith in Christ alone that we are justified in God's eyes.



MERCIFUL

ETERNAL

FAITHFUL

READ THE WORD

But there is a wrinkle we need to talk about. Many Christians have wrestled to reconcile another passage from the epistle of James which seems to contradict what Paul has said in the passages we just looked at. The specific problem is found in James 2:14–26. *Have someone read the passage aloud.*

James 2:14–26

EXAMINE THE WORD

Observe the Text

- ? **Who is James writing to?** *Looking back to the opening of the epistle, it is addressed to his brethren among the twelve tribes. This can be understood as Jews who had believed in Jesus as the Messiah. So, believing Jews was the original audience.*

- ? **What is the apparent contradiction between Ephesians 2:1–10 and James 2:14–26?** *James appears to be saying that the works that Abraham and Rahab did justified them (made them righteous) in God's sight. Verse 24 seems to provide the most direct conflict. Further, verse 14 seems to indicate that faith alone cannot save someone.*
- ? **What comparison is James making in verses 15–17?** *Verse 16 describes a person who is professing compassion but does not act on it. Compassion isn't really compassion if it doesn't result in action. Likewise, faith that does not result in action is a dead faith.*
- ? **If someone claimed to be compassionate, how would you know if they really were compassionate?** *Their life would be consistent with their claim and there would be evidence of that compassion in the actions they take.*
- ? **What literary device is James using in verse 18?** *He is introducing an imaginary objector who proposes a challenge so that he can answer the objection that may arise in the minds of his readers or using it as a way to explain an objection he had previously heard. Paul uses a similar approach in Romans 9:19 and other places.*
- ? **What does this objector claim?** *He claims to have works rather than faith, seeming to suggest one can be present without the other. Since there are no quotation marks in the Greek, there is disagreement about how far the quote extends, some suggesting it goes to the end of verse 19.*
- ? **What does James challenge the objector to demonstrate?** *He challenges the objector to prove that he has faith without works.*
- ? **How does James intend to show the objector his folly?** *James will demonstrate that he truly has faith by the works he does. He forcefully claims that faith without works is dead.*
- ? **What work of Abraham does James point to in verse 21?** *Offering Isaac on an altar.*
- ? **Where is this account found in Scripture?** *Genesis 22:1–19.*
- ? **What did this act do for Abraham?** *He was justified by this act.*
- ? **What Scripture did this fulfill?** *The willingness to sacrifice Isaac fulfilled Abraham's belief in God's promise to give him descendants as numerous as the stars (which reaffirmed the promise of given earlier in Genesis 12).*
- ? **Where does James quote from in verse 23?** *He looks back to Genesis 15 and quotes from verse 6, with the whole context of the chapter—the promise to Abraham—in mind.*
- ? **Why was Abraham credited with righteousness?** *He believed God's promise.*
- ? **When did this occur with respect to the sacrifice of Isaac?** *This must have occurred first since in 15:3 Abraham says he has no offspring. We do not read of Isaac's sacrifice until seven chapters later, representing at least 20 years.*
- ? **With this in view, was it the willingness to sacrifice Isaac or his faith in God that justified Abraham?** *Abraham was seen as righteous before he demonstrated that faith in the willingness to sacrifice Isaac.*
- ? **We mentioned earlier that justification and righteousness share the same root in the Greek. Should they be seen as synonyms in verses 21–24?** *They must have slightly different meanings since Abraham could not have been righteous in Genesis 15 and then been made righteous 20 years later in Genesis 22.*

► Remind students that the cross-references in their margins or footnotes can help them locate the OT passages referenced in the NT.

- ? **How does verse 22 help us distinguish between the uses of justified and righteous in these verses?** *It describes how the Abraham's faith, in which he was seen as righteous by God, was demonstrated in his actions. His faith was shown to be true and complete (made perfect) by his actions. His faith was not dead because it was demonstrated in his actions. So, we could say that his righteousness was justified by his actions, but not that his actions caused his righteousness.*
- ? **With this distinction in mind, how should we understand verse 24?** *Rather than saying that Abraham's righteousness unto salvation was the result of his works, the faith that brought his righteousness were demonstrated (justified) through his works.*
- ? **How did Rahab justify her faith?** *By protecting the messengers at her own peril, her faith in God was demonstrated.*
- ? **What purpose does verse 26 serve in James's argument?** *Just as the spirit in the body demonstrates life, so works born out of faith demonstrate spiritual life.*
- ? **What does Galatians 2:16 teach about our justification?** *No works can bring about our justification, but we can only be declared righteous by faith in Jesus. Additionally, this is affirmed in Romans 1:17 and 3:20–28 as well as other passages.*
- ? **Would James write something that is contradictory to Paul?** *No—while many skeptics and critics make this claim, we would have to deny the inspiration of Scripture to arrive at that conclusion.*

Galatians 2:16

Discover the Truth

Admittedly, this is a tricky passage to work through. There are many other evidences we could look at to resolve this apparent conflict, but we have no reason to doubt the truthfulness of the Scriptures since they have been revealed to us by the God who cannot lie. Additionally, the James who wrote this epistle was present at the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 where Peter stood and said, “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they” (Acts 15:7–11).

If James believed that Peter was in error and that the hearts of those who receive salvation are purified by works of the law and not faith, he would not have consented to the decree of the council. James didn't disagree with Peter, Paul, or himself when he spoke of the relationship between faith and works. True faith will be demonstrated in true works. *Encourage the students to read the explanation of this passage in the Historical/Apologetics Background section of this lesson in their student guides for more information.*





Fruit Inspectors

MATERIALS

- Student Guides
- Pencils

INSTRUCTIONS

So how can we know if someone who claims to have faith is indeed righteous in the eyes of God? In your Student Guides you will find the Fruit Inspectors activity. The Bible uses the metaphor of fruit to teach about the works a person demonstrates and the condition of their heart. Open up to that activity and let's walk through several passages that use the analogy of bearing fruit and demonstrating good works.

