

**James 2:20-26** *You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? [21] Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? [22] You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. [23] And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. [24] You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*

*[25] In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? [26] As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.*

## THEN

Verse 20 answers the people who are even present in today's society - those who believe but do not bear fruit, insisting that they too have a relationship with God. James is not writing to a specific person with this statement. It was common in ancient literature to rebuke an imaginary opponent.<sup>55</sup> They argue that faith and deeds are separate when in fact they are inseparable. James is showing us here that a faith without works is a faith that is dead and non-functional (it's just knowing about God, not putting your money where your mouth is.)

An argument has been made that James is contradicting Paul, and this falls in the realm of the usage of the Greek word *dikaioo* ("justify" - NASB / "righteous" - NIV):

**δικαίωσις, Greek 1344, NASB**

*dikaioo* ; from Greek 1342 (δικαίωσις, dikaios); *to show to be righteous, declare righteous*:— acknowledged...justice(1), acquitted(1), freed(3), justified(24), justifier(1), justifies(2), justify(4), vindicated(3).<sup>56</sup>

The question is, how does Paul use this word when he speaks of Justification versus James' usage. It is suggested by one of the commentaries that Paul is using this term as *initial* justification whereas James is speaking of *final* justification, whereby both Paul and James are not in conflict.<sup>57</sup>

*Justification*, as understood from a Pauline perspective is a declaration of standing, as a judge pronouncing a judgement upon a defendant - guilty or not guilty.

All of Paul's discussions concerning justification relates to the Jewish Law handed down from Moses. It was, and still is, the Jewish belief that one is declared righteous (Justified) in God's sight, by obedience to the Law. But the problem, as James 2:10 addresses, is when a person transgresses against even one of the Laws. The transgressor then is guilty of breaking the whole Law (all tenants), deserving of death and being cast out of God's presence. This is what Paul says specifically about the Law:

**Romans 7:7-12** What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." [8] But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For

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<sup>55</sup> Moo, Douglas J, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: James*; pp 107 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Grand Rapids, MI; 1985 - "(some scholars who are anxious to find dissent between James and Paul even though that James had Paul in mind here.)"

<sup>56</sup> **NASB Greek and Hebrew Dictionary Updated Edition**, The Lockman Foundation 1981, 1998 Database 2000 by iExalt

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apart from law, sin is dead. [9] Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. [10] I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. [11] For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. [12] So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

It is from the death sentence of sin that Christ has freed us. By spilling His blood, Jesus died once for all those who would put their faith in Him. It is by this we are declared righteous, or *Justified (dikaioo)*, and the case which Paul is making.

Examining the usage James makes of the word *Justify*, we must consider the subject matter which he is addressing versus that of Paul. Paul speaks of justification as it relates to the Law and Christ, James is addressing justification as it relates to our faith in Christ. We already know James has made the statement that faith without works is dead (James 2:17), and even made a challenge to the reader:

**James 2:18** But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."  
Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.

This is an excellent point he is making, because those who say they are Christian, yet do not demonstrate their faith by their actions will look very much like their surrounding environment (the world.) This is a term coined by John MacArthur Jr: "easy-believism"<sup>58</sup> - I believe, therefore I am guaranteed eternity no matter what I do. MacArthur extends his point by telling us:

Real grace does not include ... "the Christian's liberty to do precisely as he chooses." True grace, according to scripture teaches us "to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age." (Titus 2:12).<sup>59</sup>

It is impossible to demonstrate a faith by doing nothing.  
It is impossible to demonstrate our Christian faith by doing deeds in contradiction to that faith.

The English definition for faith is

**faith** n.

1. Confident belief in the truth, value, or trustworthiness of a person, idea, or thing.
2. Belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. See Synonyms at belief. See Synonyms at trust.
3. Loyalty to a person or thing; allegiance: keeping faith with one's supporters.<sup>60</sup>

Biblically speaking, faith is a combination of definitions one (1) and three (3), a confident belief and loyalty to the words of Christ. Definition two (2) is anti-Biblical in that God tells us not to be deceived by believing a lie - or that without logical proof or material evidence. We are to believe in His true word, and we will know what is from God for it will come to pass:

**Acts 26:25-26** "I am not insane, most excellent Festus," Paul replied. "What I am saying is true and reasonable. [26] **The king is familiar with these things**, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that **none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.**

**Deut. 18:21-22** [21] You may say to yourselves, "How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?" [22] **If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken.** That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.

*This discussion on the reliability of God's word is outside the scope of this writing and I will*

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<sup>58</sup> MacArthur Jr., John F. *The Gospel According to Jesus*, pp. 27, 37, , Zondervan, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1988, 1994.

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*attempt to address it elsewhere.*

The Greek word for faith is *pistis*:

**πίστις, Greek 4102, NASB**

*pistis*; from Greek 3982 (πίθειν, peitho ); *faith, faithfulness*:— faith(238), faithfulness(3), pledge(1), proof(1).<sup>61</sup>

This faith is demonstrated in several places in the New Testament:

*To the woman with an unhealed hemorrhage for 12 years, and she strives to even touch Christ's cloak believing this would heal her:*

**Mark 5:34** And He said to her, "Daughter, your **faith** has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."

*To the Canaanite woman who's daughter was demon possessed whom she claimed even the dogs wait to eat the crumbs off the children's table:*

**Matthew 15:28** Then Jesus said to her, "O woman, your **faith** is great; it shall be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed at once.

