

RECONCILING SAVING FAITH AND WORKS OF THE LAW IN PAUL AND JAMES

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to investigate the seeming contradiction between the teachings of Paul and of James on justification, particularly in Romans 3:28 and James 2:24. James' idea that people are justified by their deeds and not by faith alone (James 2:24) seems antithetical to Paul's teaching that people are justified by faith apart from works of the law (Rom. 3:28). This paper analyses the Greek terminologies employed by James and Paul in communicating their views, and contends that the concepts of justification, expressed by the two authors are complementary rather than contradictory.*

Key Words: Justification; works of the law; faith; antinomian; Second Temple; Judaism.

Introduction

Scholars have made several attempts to resolve the ostensible conflict between Paul and James on the doctrine of justification. An example of this seeming contradiction can be seen in comparing Romans 3:28 with James 2:24. While some scholars are of the view that the concepts as expressed by the two authors is irreconcilable, others hold the opposite view. Martin Luther, struggling with this concern many years ago, considered James' epistle as non-canonical.¹ J.T. Sanders sets Paul and James in such direct opposition that his readers are virtually left with no option than to choose one over the other.² J.C. Beker contends that the writer of James ignores Paul's gospel of grace apart from the law and, instead, "understands the gospel to be a Christian interpretation of the Torah."³ For S. Laws, "Attempts to harmonize James and Paul and thus produce an apostolic consensus are

¹ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works: American Edition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1960), 35: 362.

² J.T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 115-127.

³ J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 251.

probably fruitless...”⁴ In Rudolf Bultmann’s view Paul’s concept of faith is “...utterly misunderstood. ... Paul would certainly have agreed with the proposition that a faith without works is dead (2:17, 26) [Gal. 5:6] but never in the world with the thesis that faith works along with works (2:22).”⁵

Scholars on the other side included John Calvin, who was convinced that Paul and James were in complete agreement.⁶ G. E. Ladd sees no contradiction between them either. Ladd noted that the two writers used similar words to teach different concepts.⁷ Douglas Moo observes that, “Understood in their own contexts, and with careful attention to the way each is using certain key words, it can be seen that James and Paul are making complementary, not contradictory, points.”⁸ Recent scholarship in Pauline Theology has revived the debate profoundly. This prompted the current study, which seeks to maintain that there is no genuine contradiction between James and Paul on justification.

Background to the Epistle of James

The epistle of James addresses Jewish believers of the Diaspora—Jews living outside of Palestine (James 1:1). The epistle has obvious affinities with the OT and Jewish Hellenistic literature. Jewish terms such as ‘law’ and ‘synagogue,’ as well as OT and Jewish metaphors are common in the epistle⁹ as well as Jewish *Shema* (see Deut. 6:4 and James 2:19). The epistle also betrays vocabulary and concepts similar to early Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, including Tes-

⁴ S. Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 132-133.

⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 2:163.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1998), 276.

⁷ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 639. For other scholars who support this view see R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 160-71; James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 34-36.

⁸ Douglas J. Moo, *James* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 45-46.

⁹ D.A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 415.

taments of the Twelve Patriarchs, Sirach, Philo and Wisdom of Solomon. James' dealings with his themes also reflects the Wisdom literature of OT times and the intertestamental period. It is most likely that this epistle was composed before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), at which James presided in AD 48 or 49.¹⁰ This view finds support from the fact that James does not make any reference to the Council in his letter, even though the epistle and the conference had some similar concerns.

There is a sense in which this hypothesis could be disputed, however. For one thing, the view has no direct biblical support and the fact that the name James was common in first century Palestine makes it possible to argue for another James, say son of Zebedee, whose elder brother John, is always mentioned together with him in the synoptic gospels. We know that James, the son of Zebedee suffered early martyrdom in the hands of Herod (Acts 12:1), perhaps around AD 44.¹¹ If this is correct and if he wrote the epistle then a date before 44 is required. This makes the debate over authorship and date of James quite inconclusive. Our proposal therefore remains hypothetical.

The epistle among others addressed antinomians, who took undue advantage of the law of liberty in the Gospel to behave as if true religion was all about inward faith which produces no good works. Their false understanding of the relationship between 'faith' and 'works' made them think that salvation by 'faith' meant the law was annihilated. With this (mis)understanding, they professed faith in Christ without external evidence. To combat such antinomian interpretation of Christian liberty, the epistle stressed the importance of works, which stem from faith and which must validate one's profession of faith by a demonstration of the fruit of the Spirit (2:14-26). The epistle sought by this, also to help its persecuted audience to overcome the temptations they would encounter in times of testing. It is for this reason that the author begins (1:2-4, 12) and ends (5:7-11) with the theme of testing.

