

REVISITING THE SO-CALLED “CONTRADICTION” BETWEEN JAMES AND PAUL ON JUSTIFICATION

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Abstrak: Sudah sejak lama para ahli memperdebatkan apakah terdapat kontradiksi antara pengajaran Yakobus bahwa seseorang dibenarkan karena perbuatannya dan bukan hanya karena iman dengan pengajaran Paulus bahwa seseorang dibenarkan semata-mata oleh iman. Banyak proposal yang telah diajukan untuk mencoba mendamaikan apa yang terlihat seperti inkonsistensi ini. Salah satu solusi yang paling populer adalah teori bahwa Yakobus dan Paulus mempunyai konsep atau makna yang berbeda ketika memakai kata “pembenaran.” Tetapi analisa yang komprehensif terhadap Surat Yakobus dan penggunaan kata “pembenaran” dalam surat-surat Paulus memperlihatkan bahwa teori ini tidak mempunyai dasar yang kuat. Makalah ini menyajikan suatu tinjauan kembali terhadap isu ini dengan menganalisa konteks Yakobus 2:14-26 dan mengaitkannya dengan konteks dan tema-tema teologis penting yang terdapat dalam Surat Yakobus secara keseluruhan. Pengertian terhadap Surat Yakobus secara holistik akan memperlihatkan bahwa Yakobus sama sekali tidak berkontradiksi dengan Paulus dalam isu pembenaran ini.

Kata kunci: pembenaran, keselamatan, iman, perbuatan

Perhaps there is no more vexing issue in the Epistle¹ of James than the issue of contradiction between James and Paul concerning the

1. Dibelius contends that it is impossible to consider James as an actual letter, since it does not disclose any “epistolary situation.” It seems likely, according to Dibelius, that there is no specific reason for the author to compose this letter. Whereas some scholars think that the admonitions in the letter

term “justification.” One can easily find the contrast from the texts in their letters, especially when one compares James 2:24 and Romans 3:28, as seen in the following:

You see that a person is *justified by works* and not by faith alone.
(Jas 2:24)²

For we hold that one is *justified by faith* apart from works of the law.
(Rom 3:28)

Writing after the verse quoted above, Paul again states the similar idea in Romans 4:5, that “one who does not work but trusts him . . . his faith is counted as righteousness.”³ This contradiction has generated so many debates among the scholars, mainly in defining faith, works, and justification in James and Paul, and in concluding whether or not a stern opposition exists between those two biblical authors.

In some ways, the hot debates regarding justification in James and Paul are brought to pass by the treatment of Martin Luther toward the Epistle of James. It has been a common knowledge among many Christians that Luther underestimated the value of James. In his *September Testament* (1522), Luther wrote, “Therefore the Epistle of James is a right strawy epistle in comparison with them [John, Romans,

reflected the situation of the readers, Dibelius does not see those admonitions in that way. Moreover, Dibelius traces the lack of “epistolary remarks,” such as news, messages, or greetings, in this letter. See Martin Dibelius, *James: A Commentary on the Epistle of James*, rev. Heinrich Greeven, trans. Michael A. Williams, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 2. For a brief response to the issue of whether James is an actual letter, see Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 40. See also Richard Bauckham, *James: Wisdom of James, Disciple of Jesus the Sage* (London: Routledge, 1999), 11-25, in which Bauckham exposes the epistolary form and epistolary situations of this letter.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this paper are from the ESV Bible.

3. The words “justify” and “righteousness” come from the same Greek root δικαιο- (δικαιω, *to justify*; δικαιοσυνη, *righteousness*).

