

## JAMES 2:21–24 AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF ABRAHAM

by  
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Who of us has not wondered about the striking differences between what Paul says regarding Abraham's justification in Romans 4:1–3 and what James says regarding Abraham's justification in James 2:21–24? Paul declares that Abraham, like all true believers, was justified by faith apart from works.

For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.... What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has reason to boast—but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 3:28, 4:1–3).<sup>1</sup>

It is commonly argued from these verses that Abraham's justification was *sola fide*, or by faith alone.<sup>2</sup> James, on the other hand, appears to argue for just the opposite. In fact, on the basis of the Old Testament

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<sup>1</sup>All translations are the author's own, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup>The consensus among scholars is that this expression captures the essence of what Paul says in Rom 3:28–4:5 and elsewhere about justification. As Moo notes in his discussion of Rom 3:28, “Luther's famous addition of *sola* ('alone') to *fide* ('faith')—in which he was preceded by others, including Thomas Aquinas—brings out the true sense intended by Paul” (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, ed. G. D. Fee [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], pp. 250–251). For further support, see C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, ed. H. Chadwick (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 82–83; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 123; C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, ICC, ed. J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1982), p. 221; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC, ed. D. A. Hubbard and J. D. W. Watts (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), p. 187; Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), p. 187; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, AB, ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 360–364 (including a brief historical survey).

testimony concerning Abraham, James concludes that a man is justified by works and *not* by faith alone.<sup>3</sup>

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar: You see that his faith was working together with his works, and by his works his faith was perfected. And the Scripture was fulfilled which said, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God. *You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone* (Jas 2:21–24, emphasis added).

The purpose of this article is to examine James 2:21–24 in order to offer an interpretation which is both true to the context and consistent with Paul’s principle of *sola fide*.<sup>4</sup> Without minimizing the tensions involved or glossing over the obvious differences, it is assumed that there can be no real discrepancy between what James teaches and what Paul teaches.<sup>5</sup> The Bible is the written Word of God and, consequently, is

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<sup>3</sup>Because this verse seemingly contradicts Pauline soteriology, it has been called a *crux interpretum* not simply for James, but for New Testament theology in general (Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGNT, eds. I. H. Marshall and W. W. Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 130).

<sup>4</sup>Although others have undertaken similar studies, the tension between James and Paul continues to provoke discussion in commentaries and articles. In particular, the James passage has become something of a battlefield both in the Lordship salvation debate, as well as in the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* dialogue. On the former, see, for example, John F. MacArthur, Jr., “Faith According to the Apostle James,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990): 13–34, along with his respondents. For the latter, see R. C. Sproul, *Faith Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), pp. 155–171; Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Disagreements* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), including bibliography. Since the issues involved go to the very heart of the gospel, further examination is both important and necessary.

<sup>5</sup>There are a number who disagree with this assumption. Note, for example, Martin Luther’s assessment recorded in the preface to James in his 1546 edition of the Bible, “However, to give my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle.... It is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works.... Therefore, I cannot include him among the chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him” (Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds., *Luther’s Works* [Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960], 35:395–397). Luther’s oft-quoted reference to James as “an epistle of straw” (borrowing terminology from 1 Cor 3:12) is found in the preface to his 1522 edition of the New Testament (*Works*, 35:362). Others holding a similar viewpoint include James Hardy Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James*, ICC, ed. A. Plummer et al. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1916), p. 205; Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1955), 2:162–163; E. Blackman, *The Epistle of James* (London: SCM, 1957), p. 96; Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 153–154; James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 251–252; Sophie

inerrant and infallible (cf. John 17:17; 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16). Therefore, when properly interpreted, there can ultimately be no conflict between the statements of the two authors.<sup>6</sup> The procedure followed in this article is, first, to critique previous attempts at reconciling James and Paul on the justification of Abraham and to come to some initial conclusions as to the viability of these attempts. The next step involves an interpretation of the key passage in James in an effort to confirm the preliminary conclusions from the first section. Lastly, the results of the previous two sections are consolidated into an overall statement as to the harmonization of James and Paul on the justification of Abraham.

## PREVIOUS SOLUTIONS

Attempts at reconciling the apparent conflict between James and Paul on the justification of Abraham may be conveniently catalogued under two headings: lexical and contextual.<sup>7</sup> The former involves the definition of key words; the latter involves identifying the purpose and occasion for writing.

### Lexical Solutions

Many interpreters propose that the solution to the tension between the two authors is in a proper understanding of the key terms that both use. Specifically, the differences between the two can be resolved by defining their use of faith, works, and/or justification.<sup>8</sup>

### Faith

Several argue that James does not use faith in the sense of true, saving faith as Paul uses it in Romans and elsewhere. Rather, James views faith as mere intellectual assent, a simple agreeing with certain facts.<sup>9</sup> It

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Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, ed. H. Chadwick (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), pp. 132–133; Leonhard Goppelt, *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. Alsup, ed. J. Roloff (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:209–211.

<sup>6</sup>This reflects what the Reformers meant by the analogy of faith or the analogy of Scripture. For a defense of the statement itself, see Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preuss, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

<sup>7</sup>Similarly Robert V. Rakestraw, "James 2:14–26: Does James Contradict the Pauline Soteriology?" *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (Fall 1986): 31–50.

<sup>8</sup>E.g., Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 50–51; idem, *James*, NIBC, ed. W. W. Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1989), p. 78.

<sup>9</sup>Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1981), pp. 505–506; 598–599; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 50, 132; idem, *James*, pp.

is the faith of demons in their recognition and acceptance of certain truths about God (“You believe that God is one. You do well. The demons also believe [this], and shudder,” 2:19). That theirs is not saving faith is seen in that they shudder or tremble (φρίσσοῦσι), ostensibly in anticipation of divine judgment.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, interpreters conclude that this is the kind of faith James criticizes when he states that one is not justified by faith alone (2:24).

In response, it must be granted that James uses faith in 2:14–26 in a sense other than true, saving faith. He describes this kind of faith in 2:14 as that which does not produce (good) works and, therefore, that which cannot save (“What good is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can that faith save him?”) The question at the end of verse 14, “Can that faith save him?” is a rhetorical question, and, with the negative particle μή, the answer intended by James is *no*. In addition, the article modifying the word “faith” (ἡ πίστις) in this statement is anaphoric, meaning that James specifically has in view the previously mentioned faith without works. As such, James is not disparaging faith *per se*, but a faith that does not produce works. It is this kind of faith, James declares, that cannot save.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, James also uses faith in this passage in a way that parallels Paul’s sense of true faith.<sup>12</sup> The antithesis of a faith that does not produce works and cannot save is a faith that does both. In other words, a faith that does produce works is a true faith and is able to save. James claims this kind of faith for himself in 2:18 when he says that he will show the genuineness of his faith by his works (“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without works, and *I will show you my faith by my works*,” emphasis added). The consensus among the commentaries is that verse 18 introduces the words

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70, 78; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 36–37. Similarly, *NIDNTT*, s.v. “Faith,” by C. Brown, 1:605.

<sup>10</sup>D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistle of James* (Chicago: Moody, 1979), pp. 187–188. BAGD, p. 866, translates the verb, “to shudder from fear.”

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Hiebert, *The Epistle of James*, p. 177; Douglas J. Moo, *James*, TNTC, ed. L. Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 100; Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Faith that Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), p. 89; Ronald Y. K. Fung, “‘Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” in *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 147, 278, ns. 8, 9. Although the expression “save” in the New Testament frequently refers to initial salvation (conversion), the focus here appears to be on final salvation (deliverance from future judgment). It is used in this sense at least one other time in James (4:12; cf. 1:21; 5:20), and the preceding verse (2:13) has mentioned the final judgment. In addition to the references already cited by Hiebert, Moo, and Fung, see *TDNT*, s.v. “σῶζω,” by W. Foerster, 7:996; *NIDNTT*, s.v. “Redemption,” by J. Schneider, 3:216.