¹⁰ Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction*, 414.

¹¹ See Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 672.

Background to the Epistle to the Romans

Pauline authorship of the letter to the Romans is hardly disputed. Paul was not the founder of the church in Rome, though he knew many leaders there. He had also not been to the church, hence he expressed his desire to preach the gospel to them (1:15). It is likely that Paul wrote this letter in Corinth between 56 and 57 AD during his third missionary journey.¹² Rather than one large church, the Romans church was made up of some household churches (see 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15).

The letter deals both with Jewish (cf. 1:18-4:25) and Gentile (see 1:5; 11:3) concerns.¹³ Paul's audience are therefore both Jewish and Gentile Christians. There seems to be tension between the Jewish and non-Jewish Christians, concerning the exact meaning of the Gospel and how to practice it, especially in religious customs and holy days. Paul addresses a Jewish legalism that tries to equate "works of the law" with saving faith and "highlights faith as the sole instrument of justification."¹⁴ He makes a case against Judaizers, who believed salvation depended on doing the works of the law in order that the Gentiles could understand the roots of their faith. The letter, therefore, purposes to address certain "intellectual" questions-especially concerning the place of a universal religion over Jewish nationalism-which the saints in Rome are concerned about, which perhaps he learned about through Aquila and Priscilla. By so doing, Paul hoped to resolve disunity in the Roman church between Jews seeking special status and Gentiles who want total freedom from Judaism.

Terminological Analysis

Both Paul and James use the term justification in their epistles and theology. Do they mean the same thing? We examine common terminologies associated with their explanation of the term by comparing two passages, one from each author to determine this.

¹² D. Moo, "Romans 1-8," in *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 3.

¹³ W.G. Kummel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 309.

¹⁴ Moo, *James*, 46.

James 2:24: ὁρᾶτε ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον.

Romans 3:28: λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.

Translation

You notice that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (James 2: 24).

We affirm then that a person is justified by faith and not by works of the law (Rom. 3: 28).

Admittedly, if Paul and James used all these words – works (or “works of law” as Paul puts it), faith, justification – in the same manner, we would be faced with a real contradiction. However, a close inspection of the terms shows otherwise. James has given evidence in his preceding verses that a person is justified by faith but not by faith standing alone, because works always accompany saving faith. Thus, there is a sense in which faith and works are related. James 2:24 concludes the long train of evidence he has given. Similarly, Paul offers his audience reasons why righteousness which apart from works of the law as has been revealed, operates on faith from start to finish. He concludes that, it is faith that justifies and not works of the law, without saying that saving faith stands alone, separate from faith.

Works (ἔργων) and works of law (ἔργων νόμου)

Both authors use “works”, though Paul’s uses it in the expression “works of law”. However, in Romans 3:28, Paul qualifies works (ἔργων) with νόμου. For Paul, works are unnecessary for justification because it is justification that produces good works. For James, works are an essential component of saving faith therefore they cannot be separated from justification by faith.

Understanding the phrase “works of law” is crucial in the current study. Paul uses the phrase “works of law” eight times in his letters (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16 [three times]; 3:2, 5, 10). We have no evidence that the term is used in the Hebrew Bible, but the NT uses it several

times apart from claims by some scholars that some non-canonical Jewish writings also use the phrase.¹⁵

Interpreters are divided over the meaning of this phrase. We outline the major views as follows.¹⁶ First, there are scholars who consider “law” as a subjective genitive in the phrase and so translate it as “the law’s work.” In this case, Paul would mean the works produced by the law. This interpretation considers works produced by law as evil, claiming support from Romans 7, where sin takes the law hostage and generates more sin. This position is unlikely because even though Paul argues that a person cannot be justified by works of the law, he does not in any way describe these works as evil.