Galatians, Ephesians, and 1 Peter], since indeed it has no evangelical nature to it.”⁴ For Luther, James’s teaching on the necessity of works for justification was irreconcilable with Paul’s teaching on justification by faith apart from works. Luther’s notion of this contradiction is also obvious in his *Preface to the Epistle of St. James and St. Jude*:

In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works [2:24]. It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac [2:21]; though in Romans 4 [2:22] St. Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son, and proves it by Moses in Genesis 15 [6].⁵

Despite the contradiction with Paul that Luther saw in James, he did not totally reject James for he thought that James has strenuously proclaimed the law of God. Luther states his praise as follows:

I praise it and consider it a good book, because it sets up no doctrines of men but vigorously promulgates the law of God. However, to state my own opinion about it, though without prejudice to anyone, I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle.⁶

His argument that James is not an apostolic writing was mainly based upon the assessment that James does not teach about Christ’s passion and resurrection, as well as the Spirit of Christ.⁷ Luther’s test of whether a book can be categorized as apostolic is whether the presence

4. Quoted from Timo Laato, “Justification According to James: A Comparison with Paul,” *Trinity Journal* 18 (1997): 43; cf. 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 (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1992), 146.

5. Martin Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, vol. 35 of *Luther’s Works*, ed. E. Theodore Bachmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1960), 396.

6. Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 395-96.

7. Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 396.

of the preaching and inculcating about Christ is apparent in that book.⁸ It is observable that on the one hand Luther admitted that the Epistle of James has a purpose to teach Christians, especially to drive them to the law and its works; on the other hand, he showed a completely refusal to value this epistle as an apostolic one.⁹

Many modern scholars also see that James is in opposition to Paul on the concept of justification. Bultmann, arguing that James 2:14-26 is polemical in nature, states,

If so [James argues against Paul or that of some group claiming Paul as its authority], Paul's concept of faith is thereby utterly misunderstood. For Paul would certainly have agreed with the proposition that a faith without works is dead (2:17, 26) but never in the world with the thesis that faith works along with works (2:22).¹⁰

Ropes admits that James and Paul stand in a sharp contradiction. Although seeing no personal attack on Paul, Ropes argues that James "shows no comprehension of what Paul actually meant by his formula . . . and he heartily dislikes it."¹¹ Laws contends that the attempts to reconcile James and Paul seem fruitless and she argues that Paul could never tolerated James's teaching that faith must be followed

8. Luther even wrote, "Whatever preaches Christ would be apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, and Herod were doing it." See Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 396.

9. "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 saying in him" (Luther, *Word and Sacrament I*, 397). For a concise Reformation views on the Epistle of James, see Timothy George, "'A Right Strawy Epistle': Reformation Perspectives on James," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 3 (2000): 20-31.

10. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (New York: Scribner, 1955), 2:163.

11. James H. Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of St. James* (New York: Scribner, 1916), 35. Ropes sees that Paul and James move in "different circles of thought" concerning faith, and it is impossible to superimpose their peculiar circles to arbitrate their agreement or disagreement (Ropes, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 36).

by works in order to obtain justification.¹²

In the recent years, however, more scholars think that James’s teaching on justification is not contradicting to Paul’s view. Nevertheless, as will be discussed later, the approaches they use to the attempt of reconciling James and Paul are varied.¹³ In this paper, I will survey the concept of justification in James, mainly from James 2:14-26, and will contend that James and Paul do not really contradict each other. It does not mean, however, that they used that term in the same apprehension. James and Paul faced the different situations of their readers, and thus they had a different nuance when they employed the term “justification” in their letters.

Theological Themes

Of some prominent theological themes in the Epistle of James, two will be examined due to their significance regarding the topic of this paper. Those themes are “perfection” and “eschatology.” The theme of perfection serves as the backbone of the epistle. James is so emphasizing this theme that it has become a controlling, or driving, theme through-

12. Sophie Laws, *A Commentary on the Epistle of James* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980), 132-33.

13. One of the less convincing approaches comes from David R. Maxwell (Maxwell, “Justified by Works and Not by Faith Alone: Reconciling Paul and James,” *Concordia Journal* 33, no. 4 [2007]: 375-378). He argues, like many other scholars, that James and Paul use the term *δικαιωω* (to justify) in two different senses—that is, Paul uses in a forensic sense (“God crediting righteousness to the believer”), whereas James uses in a demonstrative sense (“shown to be righteous”). However, he bases his argument by bringing evidence from the works of Clement of Rome to show that there are two different meanings of *δικαιωω*. He says, “These examples are important not only because they come from an early church father . . . but because both meaning can be found in the same author [Clement] within two pages of each other in contexts which resemble those of Paul and James.” Such approach is hardly convincing, mainly because the problem of logic. Just because Clement uses *δικαιωω* in two different senses does not automatically justify that James and Paul must have used that term in two different meanings.

out the letter.¹⁴ As for the theme of eschatology, it may be perceived as the governing perspective in the letter, since James seems has in mind that his readers should observe all the admonitions in the letter because the end of time is at hand.¹⁵ Consequently, those two themes (perfection and eschatology) become an indispensable frame-work when one is doing the exegesis and the theological analysis of James 2:14-26.