<sup>12</sup>Kent, *Faith that Works*, pp. 101–102; Fung, “Justification in James,” pp. 151, 161.

of an objector, arguing for faith versus James's emphasis on works, whom James introduces and then rebuts after the fashion of Greek diatribe. While there is considerable debate on where the voice of the objector ends and James's rebuttal begins, a number of writers take the last half of verse 18 as the initiation of James's response, and that is assumed to be the case here.<sup>13</sup> James also claims this kind of faith for Abraham in 2:21–23. Abraham's faith produced works and, thus, was a true, saving faith.<sup>14</sup> The point is that James uses faith in a two-fold sense in these verses. More specifically, James has two kinds of faith in view, a false faith and a saving faith.<sup>15</sup> The difference between the two appears to be over the matter of trust in or personal commitment to the object of faith, rather than simply the level of conviction concerning the truth about that object. The demons mentioned by James in 2:19 are convinced of the truth of what they believe, or they would not shudder at its implications. What they have not done, in contrast to what Abraham has done, is to put their trust in the true God, to commit themselves to His authority.<sup>16</sup>

With this in mind, the point of tension over James's use of faith comes at 2:24 with his statement that a man is not justified by faith alone. What is critical here is the kind of faith James has in view.<sup>17</sup> Is it the saving faith of Abraham that James has discussed in 2:21–23, or is it the false faith James has condemned in 2:14–20? Assuming for the moment that it is the false faith earlier condemned by James, any conflict between this verse and what Paul says concerning justification by faith is alleviated. James would not be denying that faith alone justifies, only that a false faith cannot justify. Having said that, the tension between the two authors would not yet be fully resolved. What would still need

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<sup>13</sup>E.g., Ropes, *St. James*, pp. 208–210; Martin Dibelius, *James*, rev. H. Greeven, trans. M. A. Williams, Hermeneia, ed. H. Koester et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), p. 154; Hiebert, *James*, pp. 184–185; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 124–125; Moo, *James*, p. 106; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 96; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James*, AB, ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 240; Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, NAC, ed. E. R. Clendenen et al. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), p. 134. For a discussion on the rhetorical features of James 2 and, in particular, on the issue of diatribe, see Duane F. Watson, "James 2 in Light of Greco-Roman Schemes of Argumentation," *NTS* 39 (1993): 94–121.

<sup>14</sup>Hiebert, *Epistle of James*, pp. 190.

<sup>15</sup>R. A. Martin and John H. Elliot, *James, I–II Peter, Jude*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, ed. R. A. Harrisville et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), p. 31; Fung, "Justification in James," pp. 151, 161.

<sup>16</sup>Cf. Davids, *James*, p. 76; Rakestraw, "James 2:14–26," p. 36.

<sup>17</sup>See the discussion on this verse under the section, "Examination of James 2:21–24."

to be answered is what James means in 2:21 when he says that Abraham was justified by works. To say that Abraham was not justified by a false faith is one thing; to say that he was justified by works is something else.

### Works

Others argue that James and Paul do not use the word “works” in the same way. That is, when Paul rules out works as contributing to one’s justification, he refers specifically to works involving the OT Law.<sup>18</sup> These works may refer either to the Mosaic regulations as such or to those regulations performed in a legalistic spirit so as to gain divine favor. Thus, Paul is not rejecting works altogether for justification. Rather, he is rejecting only those works based on the OT Law, whether in and of themselves or such works done in order to earn justification.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, when James argues for the necessity of works, he has in mind charitable deeds which are done out of a spirit of love and which represent the fruit of new life. Proponents conclude from this that the seeming conflict between the two is removed. Paul is ruling out works of Law while James is insisting on works of charity.

By way of evaluation, there is some support for the above distinctions. Paul mentions specifically “works of law”<sup>20</sup> as those which are excluded in his statement about justification in Romans 3:28. In addition, the term “law,” as employed in the preceding context in Romans, refers to the OT and specifically to the Mosaic Law (cf. Rom 3:19–21, esp. vv. 20–21).<sup>21</sup> At the same time, James uses the expression “works” to describe charitable deeds in his discussion of faith and justification (cf.

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<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Ropes, *St. James*, pp. 204–205; Dibelius, *James*, pp. 178–179; James B. Adamson, *The Epistle of James*, NICNT, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 122; Laws, *James*, p. 129; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 50–51; Richardson, *James*, pp. 128–129.

<sup>19</sup>Adherents agree that Paul rules out specifically works involving the OT Law, the Mosaic covenant. What they do not agree on is why that is the case. Some limit “works of law” to the ceremonial laws within the Mosaic covenant and say that Paul rules these out because they are ritualistic in nature and do not involve moral issues. E.g., Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 50–51; Richardson, *James*, pp. 128–129. Others include the entire Mosaic covenant and understand Paul to exclude such works because the covenant itself is no longer operative. E.g., Ropes, *St. James*, pp. 204–205. Still others see the problem not so much with the covenant but with the underlying attitude that sees the covenant as a vehicle by which justification can be earned or merited (whether from a legalistic spirit or a misguided self-confidence). E.g., Adamson, *James*, pp. 216–217.

<sup>20</sup>ἔργων νόμου. The phrase also occurs in Rom 3:20; 9:32; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10. The genitive is variously identified as objective, subjective, possessive, etc. Regardless, the meaning appears clear. The expression refers to works required by the Law or done in response to the Law. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, p. 209, n. 61; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, pp. 337–338.

<sup>21</sup>E.g., Moo, *Romans*, pp. 209, 223; Fitzmyer, *Romans*, pp. 337, 344.

2:15–16).<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it must be acknowledged that if the distinctions that have been suggested are valid, the tension between the two authors is removed. Paul would not be ruling out all works for justification, only those involving the OT Law and/or those improperly motivated. James, on the other hand, would simply be arguing that justification requires good works, in addition to faith.<sup>23</sup>

As attractive as this solution is, it is beset with difficulties. Paul's exclusion in Romans 3:28 is not limited to works of the OT Law or to these works improperly motivated. His exclusion appears open-ended. Paul is using "works of law" in the sense of anything done in obedience to God's Word and, by extension, anything that a person does.<sup>24</sup> With Abraham in Romans 4:1ff., Paul's point is that even works done before the giving of the Law and motivated by Abraham's desire to love and obey God are excluded. Justification, according to Paul, is based on the principle of faith and not on the principle of works, whether good or otherwise. In fact, here in Romans 4 and elsewhere, Paul argues that faith and works are mutually exclusive principles as a basis for justification (cf. Rom 3:27; 4:4–5, 13–14; Gal 3:18).<sup>25</sup>

In addition, limiting James's use of works to works of charity is invalid as well. While that may be the meaning of the term in 2:15–16 and, arguably, in 2:25 with Rahab's protection of the two Hebrew spies,<sup>26</sup> that can hardly be the sense in 2:21 with Abraham's offering of Isaac. In 2:21, Abraham's "works," his offering of Isaac, refers to what

<sup>22</sup>The "charitable deeds" in view in these verses involve providing food and clothing for fellow believers in need of both. See, for example, Laws, *James*, p. 129.

<sup>23</sup>On the issue of James's "works" referring to post-conversion works, see the discussion in the following section on contextual solutions.

<sup>24</sup>Moo, *James*, pp. 101–102. Moo's arguments appear convincing. (1) The closest Paul comes to a definition of "works" is in Rom 9:10–11, where "works" refers to anything that a person does, whether "good or bad." (2) In Rom 4:1ff., the "works" of Abraham, in which he could not boast, clearly refer to good works (hence the potential for Abraham's boasting, cf. Rom 3:27). At the same time, the Abraham illustration in Romans 4 is closely tied to Paul's argument in Rom 3:20–28 where "works of law" is used. (3) What appears to be the case is that Paul uses "works of law" in 3:20–28 to refer to a specific kind of works, those done in obedience to the Mosaic Law, in order to show that even these are excluded. (4) At the same time, from Romans 4 and elsewhere, it may be seen that Paul's purpose in Rom 3:28 "is to exclude *all* works—not just certain works or works done in a certain spirit—as a basis for justification" (p. 102). See also D. J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law' and Legalism in Paul," *WTJ* 45 (Spring 1983): 73–100, esp. pp. 90–100; *Romans*, pp. 209–210.

<sup>25</sup>See, especially, Murray, *Romans*, pp. 122–123; 132–133; 140–143. Similarly, Barrett, *Romans*, pp. 82, 88, 94–95; Morris, *Romans*, pp. 185–186; 197–199; 205–206; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 246–250; 263–265; 273–275.

<sup>26</sup>So, for example, Davids, *Epistle of James*, p. 133.

Abraham did in response to God's command, to his obeying God.<sup>27</sup> This is precisely the kind of work that Paul excludes in his statement in Romans 3:28. Thus, any attempt to resolve the tension between James and Paul on justification that relies on limiting and, hence, distinguishing their meaning of "works" is not supported. When Paul rules out works as a basis for justification, he is ruling out any and all works, including those that James refers to in his epistle.<sup>28</sup>

## Justification

Perhaps the most common explanation for harmonizing James and Paul on justification is to distinguish their use of the term itself. Advocates frequently argue that Paul uses justification and its cognates in Romans 3:28 and elsewhere in the sense of God's declaring or pronouncing someone righteous. James, on the other hand, is understood to use the word-group in James 2:21 and elsewhere in the sense of someone's proving or showing his righteousness before others. Thus, Paul uses it in a judicial or forensic sense, whereas James uses it in a demonstrative or probative sense.<sup>29</sup> Assuming this is the case, supporters conclude that both statements by these men are true and neither statement is in conflict with the other.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>Moo, *James*, p. 102; Rakestraw, "James 2:14–26," p. 38.