Another interpretation is that “works of law” amounts to legalism. In this case “works of law” refers to human effort in keeping the law as a means of meriting God’s favour. This has been the popular Protestant understanding of the phrase and it seems to find support in Romans 4:4-5, where the “works” in view (v. 2) is understood as deeds done for reward as opposed to believing God for righteousness without evidence of deeds. However, recent scholarship on the new perspective on Paul has challenged this idea by arguing that the assumption that Judaism teaches righteousness that comes by law-keeping is flawed.¹⁷ There are those who oppose this refutation by maintaining that, to conceive Second Temple Judaism as a religion of grace is unsupported by available data.

J.D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright, key proponents of the New Perspective on Paul, equate “works of law” to boundary markers (such as circumcision, Sabbath, food laws etc.) that differentiate Jews from Gentiles.¹⁸ If that is accepted then Paul is confronting the Jewish separatism and exclusivism of his day and not people’s failure to obey the law. This position is supported by Paul’s rebuke of Peter in Antioch

¹⁵ Thomas Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic and Professional, 2010), 41.

¹⁶ We have gleaned what follows from Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law*, 41-42.

¹⁷ See J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2006).

¹⁸ Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 42. See also Dunn, *The Theology of Paul*, 358.

due to Peter's separatist attitude towards the Gentiles (Gal. 2:11-14). Dunn also claims support from 4QMMT, a document which contains various regulations about sacrifices and purity, which he terms as "works of the law." We find in this document purity regulations related to the temple, as well as language use associated with segregation relating to moral issues, such as fornication. The blessing and curses of Deut. 26—28 and David's adultery with Bathsheba are also accounted for. Based on the diversity of issues which this document covers, it is a strong conclusion that the document refers to the whole law and not just portions of it.

The fourth view considers "works of law" as referring to the entire law and its required deeds. Support for this position can be claimed as follows. First, "works of law" most naturally refers to the deeds demanded by the law. We find no support that it refers to a part of the law or "evil works" or legalism. Secondly, the idea that "works of law" refers to the whole law finds support from Galatians and Romans.¹⁹ Further, Hebrew texts of Second Temple Jewish literature give support to this position. "Works of law" is also used in 4QFlor 1:7 to refer to the works demanded by the entire law.²⁰ The expression "his works in the Torah" is found in 1QS 5:21; 6:18. Reading this text together with 1QS V-VII reveals that the author's concern is with "general obedience to the law."²¹ Second Temple Jews, by this interpretation, were not focused merely on ethnic identity and strict adherence to covenant markers but also with concrete, rigorous obedience to the Mosaic Law in its entirety.²²

The "works of Law" in 3:27-28 cannot, then, be limited to those aspects of the Law that serve as boundary markers for the Jews. If the term refers to the works demanded by the law, as argued, then the subjective genitive use of "law" proposed by some scholars as mentioned earlier cannot be acceptable because "the works demanded by

¹⁹ Schreiner gives the following examples as passages where Paul refers to the whole law rather than a part, or legalism or laws that divide Jews from Gentiles: Gal. 2:19, 21; 3:11, 13, 17, 18; 5:3, 54; 6:13 cf. Rom. 8:7; Rom. 3:20-22; 4:13, 14; 7:4. Cf. Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 43.

²⁰ Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 43.

²¹ Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 43.

²² A. Andrew Das, "Paul and Works of Obedience in Second Temple Judaism: Romans 4:4-5 as a 'New Perspective' Case Study," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2009), 797.

the law are good, not evil.”²³ Also, if “works of the law” refers to the whole law, then it cannot refer, only to boundary markers as proposed by some scholars. In the context of Romans 3:28, Paul’s concern is not on exclusivism but on the role of the Mosaic Law and Covenant in the salvation of the sinner.

What does James mean by “work (s)” in the context of his letter? James uses “works” frequently in the positive sense. He uses the plural *erga* rather than the singular “work” *ergon* to signify his expectation that the Christian’s work must be continual. For James, “works” refers to loving mercy, kindness, and obedience to God. These works or anything done in obedience to God are a necessary facet of saving faith, such that works and faith become inseparable. Therefore, James’ “works” refers to Christian ethical behaviour, a system of conduct springing from and accompanying a new life in Christ.