Perfection

Perfection (τέλειος) is the ultimate goal of the Christian life. Throughout his letter, James keeps employing the term “perfect,” either in the adjective or the verb form: “. . . that you may be perfect (τέλειος) and complete” (1:4); “Every good gift and every perfect (τέλειος) gift is from above” (1:17); “But the one who looks into the perfect (τέλειος) law . . .” (1:25); “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect (τέλειος) man” (3:2); “If you really fulfill (τέλειω) the royal law according to the Scripture . . .” (2:8); “. . . and faith was completed (τέλειω) by his works” (2:22).¹⁶ James apparently put the perfection as a distinctive

14. So Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 46, “Spiritual ‘wholeness’, . . . is the central concern of the letter,” and Patrick J. Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection: Faith in Action in the Letter of James* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 60, “The paraenesis of the letter [of James] gives expression to the underlying theme of τέλειος.” McCartney suggests that the controlling theme for the Epistle of James is “genuine faith.” He contends that throughout the letter, James highlights that genuine faith in God should be apparent in the whole aspects in every Christian’s life. See McCartney, *James*, 56-57.

15. “[Eschatology] is the context of the book [of James],” states Davids. See Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 39.

16. Martin indicates that the term “whole,” “entire” (ὅλος) in Jas 2:10; 3:2; 3:6, and ὁλοκληρος in 1:4, are the corresponding terms to τέλειος (Ralph Martin, *James*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 48 [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1988], lxxix). A closer look to those verses, however, shows that only ὁλοκληρος in 1:4 has a corresponding idea with τέλειος. So Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 63.

mark of Christians who are living in the midst of life that challenged by persecution, financial difficulties, and worldly way of thinking. One can scarcely deny that the call to perfection in James echoes Jesus’ appeal in the Sermon on the Mount: “You therefore must be perfect (τελειος), as your heavenly Father is perfect (τελειος)” (Matt 5:48). The Sermon on the Mount reveals the ethics of the kingdom of God, in which Jesus’ disciples learn how to live with paradigms of the kingdom of heaven while living on earth. The concluding remark of the teaching on the law in Matthew 5:17-48, indeed, recapitulates the whole message of the sermon, that the disciples of Jesus, despite their circumstances, must become nothing but perfect, as the Father is perfect. James reestablishes the same call of Jesus in his exhortations to the Jewish Christians in diaspora.

What does it mean to live a perfect life? In James, it is a good way to understand the perfection of Christian life by examining the opposite nature of perfection, namely “double-minded” (διψυκος, Jas 1:8; 4:8).¹⁷ In 4:8, those of “double-minded” are paralleled with “the sinners” (ἁμαρτωλοί). In other words, the person who is “double-minded” is remaining in sin. James exposes many problems in the lives of his readers, which are generated by this “double-mindedness.”¹⁸ Those who are “double-minded” doubt and have no faith (1:6). They are good in hearing the word of God, but not in doing what they hear (1:19-25). They are proud of their religion, but they do not bridle their tongues (1:26). The person of “double-minded” professes to have faith in Christ, but practices favoritism (2:1-9). One mouth he has, but “out of the same

17. The Greek διψυκος literally means “double-souled.” NLT gives the interpretive translation of διψυκος in Jas 1:8 and 4:8 as the people whose “loyalty is divided between God and the world.” Schlatter correctly defines “double-minded” as “a man’s ability to fix his will on two contrary aims at the same time. This is compared to unchastity”. (Adolf Schlatter, *The Theology of the Apostles: The Development of New Testament Theology*, trans. Andreas J. Köstenberger [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998], 87).