<sup>28</sup>For further discussion, see the section on the examination of Jas 2:21–24.

<sup>29</sup>So Calvin: "to Paul, the word denotes our free imputation of righteousness before the judgment seat of God, to James, the demonstration of righteousness from its effects in the sight of men" (*A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and The Epistles of James and Jude*, trans. A. W. Morrison, ed. D. W. Torrance and T. F. Torrance, Calvin's New Testament Commentaries [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], p. 285). Many have followed his lead, for example, O. Palmer Robertson, "Genesis 15:6: New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text," *WTJ* 42 (Fall 1980): 286–287; Davids, *Epistle of James*, p. 51 (but note his discussion of the verb in Jas 2:24, p. 232); Fung, "Justification in James," pp. 152–154; Buist M. Fanning, "A Theology of James," in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. R. B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1994), pp. 428–429; Richardson, *James*, pp. 44, 142.

<sup>30</sup>The issue at this point is not over the basis of justification, but the meaning of the term itself. Quite clearly the basis of Abraham's justification in Jas 2:21 was his works. Having said that, the question addressed here concerns the meaning of the verb. Does James mean when he speaks about Abraham being "justified" that Abraham demonstrated his righteousness before others or that God declared him such? If it is the former, then Paul and James are simply discussing different and, to some degree, unrelated issues. If it is the latter, then there appears to be a tension between James and Paul regarding the basis of God's declaration. See, for example, Martin, *James*, p. 91, who states, "If James' use of *δικαιοῦν*...here were the same as that of Paul, then we would be forced to agree that James does indeed contradict Paul on the issue of the means of justification." For a discussion regarding the basis of Abraham's justification in James and Paul, see the section on contextual solutions.

Again, by way of critique, there is some support for the above distinctions in James's and Paul's use of justification. The consensus among Protestant scholars, at least, is that Paul uses the term in Romans 3:28ff. and related passages in a forensic sense.<sup>31</sup> This is supported largely by the addition of such phrases as "before God" in Romans 2:13 ("for it is not the hearers of the Law who are just before God") and Romans 3:20 ("For by the works of the Law no flesh shall be justified before Him"), and by the contrast between "justify" and "condemn" in Romans 8:33–34, where the latter term clearly means "to declare guilty" or "to pronounce guilty," not "to make guilty."<sup>32</sup> Thus, when describing Abraham's justification in Romans 4:1ff., Paul means that God declared Abraham righteous and imputed righteousness to his account on the basis of his faith in God's promises (cf. v. 5).<sup>33</sup>

In addition, there are statements in James to suggest that James may have had a different sense in his use of justification. As noted above, James talks about proving or demonstrating his faith by his works in 2:18. The thought is that he could show others his faith, and thus his justification, by means of his works.<sup>34</sup> In 2:25, James uses Rahab as a parallel illustration to Abraham, saying that she too was "justified" by her works. In her case, her justification came in response to her helping the Israelite spies.<sup>35</sup> From the historical context, it is difficult to see where God was *declaring* Rahab just by her actions. The spies themselves, on the other hand, apparently saw in her works the *demonstration* of her righteousness since they informed the Israelites that she should be spared during their assault against Jericho.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the adjectival

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<sup>31</sup>See the excursus in Murray, *Romans*, pp. 336–362, esp. pp. 347–353; Morris, *Romans*, pp. 145–147; and Moo, *Romans*, pp. 79–90, esp. pp. 86–88.

<sup>32</sup>As Moo states, "It is now generally agreed, then, that *dikaioo* in Paul means not 'make righteous' but 'declare righteous,' or 'acquit,' on the analogy of the verdict pronounced by a judge. To justify signifies, according to forensic usage, to acquit a guilty one and declare him or her righteous" (*Romans*, p. 86).

<sup>33</sup>In addition to the entries above, see also Morris, *Romans*, pp. 196–199; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 261–265. For a treatment of the Gen 15:6 citation in Rom 4:3 and Jas 2:23, see the discussion that follows.

<sup>34</sup>Robertson, "Genesis 15:6," p. 287; Fung, "Justification in James," p. 154.

<sup>35</sup>The form of the verse, like 2:21, is a rhetorical question where the use of the negative adverb οὐκ indicates a positive answer is intended. See, for example, Hiebert, *James*, p. 198; Martin, *James*, p. 96. The participles ὑποδεξαμένη and ἐκβαλοῦσα are probably temporal, modifying the verb ἐδικαιώθη and identifying both the occasion as well as the basis for Rahab's justification. See, for example, Rakestraw, "James 2:14–26," p. 41.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Josh 2:1–24; 6:16–17, 22–25. Similarly, Fung, "Justification in James," p. 283, n. 64; Fanning, "Theology of James," p. 429.

cognate of *justified* is used in 5:16 as a substantive to describe one who is “righteous.” The meaning of the cognate appears to be that of one who is characterized by or has demonstrated righteous conduct.<sup>37</sup> All of this, it is argued, suggests that the two authors used justification and its related forms with different connotations and that the two are not, therefore, in disagreement.<sup>38</sup>

As with the previous attempts to distinguish James’s and Paul’s use of key terms, this one too falls short. As noted above, the general consensus is that Paul uses the word-group in a forensic or judicial sense of God’s declaring someone righteous, and that consensus is accepted here. Thus, the issue is over James’s use of justification. A careful examination of the evidence favors James using the expression in the same way as Paul. Justification means for James what it means for Paul: God’s declaring someone righteous.<sup>39</sup> This can be seen in that both James and Paul cite Genesis 15:6 in the course of their discussion of Abraham’s justification (Rom 4:3; Jas 2:23).<sup>40</sup> Taken within the immediate and larger Old Testament contexts, Genesis 15:6 appears to describe Abraham’s justification as a forensic act (Now he [Abraham] believed Yahweh, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness).<sup>41</sup> The verse does

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<sup>37</sup>Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 153.

<sup>38</sup>See the entries in note 31. Moo comments, “A significant number of scholars think that James is using the word in a demonstrative sense. Abraham and Rahab ‘were justified by works’ in the sense that they demonstrated their righteous status by performing good works. Any conflict with Paul would then be removed, because, while he stresses that faith is the only condition for the *declaration* of righteousness, James would be arguing that works are the only way in which that righteous status can be *demonstrated*” (James, p. 109). Moo goes on to argue against this position.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Hiebert, James, p. 192; Donald W. Burdick, “James,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 12:184–185; Moo, James, pp. 46–48, 110–111; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 40–42.

<sup>40</sup>See also Rom 4:9, 22; Gal 3:6. The citations in Rom 4:3 and Jas 2:23 are virtually identical; both appear to be based on the LXX (the only difference is that both replace the connective καί in the LXX with postpositive δέ). The LXX varies from the MT in using a passive verb, ἐλογίσθη (“it was reckoned”), for the active verb in the Hebrew, הִשְׁבִּיחַ (“and He [Yahweh] reckoned it”). This change led the LXX translators to add εἰς before δικαιοσύνην (“righteousness”) to preserve the intent of the original (involving a double accusative, see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], pp. 173–176). The changes do not materially affect the meaning of the verse. Cf. Moo, *Romans*, p. 261, n. 30.

<sup>41</sup>So, similarly, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, ed. D. A. Hubbard et al. (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 329–330, 334–335; John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 12 vols., ed. F. E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 1:129, 132; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*,

not mention Abraham's works, only his faith.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, the righteousness in view is not something Abraham had demonstrated; on the contrary, it is what God granted or imputed to him.<sup>43</sup> The expression, "He reckoned it to him as righteousness," could mean that Abraham's faith was viewed as the equivalent of righteousness. That is, the phrase could be understood in the sense that God saw Abraham's faith as itself a righteous act and responded accordingly. However, subsequent use of this construction in the OT points rather to the idea of reckoning something to someone's account that, in fact, the individual does not possess.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps the clearest example is 2 Samuel 19:20. Here, Shimei confesses his sin to David and asks David not to "credit" his guilt against him, that is, not to regard him as such. Shimei, thus, asks David to look

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NICOT, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), pp. 423–427. This is in contrast to the typical Jewish interpretation of this verse, found in the intertestamental literature and later, where Abraham's "faith" was taken to mean his "faithfulness" and was viewed as one of Abraham's "works" whereby he gained a right standing with God. Cf. Dibelius, *James*, pp. 161–163, 165, 168–174.