As we read each passage, let's try to come up with a short description about the connection between fruit and works in the passage, and write that in your Student Guide. *Have someone read each of the passages. If time is short, pick a few of the following verses or just relate the concept and direct the students to look more closely at it later.*

CONNECT TO THE TRUTH

What connection is explained in Matthew 3:7–10? *John the Baptist is telling the Jewish leaders that if they have truly repented, their actions would demonstrate that repentance—their good fruit would be a sign that they were healthy trees.*

What contrast is used in Matthew 7:15–20? *Just as thorn bushes can't bear grapes, neither can false*

teachers speak truth and act in righteousness. A bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

What is the key to bearing fruit in John

15:5–8? *Those who abide in Christ bear much fruit.*

Those who do not abide cannot bear fruit and are cut off and burned.

What are the works of the flesh contrasted with in Galatians 5:19–26? *The works of the flesh (listed in 19–21) are contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit (listed in 22–23). Those who are alive in the Spirit should walk in the Spirit, bearing those fruits in their lives.*

In light of these passages, we might think of ourselves as fruit inspectors. We can recognize false teachers by the false words they speak and the false works they perform. We can examine our own fruit to recognize when we are not abiding in Christ and obeying His commands. And we can encourage and exhort one another to bear fruit as we walk in the Spirit.

There was a common theme of judgment in these passages as well, a stark reminder to us of the justice of God who must punish those who are disobedient and refuse to abide in Christ. While that ultimate act of judgment is God's prerogative, we are called to judge the fruit of others with a righteous judgment, recognizing that we often fall short of God's standard of perfection ourselves (John 7:24; Matthew 7:1–5). As we inspect these fruits, let us do it with grace and truth as our Savior modeled for us.





Applying God's Word

WHAT YOU HEARD IN THE WORD

As we study a passage like Ephesians 2, it should remind us of the amazing things God has done for us in Christ and by His Spirit. We were once dead in our trespasses and sins, but we have been made alive in Christ by the grace and mercy of God. If that does not stir you to praise God for His kindness, you might need to check your spiritual pulse and see if you are indeed alive. But we often stop there, forgetting the importance of what God has prepared for us to do. We are born again in Christ to do the works that God has prepared for us. He has worked in our hearts so that we might work on His behalf.

But our new birth is not a result of those works or any acts we might try to do to be righteous—we are saved by grace alone! And, as Paul instructs the Galatian Christians, if we have been saved by grace and the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, we cannot expect to grow to be more like Christ in our own efforts or to maintain God's favor by those works (Galatians 3:1–4). We are accepted in Christ and called to walk in good works to bring glory to God (Matthew 5:16).

While we often have the wrong motives, we know that the good works that we do are a demonstration of the faith that we have in God. While works do not bring about our salvation, they are the result of a heart that has been transformed and moved toward loving God and loving others. A faith that does not result in good works is a faith that is dead. While we are saved by faith alone, the faith that saves us is never alone, but is accompanied by the good works God has prepared for us to walk in.

GOD'S WORD IN THE REAL WORLD

- ? As you relate to unbelievers, many may have the idea that they have to clean themselves up before they can approach God for forgiveness. Others might think that they can do good to make up for the bad and that will make them acceptable to God. How can you use the passages we have looked at today to help them understand the truth? *Encourage the students to open their Bibles with these people and show them that the Bible teaches that we cannot earn our salvation and that we come to God in our sin trusting that He will forgive us because of what Jesus did for us, not what we can do for ourselves. This is a very common attitude and one that we should be prepared to counter with biblical truth, trusting the Spirit to use those truths to bring regeneration.*
- ? Do you ever find yourself trying to get on God's good side by doing good things after you have done bad things? What does this attitude

demonstrate about your understanding of salvation by grace alone? *Since our salvation and position in Christ is secure and based on His work on our behalf, we need only to seek forgiveness when we sin, trusting that we are forgiven in Christ (1 John 1:8–9). Doing good works does not make up for bad works. When we sin and think we have to make up for it, we are forgetting that all of our sins (past, present, and future) are forgiven in Christ, not by our own penitent acts. This is a common thought in religions like Roman Catholicism, Islam, Mormonism, Buddhism, etc., but it is not a biblical idea and cheapens the work of Christ on our behalf.*

? **What questions do you still have about relating the ideas of grace, faith, and works?** *Discuss various answers, looking to Scripture for answers and guidance. If something comes up that you can't answer, offer to look into it and bring an answer back to the class or individual.*

? **As we think about ourselves as fruit inspectors in different aspects, what ditches do we need to be careful to avoid?** *While it is good to think critically about certain issues, we need to be careful to not develop a critical spirit that only seeks to point out error and constantly finds fault. We must also take care to remember to examine our own fruit (the log in our own eye) and seek help in growing to be more like Christ. An inordinate focus in any one area is likely to lead us into attitudes and actions that are not glorifying to God.*



MEMORY VERSE

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.



GROUP PRAYER TIME

Be sure to pray with your class before you dismiss them.

- Thank God for His kindness in saving us by grace through faith.
- Praise God for His power to raise the spiritually dead and give them life.
- Ask God for a heart that is directed at good works to bring glory to God.