18. Moo rightly argues that in James, “double-minded” is the root of the problem of sin (Moo, *The Letter of James*, 37).

mouth come praise and cursing” (3:10, NIV). Claiming to have the wisdom from above, the person of “double-minded” lives with the principle of earthly wisdom (3:13-18). Space is lacking here to show the other problems of “double-mindedness” in James, but one more issue that is important here is the segregation between faith and works (2:14-26).

It is evident that one of the main emphases in James is how one has to control his words, for “if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man” (Jas 3:2). A Christian is to slow to speak, especially to speak with anger (1:19-20). One has to bridle his tongue (1:26), to take care of what his tongue says (3:1-12), and to avoid slander (“speak evil,” 4:11) and grumbling against one another (5:9). The same caution concerning the words that one utters is given in James 2:14-26: if one has the claims of faith, but fails to prove them, which is only possible through the deeds, then his claims or words are useless. Therefore, the passage of James 2:14-26, in which one finds the issue of “justification not by faith alone,” has to be understood in the context of the desire of James for Christians to be perfect and not being “double-minded.” Thus, in one sense, one can see this passage more as an admonition with the ethical dimension rather than a theological treatise about justification.¹⁹

Christian perfection is nothing less than the total commitment to God in the whole area of life. It is the integrity between faith and deeds, between what one hears and what one practices, between the outwardly identity and the internally attitude of heart, and between the wisdom and value one possesses and the behavior one shows. Those who lack this kind of integrity are falling into the “double-mindedness.”

19. Thielman aptly observes that James desires his readers to live in the “undivided lives,” mainly in three areas: “First, he wants them to cultivate *perseverance*; their faith should remaining unwavering in the midst of testing. Second, he wants them to live in *simplicity*; wealth should not distract them from doing what God requires. Third, he wants them to live in *sincerity*; the good words they speak should find fulfillment in good deeds.” See Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 500. Italics added.

Eschatology

James states a clear eschatological reference in his epistle in 5:7-9. Knowing that the Jewish believers in diaspora are facing the oppression from the rich people, James exhorts them to be patient, because all their miseries will come to the end due to the coming of the Lord. The coming of the Lord is imminent (ἤγγικεν, *is at hand*, 5:8; the Judge is standing at the door, 5:9) and is certain will take place (5:7).

Despite the only explicit reference to the coming of the Lord in 5:7-9, James has the perspective of this eschatological theme in the whole letter. He always reminds his readers to the double-edged promise of the coming of the Lord. On the one hand, reward is prepared for those who persevere in their faith. On the other hand, the Lord will also hold the judgment when he comes.²⁰ James reminds the believers about the brevity of life (1:10-11; 4:14), of course with the perspective of eternal life in the Lord as the backdrop. Those who "remain steadfast under trial" (1:12) will receive the crown of life. Believers are to speak and act as those who are to be judged (2:12-13), and those who take the responsibility to teach should do the task with the awareness of the more strictly judgment they will face (3:1). Moreover, those who judge their neighbor must remember that they will sit under the judgment of the true Judge (4:11-12). The rich who are mishandling their wealth and oppressing the poor are to remember that they are storing their wealth in the last days (5:1-6). It is evident from these eschatological-perspective warnings that James has "put forward eschatology principally as a motivation for faithful obedience to God."²¹ In other

20. Note that James addresses the warnings about the coming of the Lord to the believers. Chester is right when he states, "[The threat of judgment] is directed here specifically not against the wicked, but against those in the community who attempt to usurp for themselves the divine role of judging." See Andrew Chester, "The Theology of James," in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, New Testament Theology, ed. Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17.