<sup>42</sup>The expression "he [Abraham] believed Yahweh" translates the Hebrew אֱמַן אֱבְרָהָם בַּיהוָה. Although the precise force of the *hiphil* (followed by אַ as here or sometimes by לְ) is debated, the overall thrust of the construction is generally agreed upon. As Jepsen notes, "This much is clear: Abraham reacts to the promise of Yahweh and its allusion to the stars by taking this promise of God seriously, by relying on it, or to be more specific, by relying on God and by believing that he is able to fulfill his promise" (*TDOT*, s.v. "אֱמַן," by A. Jepsen, 1:305 [1:298–309]).

A second issue concerns the syntax of the construction in that the perfect used here breaks the narrative sequence of *waw* consecutives plus preterites which occur in the verses both before and after this construction. It is probably best to take the *waw* prefixed to the perfect as a copulative and see the entire verse as somewhat parenthetical or, perhaps, transitional. In these constructions, the perfect often has the force of a pluperfect. Cf. Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, pp. 540–541. Thus, the narrator, Moses, informs the reader that Abraham had (already) believed in God's promise(s) and, as a consequence, that God had declared Abraham righteous. "The verse is placed here as a conclusion to the dialogue in which Abram questioned God about the promise, and prior to the enacting of the covenant. Abram's status as a believer to whom God imputed righteousness is reported here—now God will bind himself by covenant to Abram the believer" (Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], p. 310). This interpretation allows the verse to be harmonized with statements in the NT which describe Abraham as one who believed in God prior to Gen 15:6. In fact, according to Heb 11:8, Abraham had exercised faith in God when he left Ur of the Chaldees. As Hamilton notes, "The action of faith preceded the vocabulary of faith" (*Genesis 1–17*, p. 423).

<sup>43</sup>The MT reads וַיִּחְשְׁבֶהָ לּוֹ צְדָקָה ( "And He reckoned it to him as righteousness"). The subject of the verb is Yahweh, not Abraham, and the antecedent to the feminine pronominal object ("it") is the preceding statement about Abraham's faith (Waltke and O'Connor call this a "neutrum," where the antecedent is somewhat vague and may refer to a preceding action or state [*Syntax*, p. 305]). Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, p. 425.

<sup>44</sup>The verb חָשַׁב followed by the preposition לְ.

upon him in a way that does not correspond to the facts (cf. Gen 31:15; Lev 7:18; Num 18:27, 30; Ps 32:2). This and other parallel passages strongly suggest that the expression “to reckon Abraham’s faith as righteousness” means specifically “to account to him a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him.”<sup>45</sup>

Having said that, the critical passage for James in this debate is 2:21 where justification is predicated, not on Abraham’s faith, as in Paul, but on Abraham’s works. Here too the evidence favors a forensic or judicial force.<sup>46</sup> This verse looks back to Genesis 22:1–19 when God directed Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac. While the justification word-group or its equivalents do not appear in Genesis 22, clearly it is God who tests Abraham (22:1); it is God who acknowledges Abraham’s faith and obedience (22:11–12, 18); and it is God who reaffirms His promises to Abraham (22:15–18).<sup>47</sup> There is nothing in Genesis 22 about what others witnessed concerning Abraham’s deeds and everything about what God declared.<sup>48</sup> It must be admitted that Rahab’s justification in James 2:25 poses a problem. As mentioned earlier, 2:25 refers to events recorded in Joshua 2 and Rahab’s protecting the two Hebrew spies. There is no overt reference in Joshua 2 or elsewhere to what God declared concerning Rahab, only to what the spies witnessed and subsequently reported (cf. Josh 6:16–17, 22–25). However, the other uses of “justified” in James 2 clearly support a declarative sense and that is assumed to be true here as well. It may be that there was an unrecorded divine declaration regarding Rahab that underlies Joshua’s directives about her to the Israelite army in Joshua 6. In any case, resolving the tension between the two authors based on their use of the justification word-group is not supported.

### Contextual Solutions

The second approach to harmonizing James and Paul on the justification of Abraham involves identifying their respective purpose and occasion for writing. Attempts along this line generally focus on two related issues: first, defining the problem each addresses; second, distinguishing the perspective each has in the discussion of justification and

<sup>45</sup>Robertson, “Gen 15:6,” p. 265 (pp. 265–266). Cf. Moo, *Romans*, pp. 261–262.

<sup>46</sup>See note 38.

<sup>47</sup>The heavenly speaker in vv. 11ff. is the angel of the Lord (מַלְאָךְ יְהוָה). He appears to be the same as God (אֱלֹהִים) in v.12 (cf. vv. 1–2) and as Yahweh (יהוה) in vv. 15ff. So Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, pp. 449–451 (along with documentation). See the discussion in *TDOT*, s.v. “מַלְאָךְ,” by D. N. Freedman et al., 8:317–324.

<sup>48</sup>See Hiebert, *James*, pp. 191, 195–196; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 103.

works.<sup>49</sup>

### Defining the Problem

A growing number of interpreters argue that much of the tension between the two can be resolved by recognizing that James and Paul addressed different concerns. These differing concerns, in turn, required separate lines of argument and different theological expressions which, when properly understood, are seen as complementary rather than as contradictory.<sup>50</sup> Specifically, Paul combats some form of Jewish legalism in his discussion of justification in Romans and elsewhere.<sup>51</sup> Against such confidence in human works, “Paul highlights faith as the sole instrument of justification.”<sup>52</sup> James, on the other hand, responds in his discussion to a form of dead orthodoxy,<sup>53</sup> or even antinomianism,<sup>54</sup> both of which discounted works altogether. Against this kind of error, James asserts the necessity of works. Thus, James and Paul “are not an-

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<sup>49</sup>E.g., Moo, *James*, pp. 44–48.

<sup>50</sup>Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 34. C. L. Mitton observes, “The kind of error Paul is seeking to correct in Romans and Galatians is very different from the error which James is resisting, and our statement of a truth varies according to the error we are opposing. If we ourselves were arguing against antinomians, who believed that moral conduct in a Christian was of little importance, our arguments would be very different from those we should use if our opponents were ‘legalists’ who believed that good conduct alone secured all the benefits of religion” (*The Epistle of James* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966], p. 104).

<sup>51</sup>See, for example, Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John*, NICNT, ed. N. B. Stonehouse (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 53; J. Jeremias, “Paul and James,” *ExpTim* 66 (1954–1955): 371; Curtis Vaughan, *James*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), p. 56; Moo, *James*, pp. 45–46; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 49; Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 161.

<sup>52</sup>Moo, *James*, p. 46. Moo’s excursus on the issue of legalism within first century Judaism (*Romans*, pp. 211–217) supports the traditional position that the Jews in Paul’s day did, in fact, believe that by keeping the Law they could attain a right standing with God. He argues against such recent reconstructions of first century Judaism as found, for example, in E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [London: SCM, 1977]; *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983]). Sanders, in contrast, has argued that the Jews of Paul’s day were not legalists in that they did not see the Law as a means of *attaining* a right standing with God, but only as a means of *maintaining* such a standing, a standing that was theirs already by virtue of divine election. Moo’s arguments are persuasive in defense of the traditional view. See, similarly, Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of the Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), pp. 114–121.

<sup>53</sup>E.g., Moo, *James*, p. 46.

<sup>54</sup>E.g., Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 34, 49.

tagonists facing each other with crossed swords, they stand back to back, confronting different foes of the Gospel.”<sup>55</sup>

### Distinguishing the Perspective

The corollary to this commonly offered solution to the apparent conflict between James and Paul is to distinguish the perspective each had in discussing justification and works. Assuming the validity of the previous conclusions on the specific problems James and Paul were addressing, many of these same interpreters further hold that the two authors were not looking at works or justification from the same vantage point.<sup>56</sup> The issue here is not one of definition, but one of perspective. These interpreters are not proposing substantially different definitions of justification and works. Rather, they conclude that James and Paul are viewing these two concepts from different angles.