Paul uses the same term in a different sense to denote ethical demands of the Jewish law, an old and abandoned stipulation, impotent to secure one’s salvation because it is different from the promise itself. In effect, those who argue that the gospel annuls the law along with the contra opinion that the law invalidates the gospel cannot find support in either James or Paul because the works in Paul subsequently follow faith in Christ, while James notes that the works give evidence of faith in Christ. While this distinction shows that James is not controverting Paul, it does not mean complete agreement between them. Paul would have admitted the inadequacy of a faith which does not show itself in works but he would never have admitted that justification comes from works.²⁴ James employs the term differently from Paul’s theological usage, whether we speak about faith or works of the Law.²⁵ People are justified by faith but the faith that justifies is seen only on the evidence of good works. “Works of the law” (Paul) and “works” (James) refer to two different realities, even though both authors are addressing justification.

²³ Schreiner, *40 Questions*, 42.

²⁴ James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 205.

²⁵ Ropes, *James*, 205.

Faith (πίστις)

Paul considers faith as total trust in God, so that salvation can be received as a gracious gift apart from any meritorious works because of the Christ Event. Ladd says what Paul meant by faith is the “acceptance of the gospel and personal commitment to the one proclaimed.”²⁶ Faith is not any kind of belief whatever but a trust, which brings peace with God under all circumstances (Rom. 5:1-5).

For James, “faith” may be used in two senses. In one sense, it is the intellectual acceptance of theological assertions, particularly the monotheistic creed. This kind of faith, which James was probably condemning, is not evident in good works and it does not justify. This is not true Christian faith. In 2:14b James asks, “Can *that* faith save someone?” What is “*that* faith” which James opposes? This is the false faith that possesses no good works (2:14a, 18b), cannot save (2:14b), which is dead (2:17) and is distinct and separate from good works (2:18a). Like demonic faith, it leads mere lip service (2:19). It is useless (2:20). It is contrasted with the other sense, which points to a faith whose evidence is good works (2:18c, 22a). The sense in which James uses “faith” in this verse is different from how Paul employs it. “Faith for Paul is personal, cordial trust; for James, it is orthodox opinion.”²⁷

Like Paul, James uses “faith”, in another sense to refer to that which brings justification apart from works of the law. This is true saving faith. The conclusion is that for James, faith and works are two sides of the same coin for the justified person. They are inseparable in a true Christian life (James 2: 18).²⁸ This is Abrahamic faith (2:21-22). From the foregoing, we distinguish between faith according to James (true, saving faith) and faith according to James’ real or imaginary opponent (false faith). James is not arguing that works are a necessary help to faith if the latter must be saved. Rather, he is arguing that genuine faith inevitably is followed by good works which both the law and the gospel recommend as love for God and neighbour (cf. Deut. 6:4-5; Lev. 19:18; Jer. 31:31-34; Matt. 5:43-46; 12:30; John 13:34).

²⁶ Ladd, *A Theology of The New Testament*, 639.

²⁷ Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 639.

²⁸ Ropes, *James*, 35.

James means that any “faith” that does not lead to works is dead. It is probable that James is refuting perversions of Pauline teaching, whether the Pauline epistles were known or not.

Justify (δικαιῶ)

Some have interpreted Paul’s use of *justify*, to mean declaring someone righteous, because Jesus has satisfied all the requirements of the law on his or her behalf. For them, James uses it in the sense of someone proving or showing her/his righteousness before people.²⁹ However, recent scholarship has argued that both Paul and James use the term in the same declarative-forensic-judicial sense to point to God’s legal declaration that someone is righteous. There is no human meritorious achievement in this. Compton suggests that, when Paul and James cite Genesis 15:6 to explain Abraham’s justification in Romans 4:3 and James 2:23 respectively, they do not mean righteousness based on Abrahamic achievement or merit. They mean imputed righteousness, given because of his faith.³⁰ Therefore, “justification means for James what it means for Paul: God’s declaring someone righteous.”³¹ Paul’s forensic use of the term “justify,” is supported by his addition of such phrases as “before God” (Rom. 2:13) as well as by his contrast between “justify” and “condemn” in Romans 8:33–34. Like his contemporary Jews, Paul was of the view that the new covenant for the post-exilic Jews according to the prophets pointed to a glorious future for Israel: In the day when all the promises (e.g., Isa. 40—55) are fulfilled, Israel will be vindicated (*justified*) before the world and Abraham’s promised blessing to all nations would be fulfilled. In the “last day” (Isa. 54:13), “justified” people will, “in righteousness” be established (Isa. 54:14).

A declarative use of *dikaioō*³² is by far the most common meaning for this verb, as used in the Septuagint, the Pseudepigrapha, and often in

²⁹ See for example, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 3: 12.