21. McCartney, *James*, 70. The thorough study of Penner on the structure of James has helpfully disclosed the eschatological framework in this

words, one has to view James's admonitions in the light of his eschatology.²²

Likewise, the passage of James 2:14-26 has to be perceived in the eschatological perspective.²³ James is arguing there about the kind of faith that endures in the final judgment. The readers have to grasp that they must persevere not in the passive faith with the claims only, but in the faith that perfected by deeds. Since they have received the "implanted word" (1:21), they must produce a fruitful Christian life. "In looking forward to the future, James is not advocating passivity, but rather is calling the readers to activity and involvement."²⁴

Justification in James 2:14-26

Having the understanding of the framework of the concept of perfection and eschatology in the Letter of James, I will proceed with the main discussion of this paper—that is, James's notion on justification in 2:14-26. Forasmuch as this is not an exegesis paper, the analysis of this passage will not deal with a detailed exegesis, rather it is a tracing of James's argument. In order to understand James's concept well, I will trace his train of thought in this passage by dividing the examination into

epistle. See Todd C. Penner, *The Epistle of James and Eschatology: Re-reading an Ancient Christian Letter*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement 121 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 121-213.

22. Despite the ample references to the future coming of the Lord, the realized eschatology is not completely absent in James. In 1:18, James reminds that the believers are already being the firstfruits of God's creatures. This means that the believers, after receiving the message of the word of truth, have foretasted the future blessings of heaven while they are still facing the worldly difficulties. Many scholars have seen "the word of truth" in 1:18 as the gospel. See for example, Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 114. Schreiner and Moo identify Jas 2:25 also as an indication of the realized eschatology in this letter (see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 114, and Moo, *The Letter of James*, 30).

23. So McCartney, *James*, 70, who argues that the whole of the letter is to be apprehended in the "perspective of eschatological judgment."

24. Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 52.

three parts:

1. James 2:14-17: The key issue
2. James 2:18-20: The first argument
3. James 2:21-26: The second argument

James 2:14-17: The Key Issue

These first verses of the passage reveal the key issue in the passage, namely the kind of faith that saves one. Two questions in verse 14 introduce this issue: “What use (ὄφελος) is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him?” (NASB). These questions call the readers to examine the faith that they claim they have. The believers have to make sure that they have the kind of faith that is useful in obtaining the salvation. The kind of faith that cannot save one is apparent here; it is the faith that merely a claim without proof in deeds, a faith that merely an intellectual assent.²⁵ As has been clear in the discussion on the theme of perfection, the believers should avoid the “double-minded” lifestyle. One of the “double-minded” issues that James emphasizes in his letter is the misuse of one’s tongue or words. Thus, here James warns the danger of separating word (claim of

25. Bauckham, noting the Jewish usage of the Greek word group πιστ- (πιστευειν, πιστις, πιστος), which have a close accordance with the Hebrew root *אמן*, explains three meanings of “faith.” First, “the verb πιστευειν can refer to purely intellectual belief that a statement is true . . . It can also refer to trust in and commitment to someone or something.” Second, “πιστις can be the content of what is believed, or faith in the sense of trust and commitment, or faithfulness.” Third, “πιστος can mean ‘believing’, but more often means ‘faithful’.” Moreover, Bauckham argues that in James’s discussion all these three dimensions of faith are involved, especially the second and third dimensions are hard to distinct, because true faith involves not only an unwavering trust in God, but also an continuous loyalty to God. This loyalty is shown by the works as the acts of obedience to God. See Bauckham, *James*, 120-21. Of the sixteen occurrences of the noun “faith” in James, only five are found outside Jas 2:14-26 (1:3, 6; 2:1, 5; 5:15), and all these five instances refer to a positive meaning of faith: a faith that is not merely an intellectual assent. See Robert Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone]’ in Paul Versus ‘Not Saved by Faith Alone’ in James,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4, no. 3 (2000): 5.

faith) from the works that prove the presence of faith, which will result in the failure to be saved.

The emphasis to the useless of faith that is merely verbal assent is made clear by an apt illustration in James 2:15-16.²⁶ Suppose a believer (“one of you”; 2:16) saw a fellow brother or sister whose condition was so poor that they could not afford enough clothes and food. Then that believer, seeing the destitute circumstance, simply says, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without even doing a single act to help warming and filling the needy body. Closing this illustration, again James asks, “What use (ὄφελος) is that?” (2:16). The question of the advantage of faith without works in 2:14 and 2:16 will indisputably result in the answer, “The faith without practical expression is useless.” The answer to the question in 2:14 “Can that faith (without works) save him?” is also a negative, “No.”²⁷ To the contrast of the living faith that implemented in acts, which is the saving faith, the unproductive faith is called “dead” (νεκρος; 2:17, 26) and “barren” (RSV) or “useless” (ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT; ἀργός 2:20).²⁸ Genuine faith always evident in works, as Paul says in Galatians 5:16, that what is important in Christ is “faith working through love.”