Taking first the concept of works, proponents argue that when Paul claims a person is justified by faith and not by works, he is referring to works that *precede* salvation (conversion). Conversely, when James states that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone, he has in view works that are produced by faith and, hence, works that *follow* salvation.<sup>57</sup> Obviously, they say, works that are ruled out as a condition for salvation and works that are insisted upon as the evidence of salvation are not the same. Consequently, the statements by these two authors would not be in conflict.<sup>58</sup>

These same advocates further argue that, if Paul rules out works that precede salvation and James insists on works that follow salvation, they

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<sup>55</sup>Ross, *James and John*, p. 53. There is considerable debate on the literary relationship between James and Paul in their respective discussions regarding justification. The consensus among contemporary scholars has been that James is responding to an aberrant form of Paul's gospel of justification by faith alone. Cf. Dibelius, *James*, pp. 178–180; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 34–35; Martin, *James*, pp. 95–96. However, there is a growing number of scholars who have argued that the two wrote independently of each other. Johnson concludes, “Despite the remarkable points of resemblance, they appear not to be talking to each other by way of instruction or correction. Rather they seem to be addressing concerns specific to each author” (*James*, p. 64 [pp. 58–64]). Cf. Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 19–21, 50–51; Fung, “Justification in James,” pp. 159–160; Richardson, *James*, p. 141. It is difficult to decide between the two positions in that the evidence appears inconclusive. In any case, either position is compatible with the conclusions drawn in the present study.

<sup>56</sup>E.g., Moo, *James*, pp. 44–48; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 36–42.

<sup>57</sup>So Moo, *James*, p. 46, 101–102; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” pp. 38–39; and, on the sole issue of works, Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 161.

<sup>58</sup>Fung states, “Their difference lies rather in the different contexts in which they speak of ‘works’: Paul denies any efficacy to pre-conversion works in the matter of justification, James affirms the absolute necessity of post-conversion works as evidence of justifying faith” (“Justification in James,” p. 161).

must be viewing justification differently as well.<sup>59</sup> Paul means by justification the activity whereby a sinner is given a new status, a right standing before God. This new status is secured through faith and involves the sinner's transfer from the realm of sin and death to the realm of righteousness and life.<sup>60</sup> The point, they note, is that when Paul refers to justification, he has in view this initial transfer. Furthermore, Paul's statement in Romans 4:5 about Abraham's believing in "the one who justifies the ungodly" (τὸν δικαιοῦντα τὸν ἀσεβῆ), gives a telling insight into Paul's conviction regarding Abraham's justification. It not only identifies something of what Abraham believed, it also identifies something about Abraham's status prior to his justification. It depicts Abraham at the moment of his justification as ungodly and, therefore, incapable of contributing any works that would make him acceptable to God.<sup>61</sup> The term "ungodly" (ἀσεβῆ) is a harsh expression, describing one who is not simply irreverent but a transgressor. It is used in Romans 5:6 where it is roughly synonymous with the expression "sinner" in 5:8 and as the antonym of "righteous" in 5:7.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, since it is the *sinner* who is justified, the one who has no righteousness of his own to offer, Paul necessarily affirms that works can have no role in obtaining this transfer.

On the other hand, according to these interpreters, James means by justification a declaration by God affirming the believer's status as a righteous individual.<sup>63</sup> This meaning, they point out, reflects the dominant use of justification in the Septuagint, in extra-biblical Jewish

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<sup>59</sup>As Moo notes, "If Paul has in mind works that precede conversion and James works that follow conversion, it follows that the 'justification' for which these respective works are the basis must be something different in Paul than in James" (*James*, p. 46).

<sup>60</sup>Moo's comment is representative, "Paul gives to the term justification a very distinct meaning, one that is closely related to his whole theological perspective. He designates with this language the initial transfer of a person from the realm of sin and death to the realm of holiness and life. This transfer takes place by virtue of the sinner's identification, by faith, with Jesus Christ, 'the righteous one.' For Paul, then, justification is a sovereign, judicial act in which God, apart from any human 'work,' declares the sinner to be innocent before him" (*James*, p. 108).

<sup>61</sup>Moo, *James*, p. 46. The uniqueness of this act in Rom 4:5 is highlighted when set beside those passages in the OT where God condemns human judges who "justify" the guilty (Isa 5:23; Prov 17:15) and declares that He himself will not do such (Exod 23:7). The difference, of course, involves God's divine prerogatives and his gracious provision for the guilty who believe as Abraham believed. See Morris, *Romans*, pp. 198–199; Moo, *Romans*, pp. 263–265.

<sup>62</sup>*TDNT*, s.v. "ἀσεβής," by W. Foerster, 7:190–191; *NIDNTT*, s.v. "σέβομαι," by W. Günther, 2:93–94.

<sup>63</sup>See the discussion in the preceding section on the definition of "justification" in James, along with the documentation.

literature, and frequently in the Gospels. As such, it is similar to a verdict of “righteous” or “innocent” rendered by a judge based on known and observable facts.<sup>64</sup> In 2:21, James states that God declared Abraham righteous in connection with the offering of Isaac.<sup>65</sup> Clearly here, they conclude, James is using justification to describe a subsequent declaration by God regarding Abraham, affirming Abraham as a righteous individual. Since justification in this case is a verdict based upon the evidence, James insists on works as the necessary evidence.<sup>66</sup>

This combined approach to resolving the tension between the two authors has much to commend it. The description of the specific occasions which prompted James’s and Paul’s remarks appears to agree with a straightforward reading of the texts and with the historical evidence. The two are not adversaries. Paul combats legalism in his comments in Romans and elsewhere; James combats a dead orthodoxy or possibly antinomianism in the comments in his epistle. Furthermore, distinguishing between the perspectives of the two authors regarding their use of justification and works appears to resolve the tension over their pronouncements concerning Abraham. Paul addresses Abraham’s initial justification which was based on faith alone. James, on the other hand, addresses Abraham’s subsequent justification which was based on works and which affirmed Abraham’s righteousness. What remains is to examine the key passages in James 2:21–24 to determine if, in fact, the text supports the above interpretation.

## EXAMINATION OF JAMES 2:21–24

Two key issues must be considered in the examination of the James

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<sup>64</sup>See *NIDNTT*, s.v. “Righteousness, Justification,” by H. Seebass and C. Brown, 3:356–359; and, especially, the excursus in Moo on “‘Justification’ in the Old Testament and Judaism” (*James*, pp. 109–111). So also Jeremias, “Paul and James,” p. 370; Dibelius, *James*, p. 162; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 40.

<sup>65</sup>See the discussion of this verse in the following section, “Examination of James 2:21–24.”

<sup>66</sup>Moo, *James*, pp. 46–48, 109–111. He states, “The verb *dikaioo* occurs forty-four times in the LXX. Of the twenty-eight times there is a Hebrew original, twenty-two involve a form of the verb *sadaq*. The word is associated above all with the ‘law court,’ and describes the verdict of innocence rendered by the judge. *Sadaq* is often used without direct reference to a legal setting, but the forensic connotations are maintained (Gn. 38:26; 44:16; Je. 3:11; Ezk. 16:51–52). Very often God is pictured as the judge before whom one pleads one’s case (1 Sa. 12:7; Is. 43:26; Mi 7:9) and who passes judgment on the lives of men and women. What is particularly important is that this divine verdict is usually rendered with respect to actual conduct. For example, in Micah 6:11, the Lord warns that he will not acquit (*dikaioo*) the man ‘with wicked scales’” (*James*, p. 110).

passage.<sup>67</sup> The first is to determine the relationship between verse 21 and verse 23. In other words, what is the relationship between James' declaration in verse 21 that Abraham was justified by works and his quotation of Genesis 15:6 in verse 23 describing Abraham's justification by faith? Does the interpretation of these verses support the contention that James recognized both Abraham's initial justification by faith and his subsequent justification by works? The second issue involves verse 24 and the statement by James that a person is not justified by faith alone. Specifically, what is the force of the adverb "alone?" Does James deny the Pauline principle of *sola fide*, or is he simply stating that a faith without works cannot justify?

### Verses 21–23

As mentioned above, the task here is to examine these verses in sequence in order to determine the relationship between Abraham's justification by works in verse 21 and his justification by faith in verse 23.

#### Verse 21

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

Two concerns arise from this verse. The first is to identify the overall structure of the verse and its significance. The entire verse is generally understood as a rhetorical question which, with the negative particle οὐκ, makes a positive assertion.<sup>68</sup> James affirms, in effect, that Abraham *was* justified by works.<sup>69</sup> The verse itself, along with those that follow, illustrates and supports James's proposition in 2:14–20 that a true, saving faith must produce works. Such was the case with Abraham.<sup>70</sup> There is some question as to the force of the phrase "by works" (ἐξ ἔργων) and why the plural "works" is used since only one "work" is mentioned, the offering of Isaac. Regarding the former, the prepositional phrase may

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<sup>67</sup>The text of the passage under consideration is fairly stable. Those variants listed are relatively minor and are discussed as necessary in the interpretation that follows. For discussion on the text of James, see Dibelius, *James*, pp. 57–61; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 59–61; Johnson, *James*, pp. 4–7.