³⁰ R. Bruce Compton, “James 2:21-24 and the Justification of Abraham,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2, no.1 (1997): 28.

³¹ Compton. “James 2:21-24”, 28.

³² In the Hebrew Bible, *dikaioo* generally comes from the *piel* or *hiphil* stems of the Hebrew root קדש, which usually means, “to declare righteous, justify,” or “to justify the cause of, save.”

the NT.³³ Since James exemplifies declarative justification in Genesis 15:6, he probably intended declarative justification in the remainder of 2:20-24. Within the immediate and larger OT contexts, Genesis 15:6 appears to describe Abraham's justification as a forensic act of God. Abraham's justification was not earned; it was based on his faith. He was justified because he trusted in the Lord. It is clear from James 2:14, that the focus of the pericope (2:14-26) is not on demonstration of faith but the bestowal of the gift of salvation. James uses "justify" where Paul speaks of judgment.³⁴

Why is it that in James 2:21 justification is predicated, not on Abraham's faith, as in Paul, but on Abraham's works? James' reference to Abraham's sacrifice in 2:21-24 should not be interpreted as opposing Pauline analyses in Romans 4:2-12 about Abraham's justification by faith (cf. Gal 3:6). Rabbinic tradition regards the love-your-neighbour rhetoric (Lev. 19:18) as the foundational principle of the entire Torah. James, employing this tradition, contends that the proclaimed belief in one God must be demonstrated in the fulfilment of the Torah's precepts hence obedience to the commandments and loving one's neighbour as oneself are two sides of the same coin (2:18-19).

Second Temple and early rabbinic sources show that Abraham fulfilled the Torah perfectly. For example, Ben Sirach 44:19-21 notes that Abraham kept the law and was found faithful (cf. Gen. 26:5),³⁵ when he was tested.³⁶ Therefore, rather than use it as a polemic against Paul, James employs Abraham's deeds-centred righteousness (rabbinic exegetical tradition of the Second Temple period) to push forward the love-your-neighbour rhetoric as the foundational principle of the entire Torah.

Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver and Charles August Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 776.

³³ Robert V. Rakestraw, *James 2:14-26: Does James Contradict The Pauline Soteriology?," Criswell Theological Review* 4, no. 1 (1986), 40.

³⁴ Moo, *James*, 109.

³⁵ Gary Anderson, Ruth Clements and David Satran, eds., *New Approaches to the Study of Biblical Interpretation in Judaism of the Second Temple and in Early Christianity* (Brill: Hotei Publishing, 2013), 98.

³⁶ See Jubilees 17:15-18 (cf. Jubilee 16:18; see also 1 Macc. 2: 52; 4QPseudo-Jubilees [4Q226] 7:1). Anderson, Clements and Satran, *New Approaches*, 98.

Unlike Paul, James does not apply the reasoning from Abraham's example to Christology or to the gentile conundrum.³⁷ Rather, he employs it in the general sense of Jewish exegetic discourse. For this reason, "circumcision does not feature in the description of Abraham's righteous behaviour ('deeds'), being substituted –as the 'seal of righteousness' – by the offering of Isaac."³⁸ The foregoing discussions make it unlikely that James cited Abraham as a polemic against Paul.³⁹

After the discussion in 2: 21-23, the author calls for acceptance of his conclusion in 2: 24. Had he not included the modifier "alone," he undoubtedly would have contradicted Paul (Rom. 3:28) as well as his own previous verse (v. 23). The meaning of the text depends on how one conceives the term 'alone'. If it functions as an adjective modifying 'faith', James will be referring to a faith that is alone, isolated, or unaccompanied by good works and hence unable to impact reality. This is the type of faith he describes in v. 17 as dead, imaginary and unrealistic. His understanding of OT prophetic oracles about 'cult' and 'social justice' comes to play here. The idea of social justice must be understood in the light of covenant relationship between God and his people, and how the people relate among themselves. Justice itself is almost synonymous with righteousness. The "righteousness expressed in justice is the indispensable qualification for worship—no justice, no acceptable public religion."⁴⁰ Thus, James' statement in 2:24, means that a faith that has not fruit of good works cannot justify.

If 'alone' is "modifying an implied verb 'justified,' supplied by ellipsis from the first part of the verse,"⁴¹ then James is saying that a person is justified by works and not *only* by faith.⁴² Put differently, "a person is justified not only by faith but also by works" or that "a person is justified by faith that produces good works."⁴³ Such a position

³⁷ Anderson, Clements and Satran, *New Approaches*, 98.