In James 2:14-26, the author is not teaching a theology treatise

26. Fung suggests that this illustration is not a concrete case from the life of believers at that time, but rather “a *comparison* contrived for purposes of illustration which, nevertheless, reflects a real concern of James” (Fung, “‘Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” 147). Moo also suggests the same idea as Fung’s, saying that the illustration here is a hypothetical example. The hypothetical nature of this illustration is obvious from the “indefiniteness of *brother or sister*.” See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 124. Nevertheless, this illustration might be a potential problem to happen in the lives of believers at that time. See Dibelius, *James*, 152-53; McCartney, *James*, 156.

27. The use of Greek particle *mh* in this question expects a negative answer.

28. The Greek word for “useless,” ἀργός, represents a wordplay: α + ἔργον, literally means “without work.” Thus the “faith that does not “work,” James is saying, “does not work.” See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 132, and McCartney, *James*, 161.

on faith, but a practical Christian life that really shows the acts of obedience to God, which is certainly an active Christian lifestyle. This stress on the action of the believers is confirmed by the near context of the passage. The believers are to be the doers (active) of the word, not hearers (passive) only (1:22). The one who is "doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing" (1:25). Those who claim to have faith must remember: "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world" (1:27). An emphasis on the active Christian lifestyle is apparent here.

Moving into chapter two, James begins with the instruction on the issue of favoritism (2:1-13). This passage is also pregnant with the idea of active obedience of the believers. James states, "My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory" (2:1). The Greek of this verse literally says, "Do not in showing partiality you have the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ . . ." (μὴ ἐν προσωποληψίαις ἔχετε τὴν πίστιν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ).²⁹ This means that partiality and having faith in Christ are incompatible. The one who shows partiality is better not to claim to have faith, and the one who thinks he has faith may not practice favoritism. Furthermore, in a positive statement, James reminds that to show partiality is the same as to violate the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8). To love the neighbor is to show an active deed of love in sincerity, not in partiality. This passage of warning about favoritism is closed by the caveat: "So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty" (2:12). This verse again stresses the act of a believer and the integrity between the word and the act, for the judgment is not based on the claim of faith, but the doing of the faith.

James's emphasis on the saving faith that evident in works has a

29. Hartin takes Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ here as subjective genitive (hence, 'the faith of Jesus Christ'), which is unlikely. See Patrick J. Hartin, *James*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 14 (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003), 157.

great similarity to what Jesus emphasizes in his teachings. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, believers are to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-14).³⁰ The purpose of this designation is "so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (5:16). God receives the glory not because someone claims that he has faith, but because the testimony of his faith that produces obvious fruits. Moreover, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (7:21). The promise to enter into the kingdom of heaven is for those who show the works of faith. After preaching this long sermon, Jesus concludes with the illustration of two builders who built their houses (Matt 7:24-27). The wise one built on the rock, but the fool one built on the sand. When the severe situation like the rain, flood, and wind, struck their houses, the house on the rock firmly stood on its foundation, whereas the house that built on the sand fell away and the destruction was great. What Jesus emphasizes in this illustration is the importance of doing his teaching and not just hearing to it. "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (7:24). Furthermore, the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 also shows the significance of good works to face the final judgment. Jesus clearly reveals that his true disciples are those whose faith is implemented in works and not those who know the truth well but then do nothing to articulate their faith.