<sup>68</sup>E.g., Hiebert *James*, p. 191; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 103; Fung, "Justification in James," pp. 152, 282, n. 50.

<sup>69</sup>On the meaning of "justified" (ἐδικαιώθη), see the discussion in the preceding section under "Contextual Solutions," along with the documentation.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., Hiebert, *James*, p. 190. On the significance of the Abraham and Rahab illustrations for James's argument, see Moo, *James*, pp. 108, 116–117.

be taken as a genitive of means, of cause, or possibly of source. In any case, there is general agreement among interpreters that the construction would point to Abraham's works as the basis of or reason for the justification mentioned here.<sup>71</sup> Regarding James's use of the plural "works," several have concluded that James has in mind the "ten works" of Abraham that were well known in Jewish literature and that included the offering of Isaac as the apex. In defense of this interpretation, the references to Abraham's works in Jewish literature frequently associate these works with a reference to Abraham as God's friend, as does James in 2:23.<sup>72</sup> Others have argued that the plural should be understood as a categorical or generalizing plural, of which the particular "work" mentioned in the verse is but one example. In support of this position, it is pointed out that James uses the plural exclusively in this section, even when a single work is in view as in 2:15–16 and 2:25.<sup>73</sup> This latter view appears to be the better approach. In 2:25, James uses the identical statement, "justified by *works*," with reference to Rahab as he does in this verse with reference to Abraham. Although Rahab is celebrated in Jewish literature as a true proselyte and as a model of hospitality and obedience, there does not appear to be a corresponding tradition of Rahab's works for James to be drawing upon in using the plural here. Furthermore, as with 2:21 and Abraham, the plural is found in 2:25 with essentially only one work in view, that of Rahab's protecting the spies (ἀγγέλους, lit. "messengers").<sup>74</sup>

The second concern with this verse is to pinpoint the relationship between the statement about Abraham's offering Isaac and the statement about his being justified. The statement about Abraham's offering Isaac is a participial clause functioning adverbially and modifying the main clause, referring to Abraham's justification. The participle "offered" (ἀνευέγκας) is probably temporal and, in any case, identifies an action

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<sup>71</sup>On the use of the preposition itself, see *BAGD*, pp. 234–235; *NIDNTT*, s.v. "Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament," by M. Harris, 3:1189–1190.

<sup>72</sup>Cf. Dibelius, *James*, pp. 168–174; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 127–128; Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), pp. 144–148.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. Laws, *James*, pp. 134–135; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 103; Rakestraw, "James 2:14–26," p. 39; Fung, "Justification in James," p. 152.

<sup>74</sup>As Laws comments, "...the plural is really no more appropriate in the case of Rahab [than in the case of Abraham], for the reception and safe-conduct of the messengers is a single event rather than two distinct actions; and the use of *erga* in both examples surely derives from the contrast between *faith* and *works* throughout vv. 14–26, the language being imposed on both illustrations of the theme, rather than emerging from a strictly literal consideration of their content" (*James*, p. 135).

that is logically, at least, prior to the verb “justified” in the main clause.<sup>75</sup> As such, the entire participial clause identifies not only the occasion when Abraham was justified, but also the particular “work” James singles out as the basis for Abraham’s justification.<sup>76</sup> As noted earlier regarding Genesis 22, Abraham offered Isaac in response to God’s command. Although the act was halted before Abraham actually took Isaac’s life, nevertheless it was clear Abraham intended to go through with what God had commanded (cf. Gen 22:9–12).<sup>77</sup> James points to this act of obedience on Abraham’s part as a “work” which led to Abraham’s being “justified.” In other words, James is saying that Abraham was justified by his works, specifically in conjunction with the offering of his son.

### Verse 22

You see that his faith was working together with his works, and by his works his faith was perfected.

Three problems are encountered with this verse. The first is to discern the relationship this verse has with the preceding verse. Verse 22 appears to be clarifying a principle that verse 21 has illustrated, namely, that a saving faith necessarily will produce works.<sup>78</sup> James’s thesis in this passage has been two-pronged: a faith without works is not a true, saving faith (vv. 14, 17, 20); a true, saving faith will produce works (vv. 18, 21, 25).<sup>79</sup> The Abraham illustration in verse 21 has substantiated the second prong of James’s thesis, which verse 22 now reiterates. This is supported by the construction, “You see” (βλέπεις), at the beginning of the verse. Although the construction could be taken as an interrogative, the majority of interpreters take it as declarative.<sup>80</sup> In either case, the use of the

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<sup>75</sup>Most translations take the aorist participle as temporal and translate the participial clause as “when he offered” as they do the corresponding participial construction in 2:25 (KJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NKJV). On viewing the participle as antecedent to “justified,” see, for example, Hiebert, *James*, p. 192; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 41.

<sup>76</sup>Dibelius, *James*, p. 162. He states, “under no circumstances should one assume...that the offering of Isaac is mentioned here merely in order to fix the point in time when the justification of Abraham took place, for then the author’s thesis would be left without evidence.” He notes the same is true with the participial clause in 2:25.

<sup>77</sup>Hiebert concurs, “Although Genesis 22 describes how God halted the offering before it was consummated, the use here of the aorist presents it as a completed act in Abraham’s intention” (*James*, p. 192).

<sup>78</sup>Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 154

<sup>79</sup>Hiebert, *James*, pp. 175, 190; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 101–102; Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 154.

<sup>80</sup>See, for example, Dibelius, *James*, p. 163, n. 73, who argues that were it an interrogative, then some form of address would have been expected as in v. 20.

second person singular points the reader back to the imaginary objector of verse 18. The construction itself serves to introduce a logical deduction or inference based on the preceding example in verse 21, and calls on James's opponent to acknowledge the force and validity of the inference.<sup>81</sup>

The second problem encountered here is to identify the precise roles of faith and works in the first part of the verse. Understanding how this verse functions within James's argument helps in solving this second problem. While Abraham's faith is not mentioned in verse 21, verse 22 assumes that Abraham's faith was both present and active in the offering of Isaac. As mentioned above, the expression "You see" at the beginning of this verse indicates that what James states here is an inference from the Abraham example of the previous verse. Since James mentions both Abraham's works and his faith in this verse, both must be inferred from the example in verse 21.<sup>82</sup>

Furthermore, the point James has been emphasizing in these verses is that a true, saving faith produces works. That is, a true faith validates its genuineness by its works.<sup>83</sup> The verb James uses here is a compound verb meaning "to work together with," "to cooperate with," "to help."<sup>84</sup> Although the precise relationship between faith and works and the specific force of the compound in this verse is debated, it is best to take the two, faith and works, as distinct and yet related. James does not argue that the two are synonymous, only that works are the necessary *fruit* of a true, saving faith (cf. 2:14–20). In addition, the verb should be understood here in the sense that works "aided" or "supported" Abraham's faith. That is, Abraham's works "supported and sustained the fact that his faith was a living faith."<sup>85</sup> Therefore, to say that Abraham's "faith

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<sup>81</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 193; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 104.

<sup>82</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 193; Moo, *James*, p. 111; Martin, *James*, p. 93; Fung, "Justification in James," p. 154, 283, n. 67. Others conclude that the reference to Abraham's faith stems from the author's and readers' familiarity with the Jewish tradition surrounding Gen 15:6, a reference James cites in the following verse. So Dibelius, *James*, p. 163; Davids, *Epistle of James*, pp. 128–129.

<sup>83</sup>Cf. Moo, *James*, pp. 111–112; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 104.

<sup>84</sup>BAGD, p. 787. Two issues should be mentioned regarding the verb "was working together with." (1) Although a few textual witnesses have the present tense (συνεργεῖ), the external evidence overwhelmingly supports the imperfect (συνήργει). See Dibelius, *James*, p. 163, n. 71, for a brief discussion. (2) The use of the imperfect tense indicates that Abraham's faith expressed itself in works on more than one occasion. Thus, the event described in v. 21 should not be viewed as an isolated incident, but as simply one occasion, albeit a striking one, where Abraham's faith expressed itself in works. Cf. Martin, *James*, p. 93.

<sup>85</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 194. Cf. Kent, *Faith that Works*, p.

was working together with his works” means that Abraham’s faith was the source of his works and that his works were an expression, the manifestation of his faith.<sup>86</sup> The two, faith and works, were working together in that Abraham’s faith produced works and these works validated his faith.