³⁸ Anderson, Clements and Satran, *New Approaches*, 97.

³⁹ Anderson, Clements and Satran, *New Approaches*, 97.

⁴⁰ Mays, as quoted in Christopher J.H Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of Israel*, (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 267.

⁴¹ Compton, "James 2:21-24," 43.

⁴² Compton, "James 2:21-24," 43.

⁴³ Compton, "James 2:21-24," 43.

does not in any way deny justification by faith, but requires that faith justifies initially and subsequently produces good works.⁴⁴ If the second option is the correct reading, then the subject of the debate now shifts to the exact timing of this subsequent evidence of faith in works. Rakestraw argues that James had in view a subsequent justification in this life,⁴⁵ but Moo thinks James had in mind an eschatological justification.⁴⁶ Moo's opinion is unlikely because from James 2:14-24, Abraham was justified there and then during his earthly life (James 2:21).⁴⁷ If no works exist on which subsequent justification is founded, we still cannot speak of failure of the initial justification. Rather, it shows that the subject was initially not justified to begin with, because he or she had no saving faith to exercise.⁴⁸ Cranfield puts it poignantly by arguing, "Had there been no works, Abraham would not have been justified; but that would have been because the absence of works would have meant that he had no real faith."⁴⁹ In such a case, there will be no initial justification, since there is no true saving faith to pave the way for the imputation of righteousness. It is evident that James is not referring to the initial declarations of righteousness at the conversion of Abraham but rather God's approval of Abraham's righteousness, which he (Abraham) received during his lifetime and not (merely) that which looks up to the final judgment.

Conclusion

There is no disagreement between Paul and James on the subject of justification; only a difference in perspective for the same basic teaching. To both writers, faith is good and necessary for salvation, but

James emphasizes the intellectual-objective aspect of faith, by refuting any thinking that assumes justification results from mere intel-

⁴⁴ Compton, "James 2:21-24," 43.

⁴⁵ Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26," 40-42.

⁴⁶ Moo, *James*, 109-111.

⁴⁷ Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26," 41.

⁴⁸ Compton, "James 2:21-24," 44.

⁴⁹ C.E.B. Cranfield, "*The Message of James*," as quoted by Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26," 46.

lectual affirmation, while Paul stresses the volitional, subjective dimension of faith, which embodies and even follows intellectual faith.⁵⁰

James and Paul regard works and faith as separate entities, even though they are intimately tied together. Paul contrasts faith and works while James distinguishes false faith from works and speaks of true faith as working together with good works. James does not identify true faith as works. Faith is belief; works are actions. Faith stands behind works; the two do not mean the same thing⁵¹ but the two are closely linked in a justified life.

The reason for these differences is not far-fetched. James and Paul were handling two different situations. Paul deals with the question, "How can a sinner be justified before a holy God?" He answers, "By faith alone." James, on the other hand, deals with the question, "What kind of faith justifies or what kind of faith saves?" He answers, "The faith that produces good works." When Paul speaks of Abraham's justification by faith, he is referring to Abraham's initial justification recorded in Genesis 15:6. From the Pauline perspective, therefore, all pre-salvation works are necessarily excluded in justification, because it is the sinner who is justified and not the righteous.

On the other hand, when James speaks of Abraham's justification by works, he is referring to Abraham's subsequent justification, which validates or confirms Abraham's faith and his initial justification. Since such a validation must be based on the evidence, Abraham's post-conversion works are essential follow ups to his justification by faith. "Paul was rooting out 'work' that excluded and destroyed saving faith; James was stimulating a sluggish faith that minimized the results of saving faith in daily life."⁵² Their common ground is that although good works contribute nothing to justification, they serve as litmus test for the genuineness of a person's faith. So, those who are saved will, without doubt produce good works in keeping with their

⁵⁰ Rakestraw, "James 2:14-26," 31.

⁵¹ John A. Battle, "'Justified by Faith' . . . 'Justified by Works': Abraham's Justification, as Viewed by Paul and by James," *The WRS Journal* 13, no. 1 (2006), 10.

⁵² D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), 175.

justified and those whose faith is so intellectual that it has nothing to do with good works have no benefit of justification, imputed to them.

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