*To Saul when Jesus stopped him on the road to Damascus. "... I will appear to you, rescuing you from the Jewish people and the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you ..."*

**Acts 26:18** ... to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by **faith** in Me.'

But there are also instances where Christ called those who would follow Him to sacrifice of themselves or to conform to the word of God:

*Such is the case of the rich young ruler who claimed to have obeyed all of God's Laws:*

**Mark 10:21-22** Jesus looked at him and loved him. "One thing you lack," he said. "Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

[22] At this the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.

*And there is also Christ's call to obedience:*

**Luke 6:46-47** "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? [47] I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice

*And even Paul, the champion of 'Faith alone' calls us to perform deeds that set us apart from evil works:*

**2 Cor. 5:17** Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

**2 Cor. 7:1** Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

**Titus 2:7** In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness

*And there is also Paul's list of the fruit of the Spirit and his exhortation to keep in step with the Spirit:*

*Fruits of the Spirit*

[ *Formatting emphasis added* ]

**Galatians 5:19-26** The acts of the sinful nature are obvious:

sexual immorality,	and witchcraft;
impurity and debauchery;	hatred,
[20] idolatry	discord,

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<sup>61</sup> NASB Greek and Hebrew Dictionary Updated Edition, The Lockman Foundation 1981, 1998 Database 2000 by iExalt

jealousy,	factions
fits of rage,	[21] and envy;
selfish ambition,	drunkenness,
dissensions,	orgies, and the like.

I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

[22] But the fruit of the Spirit is

love,	kindness,
joy,	goodness,
peace,	faithfulness,
patience,	[23] gentleness
	and self-control.

Against such things there is no law.

[24] Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires.

[25] Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

[26] Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Faith is not dependent upon our works, that is true. But whether we have a saving faith is based upon the fruit that we bear. As Jesus so poignantly states:

**Matthew 7:17** Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

It is this desire of seeing professing Christians bear good fruit in verse 24 of our passage: “*You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.*” And the usage of *Justify* in this case, where Douglas Moo coined it as *Final Justification*, an appropriate word to describe where James is leading us would be the word ‘*Sanctify.*’

The emphasis here is purification and consecration, being made holy. As the English definition tells us:

**sanc-ti-fy** [ *tr.v.* **sanc-ti-fied, sanc-ti-fy-ing, sanc-ti-fies** ]

- a. To set apart for sacred use; consecrate.
- b. To make holy; purify.
- c. To give religious sanction to, as with an oath or vow: sanctify a marriage.
- d. To give social or moral sanction to
- e. To make productive of holiness or spiritual blessing.<sup>62</sup>

This term in ‘sanctify’ is the Greek word *hagiazō*:

**ἁγιάζω, Greek 37, NASB hagiazō** ; from Greek 40 (ἅγιος, *hagios*); *to make holy, consecrate, sanctify*:— hallowed(2), keep himself holy(1), sanctified(16), sanctifies(2), sanctify(7).<sup>63</sup>

The Strong’s definition is:

**hagiazō, Greek 37hagiazō, ἁγιάζω hag-ee-ad'-zō** from Greek 40 (*hagios*); *to make holy*, i.e. (ceremony) *purify* or *consecrate*; (mentally) *to venerate* :- hallow, be holy, sanctify.<sup>64</sup>

In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, 5:12-24, after Paul gives a laundry list of how those in Christ at the Thessalonian church are to conduct themselves, he tells them “May God Himself, the God of peace, **sanctify** you through

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<sup>63</sup>NASB Greek and Hebrew Dictionary Updated Edition, The Lockman Foundation 1981, 1998 Database 2000 by iExalt

<sup>64</sup>Strong’s Greek and Hebrew Dictionary, Database ©1990-93 NavPress Software. Audio: Kirkbride Bible & Technology © 1998.

and through ... [being] kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is this obedience to Christ, this ‘bearing fruit’, that we are sanctifying ourselves through Him.

By bearing good fruit (as opposed to no fruit or bad fruit) we are setting ourselves apart for Christ. We are lights of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. No one ever ignites a light and puts it under a bowl. Instead they put it on a stand where it will shine onto as much area as possible. (*Paraphrase of Matthew 5:15*) Thus we are demonstrating our faith by what we do.

The entire goal of this Christian walk is to look more and more like Christ until that day we are resurrected to stand in His presence, in our ultimate perfected bodies.

A quick word search on the Greek word for deeds ([ergon](#)) provides a list of where works and deeds are referenced in scripture. The following is a sampling from that list:

**Matthew 5:16** "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

**Matthew 11:19** Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

**John 3:19-21** "This is the judgment, that the Light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the Light, for their deeds were evil. [20] "For everyone who does evil hates the Light, and does not come to the Light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] "But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God."

**John 4:34** Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work.

**John 8:39** ... "If you are Abraham's children, do the deeds of Abraham.

[Paul is arguing against the thought we are saved only by obeying the Mosaic Law:]  
Romans 3:27-28 Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.  
[28] For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.

So the question becomes, who are we really living for? That is the *faith* we demonstrate to the world.

## **ALWAYS**

Faith is made complete by what you do. If you bear good fruit, your faith is alive. If you bear bad fruit or no fruit, the likelihood is that your faith is dead, and you will be cut off from the true vine and thrown into the fire.