The third problem encountered here is to define the expression “faith was perfected” at the end of the verse. Two points need to be noted in connection with this statement. The first is that James’s declaration here suggests the temporal priority of Abraham’s faith over his works. To say that Abraham’s faith was perfected by his works implies that Abraham’s faith came first.<sup>87</sup> The second point, related to the first, concerns the meaning of “perfected” (ἐτελειώθη). James does not imply with this expression that Abraham’s faith prior to Genesis 22 was insufficient to save. Saving faith is still saving faith, even before it expresses itself in works.<sup>88</sup> Rather, the thought here is that Abraham’s faith was perfected in that it reached its intended goal and accomplished its intended purpose in the offering of Isaac.<sup>89</sup> The oft-quoted analogy by Mayor captures the force of the expression, “As a tree is perfected by its fruit, so faith by its works.”<sup>90</sup> A tree fulfills its purpose and demonstrates that it is a living tree through the bearing of fruit. Similarly, faith attains its goal and shows its viability through the producing of works (cf. Eph 2:8–10). Thus, James is saying that Abraham’s faith was brought to its intended expression in works by which the genuineness of Abraham’s faith was clearly shown.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup>C. E. B. Cranfield, “The Message of James,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, p. 169. Cf. Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 154.

<sup>87</sup>Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, AB, ed. W. F. Albright and D. N. Freedman (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), p. 34; Hiebert, *James*, p. 194; Vernon D. Doerksen, *James*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1983), p. 71. As Doerksen observes, “That Abraham’s faith was perfected by his works implied that his faith came first, and that it was matured by his works.”

<sup>88</sup>As Hiebert notes, “The statement implies the prior existence of his [Abraham’s] faith, but the meaning is not that his faith at first was defective and insufficient for God to declare him righteous. ‘There are in reality no degrees of justifying faith’” (*James*, p. 194, citing R. V. G. Tasker, *The General Epistle of James*, TNTC, ed. R. V. G. Tasker [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976], p. 69). Cf. Adamson, *Epistle of James*, p. 130; Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 44; Martin, *James*, p. 93

<sup>89</sup>Hiebert, *James*, p. 194; Doerksen, *James*, p. 71; Rakestraw, “James, 2:14–26,” p. 44. Cf. BAGD, p. 809–810; *TDNT*, s.v. “τελειώω,” by G. Delling, 8:82.

<sup>90</sup>Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (reprint of 1913 ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), p. 104.

<sup>91</sup>Hiebert’s comments are apropos, “That goal was that through faith Abraham should be brought into such intimate relations with God that he would voluntarily act to place God first in every area of his life. That goal was effectively attained through the

## Verse 23

And the Scripture was fulfilled which said, “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” and he was called the friend of God.

Two issues are raised with this verse. The first is to establish the role of the citation from Genesis 15:6 in the flow of James’s argument.<sup>92</sup> The citation itself serves as the theological starting point in James’s discussion of Abraham.<sup>93</sup> James uses Abraham to illustrate and support his thesis that a saving faith produces works.<sup>94</sup> He has already established Abraham’s works, in verse 21. In this verse, he cites Genesis 15:6 in order to establish Abraham’s faith. Having said that, the citation itself serves three purposes in James’s argument. It confirms a point that James has assumed all along in his illustration, Abraham’s faith. It affirms not only that Abraham believed in God, but also that God recognized the genuineness of Abraham’s faith.<sup>95</sup> Next, the citation also acknowledges that Abraham was justified, declared righteous by God, based on faith and not works.<sup>96</sup> Finally, as a corollary to the previous, it also acknowledges that Abraham’s justification by faith was prior to Genesis 22 when

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events recorded in Genesis 22. And thus ‘by works,’ again the plural of category, ‘was faith made perfect,’ brought to its intended goal. The works demonstrated the vital nature of the faith that produced them” (*James*, p. 194).

<sup>92</sup>The concluding statement of the verse, “and he was called a friend of God,” does not directly bear on the issue of Abraham’s justification, the topic of this study. For discussion, see Mayor, *St. James*, p. 105; Ropes, *St. James*, pp. 222–223; Dibelius, *James*, pp. 172–173.

<sup>93</sup>As Moo states, “Genesis 15:6, which has been behind James’s discussion of Abraham all along, is now cited” (*James*, p. 113). Several argue that James follows a typical Jewish midrashic approach in turning to Gen 15:6 here. Such an approach would cite a primary text in support of a thesis, Gen 22 in this case, and then, after a brief discussion, would turn to a secondary text(s), Gen 15 here, which may be loosely connected to the first and which would be used to support both the interpretation of the primary text and the overall thesis. Cf. Davids, *Epistle of James*, p. 129; Martin, *James*, p. 93. Caution must be exercised in identifying the technique James uses here as midrashic. The term itself is somewhat slippery in that scholars have not agreed upon a definition. Furthermore, Rabbinic midrash frequently linked texts that were, in fact, not related whereas here the two passages are clearly related. For further discussion, see Richard Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), esp. pp. 32–38.

<sup>94</sup>See the comments with the interpretation of v. 21 on James’s thesis in 2:14–26.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. Hiebert, *James*, p. 195.

<sup>96</sup>See the previous discussion on Gen 15:6 under “Lexical Solutions.”

Abraham was justified by works.<sup>97</sup>

The second issue here is to capture the meaning of the word “fulfilled” (ἐπληρώθη) in the statement, “the Scripture was fulfilled” at the beginning of the verse. This expression should *not* be understood in the sense of the fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>98</sup> The Scripture James has in mind is clearly the citation from Genesis 15:6 which follows. Nothing in Genesis 15:6 suggests that this is a prophecy. Genesis 15:6 is part of a historical narrative which simply records what God did for Abraham in response to Abraham’s faith.<sup>99</sup> As used in the NT, “fulfilled” can refer to the realization of a prophecy, to the interpretation and application of an OT Law (Matt 5:17), or to the identification of the underlying significance of a historical event (Matt 2:15).<sup>100</sup> This last use best fits the context here. To say that Genesis 15:6 was “fulfilled” is to say that the event recorded there was “proven” or “confirmed” or “shown to be true.”<sup>101</sup> James does not deny that Abraham was given a righteous standing before God on the basis of his faith, nor that this occurred well before he offered Isaac in obedience to God’s command. Rather, James emphasizes that Abraham’s faith was a true, saving faith and that God’s verdict in Genesis 15:6 was reconfirmed in Genesis 22 on the basis of the works that Abraham’s faith produced.<sup>102</sup>

### Verse 24

You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.

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<sup>97</sup>Cf. Kent, *Faith that Works*, pp. 105–106. The commentaries suggest that the events recorded in Gen 22 occurred approximately thirty years after the events of Gen 15; the rabbis typically place Gen 22 fifty years after Gen 15. See, for example, Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James* (reprint of 1913 ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), p. 104.

<sup>98</sup>This is in contrast to the following who take Gen 15:6 as containing a prophetic element: Ropes, *St. James*, p. 221; Hiebert, *James*, p. 195 (who speaks of a “prophetic element” in Gen 15:6); Johnson, *James*, p. 243. See Fung for various approaches to the meaning of “fulfilled” in this verse (“Justification in James,” p. 284, n. 82).

<sup>99</sup>As Moo comments, “But what does James mean when he asserts that this *scripture* was *fulfilled* as a result of Abraham’s obedience? Certainly Genesis 15:6 is not a prophecy. It straightforwardly asserts that God ‘reckoned,’ or ‘considered,’ Abraham’s faith—in this context, specifically his belief in God’s promise to give him a natural son and many descendants—for ‘righteousness’” (*James*, p. 113). Cf. Rakestraw, “James 2:14–26,” p. 45; Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 155.

<sup>100</sup>Moo, *James*, p. 113. Cf. BAGD, p. 671.

<sup>101</sup>Burdick, “James,” p. 184; Doerksen, *James*, p. 71; Kent, *Faith that Works*, p. 106; Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 155. Fung states, “in Abraham’s offering of Isaac, the scriptural statement of Gen 15:6 proved to be, or was confirmed as, correct.”

<sup>102</sup>Moo, *James*, pp. 113–114.

With this verse, James concludes his discussion of Abraham by setting forth a theological principle drawn from the previous verses. He begins with the plural “you see” (ὁρᾶτε), indicating that he is once again addressing his readers, calling on them to recognize the force and validity of his conclusion.<sup>103</sup> The principle itself is presented as a universal truth. James puts it in the present tense, “is justified” (δικαιούται), and uses the generic “man” (ἄνθρωπος) as its subject.<sup>104</sup> The chief concern here is to identify the force of the adverb “alone” (μόνον) in James’s statement that a man is not justified “by faith alone” (ἐκ πίστεως μόνον). Does James, after all, deny the Pauline principle of *sola fide*, or does he simply restate his thesis that a faith without works cannot justify? It must be noted here that James does not categorically reject the efficacy of faith with this statement. James is not ruling out justification by faith *per se* in this verse. Rather, he is ruling out justification by faith *alone*. Had James not included this modifier he certainly would have been in conflict not only with Romans 3:28 et al., but also with his own citation of Genesis 15:6 in the previous verse.<sup>105</sup> Having said this, what James meant by this statement must still be determined.

There appear to be two possible interpretations of James’s statement, depending on the function of the adverb and its meaning. The adverb “alone” could be used here as an adjective modifying “faith.” In this case, James would be describing a faith that is *alone*, an isolated, solitary, unaccompanied faith.<sup>106</sup> The thought would be similar to what he wrote at the end of 2:17. There James describes a faith that is “by itself” (καθ’ ἑαυτὴν) which, earlier in the same verse, he describes as “not having works” (μὴ ἔχῃ ἔργα). In other words, a faith that is “by itself” and a faith that is “alone” would both refer to a faith that is devoid of works.<sup>107</sup> With this in mind, James’s statement at the end of 2:24 would simply mean that such a faith cannot justify, the very point James developed in 2:14–20. As consistent as this translation is with the

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<sup>103</sup>See the previous treatment of the corresponding construction with the singular in v. 22.

<sup>104</sup>Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 155.

<sup>105</sup>Moo, *James*, p. 115.

<sup>106</sup>So, apparently, BAGD, p.528. The editors categorize this construction under the use of the adverb with negatives and give the meaning for the adverb “in isolation.” Their gloss for this verse, “not by faith viewed in isolation,” suggests that they are taking the adverb as modifying the noun “faith.” Cf. *EWNT*, s.v. “μόνος,” by J. Fitzmyer, 2:442, who states that this adverb does modify nouns and pronouns in the NT, and lists Jas 2:24 under this category.

<sup>107</sup>So the majority of commentaries. See, for example, Johnson, *James*, p. 245. For a discussion of the phrase in 2:17, see Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 148.

preceding context, it must be acknowledged that this is a somewhat rare use of the adverb, and there is only limited support for such a use elsewhere in the New Testament.<sup>108</sup>

The second possibility takes the adverb as modifying an implied verb “justified,” supplied by ellipsis from the first part of the verse. In this case, James would be saying that a man is justified by works and not *only* by faith.<sup>109</sup> In other words, James concludes that there is one justification by faith and another by works and that both are necessary.<sup>110</sup> Again, it must be pointed out that this interpretation does not deny the efficacy of faith for justification. As mentioned above, James has already acknowledged its efficacy when he cited Genesis 15:6 in the preceding verse. Rather, James would simply be arguing here that there must be both an initial justification by faith and a subsequent justification by works. Assuming this is the case, the exact timing of this subsequent justification is debated. Some argue that James has in view a subsequent justification in this life. Others argue that he has in mind a justification at the final judgment.<sup>111</sup> The point in either case is that if

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<sup>108</sup>New Testament Greek grammars generally allow for the use of the adverb to modify a substantive (e.g., Rom 3:26, ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ), and this includes the adverb μόνον as well. Cf. F. Blass, A. Debrunner, and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961], pp. 126, 224, who speak of an occasional “confusing” of the adverb μόνον with the adjective μόνος in the NT. They list Mark 6:8; Acts 11:19; 1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 12:26; Jas 1:22; 1 John 5:6 as examples where the adverb is used instead of the adjective, yet having the force of the adjective. To reinforce the fact that the adverb appears to be used as an adjective, several of the above passages have a variant where the corresponding adjective is read. A. T. Robertson apparently agrees, mentioning some of the same texts as noted above (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. [Nashville: Broadman, 1934], p. 657). The same may be said with J. H. Moulton, W. F. Howard, and Nigel Turner (*A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, 3 vols. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908–1963], 3:225–226). H. W. Smyth notes that there is a similar rare use of the adverb modifying a substantive in Classical Greek (*Greek Grammar*, rev. G. Messing [Cambridge: Harvard, 1956], p. 283).

<sup>109</sup>Of the commentaries consulted, very few actually championed this position outright. A few did indicate, however, that this is how the verse should be taken, either by their translation of the verse or by their remarks or both. Cf. Tasker, *James*, p. 70.

<sup>110</sup>There are a number of interpreters who conclude that this is what James means here, regardless of how they translate the last clause of this verse. Those that take the adverb as modifying the noun “faith,” rather than the verb “justified,” arrive at this conclusion from vv. 21, 23, as well as from the first part of v. 24. See, for example, Moo, *James*, pp. 114–115.

<sup>111</sup>For the former, see Rakestraw, “James, 2:14–26,” pp. 40–42; Fung, “Justification in James,” p. 153; for the latter, see Davids, *Epistle of James*, p. 132; Moo, *James*, pp. 109–111. There is some support for taking “justified by works” in this verse to refer to the final judgment. Proponents argue that the justification word group is frequently found in this sense in the OT, in Judaism, and in the Gospels. See also *TDNT*,

there are no works on which the latter justification is based, that does not mean that somehow the former justification has failed. It only shows that there was no initial justification to begin with because the faith that was exercised was not a true, saving faith.<sup>112</sup>

Deciding between the two interpretations of the passage is difficult. The former fits well James's argument in 2:14–20 that a faith without works cannot save, cannot justify. As was noted, though, it assumes a rare use of the adverb as an adjective. The latter interpretation follows closely James's argument in the immediately preceding verses concerning Abraham. Abraham, as has been shown, was justified initially by faith and subsequently by works.<sup>113</sup> Yet this latter interpretation postulates a subsequent justification of the believer that is not directly addressed elsewhere in the New Testament. In any case, neither is in conflict with Paul's principle of *sola fide*. As such, either is acceptable.

## CONCLUSION

In the section on contextual solutions, it was argued that James and Paul in their discussion of Abraham and justification were not adversaries, facing each other across the lines of battle. Rather, they were to be seen as fellow soldiers standing back to back, addressing different concerns and combating different enemies. For Paul, the enemy was legalism; for James, it was either dead orthodoxy or antinomianism. Furthermore, it was also argued that the two authors necessarily viewed both justification and works from different perspectives. Paul meant by justification the initial act whereby God imputes righteousness to the sinner based on faith alone. James meant by justification the subsequent act whereby God confirms the righteous standing of the redeemed based on works. When Paul claims that one is justified by faith alone, apart from works, he is referring to works that precede salvation. Conversely,

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s.v. "δικαιοσύνη et al.," by G. Schrenk, 2:192–219. While there is clearly some precedent for a final justification of the righteous in the eschaton, the illustrations James uses argues against this understanding for v. 24. Both Abraham and Rahab were "justified by works" during their earthly lives. As was argued earlier in v. 21, this took place with Abraham in connection with his offering of Isaac; it took place with Rahab in connection with her helping the Israelite spies. Perhaps, as Rakestraw argues, this subsequent justification during the lifetime of an individual anticipates and is a prerequisite for the final justification ("James 2:14–26," p. 41). Assuming this is the case, the final justification for believers in this age would take place at the judgment seat of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 5:10 et al.).

<sup>112</sup>Cranfield echoes a similar thought when he says, "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" ("Message of James," p. 340).

<sup>113</sup>So too, apparently, Rahab (2:25).

when James insists on works as necessary to justification, he has in view works that follow and validate salvation. The interpretation of James 2:21–24 discovered no obstacle to the above conclusions and has, in fact, been shown to be in complete agreement with these.

In effect, James and Paul were answering two different questions. Paul answers the question, How can a sinner be justified before a holy God? His answer to that question is, by faith alone. James, on the other hand, answers the question, What kind of faith saves, that is, what kind of faith justifies? James's answer to that question is, a faith that produces works. When Paul speaks of Abraham's justification by faith, he is referring to Abraham's initial justification. From Paul's perspective, works, all works, are necessarily excluded in that it is the sinner who is justified. On the other hand, when James speaks of Abraham's justification by works, he has in mind Abraham's subsequent justification. This subsequent justification serves to validate or confirm Abraham's faith and his initial justification. Since such a validation must be based on the evidence, Abraham's post-conversion works are essential. The old adage bears repeating, Faith alone saves, but not the faith that remains alone.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup>Robert Johnstone, *Lectures Exegetical and Practical on the Epistle of James* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954), p. 224. He states, "Similarly to him who asks, 'Is it faith that justifies or works?' Paul replies, 'Faith alone justifies, without works.' To him who, knowing and believing this, asks further, 'But does *all* faith justify?' James answers, 'Faith alone, without works, does *not* justify,'—for an inoperative faith is dead, powerless, unprofitable. Both statements, looked at in connection with the questions they are respectively meant to answer, are true, and both of vast importance."