The key issue in James 2:14-26 is not about coming to faith or salvation, but concerning the kind of faith that will persevere in the final judgment. What James emphasizes here is that the true saving faith always inevitably yields the works that correspond with God's words. It does not mean, however, that James stresses the priority of works over

30. Schreiner poses the idea, which was first suggested by his student, Jonathan Leeman, that Jesus' reference to the salt and saltiness in this passage probably does not signify the preservative function of the believers in the world. Rather, "salt points to the distinctiveness of the church." See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 684-85.

the priority of faith in obtaining the salvation. In James, one comes to salvation by receiving the implanted word with meekness (1:21).³¹ The word, it is said, “is able to save your souls” (1:21). This word refers to “the word of truth,” through which God has chosen to “give us birth . . . that we might be a kind of firstfruits (ἀπαρχῆ) of all he created” (1:18, NIV).³² “Firstfruits” in the OT frequently refers to the idea of the best part that belongs to God (Exod 23:19; 34:26; Lev 2:12, 14; 23:17; Num 18:12; 28:26). The firstborn sons is also seen as the firstfruits that belongs to God (Exod 13:12, 15; 22:29; 34:20), and “consequently had to be symbolically redeemed (Num 18:15).”³³

In the NT, some employments of “firstfruits” denote the saving activity of God in Christ (2Thess 2:13; Rev 14:4). When Paul argues for believers’ resurrection, he points to Christ as the firstfruits of those who are resurrected from the death (1Cor 15:20, 23). The certainty of believers’ eschatological resurrection is based upon Christ’s resurrection. Thus, there is a sense of the inauguration of salvation in the use of the term “firstfruits” in the NT. Accordingly, when James says that the word of truth has given birth to the believers to be a kind of firstfruits of God’s

31. Although the word “implanted” comes from the Greek adjective ἔμφυτον, and not a verb, Laato rightly notes the thrust of divine passive here: “the word implanted in them (by God),” hence implies the sovereignty and initiative of God in the salvation of humankind. See Laato, “Justification According to James,” 52.

32. The “word of truth” here refers to the gospel, as the meaning that also found in Pauline corpus (2Cor 6:7; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5; 2Tim 2:15). See Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 89; Martin, *James*, 39; Moo, *The Letter of James*, 79; McCartney, *James*, 110. Laato contends that the “Word” (λογος) in Jas 1:18 and 1:21 is related to the baptismal proclamation, particularly in 1:21, since there are the features of “early Christian baptismal exhortation” in his verse. In a baptism, as a consequence of putting his faith in Christ, “therefore” (διό), a believer has to “put off” (ἀποτίθημι) the old life and put on the new life. The notion of the indicative and imperative of the baptism, therefore, is probably in James’s mind. “The one baptized is recreated or reborn through the (indicative) Word, in order to be able to live according to the (imperative) Word.” See Laato, “Justification According to James,” 52.

33. McCartney, *James*, 110-11.

creatures, he signifies that the salvation of the believers has starting to take place and that those who receive the word of truth are the possession of God.³⁴ The salvation comes from the power of the word and not the power of good works.

Salvation in James is apparently not anthropocentric, but rather God-centered.³⁵ Those who have the word implanted in their hearts by God consequently have to be the doers of the word, otherwise they are deceiving themselves (Jas 1:22). They are deceiving themselves because faith without works is a dead faith and useless (2:16-17). The uniqueness of the Christian virtues lies in the truth that good works are not done in order to achieve salvation. Rather, the starting point is the saving faith that energizes one to bear the acts of obedience to God. The right understanding of this key issue in James will hinder one to see James stands in opposition to Paul. Ropes is right when he observes, "The two things which are opposed are not faith and works (as with Paul) but a living faith and a dead faith."³⁶ James is by no means promoting works as the agent of salvation; rather, his teaching on the means of salvation, just as Paul, centered on faith.

34. "The term [firstfruits] therefore is eschatological as well as cultic, and James's designation of believers as "firstfruits" not only declares them to be holy, but also places them in the category of those who are really experiencing the full redemption that the rest of creation still awaits" (McCartney, *James*, 111). The salvation viewed in James shows the tension of already and not yet. On the one hand, the implanted word in the believers has effected the deliverance from the old life (Jas 1:21). On the other hand, the expression "able" (δυναμαι) in 1:18 and 2:14 implies that the salvation is still something anticipated in the future. See McCartney, *James*, 119; Dibelius, *James*, 152.

35. Childs correctly remarks, "In no sense does James derive salvation from a syncretism of human and divine co-operation. God is the source of every benefit [of salvation]" (Brevard S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* [Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994], 439). Laato, insisting that Christian owes thanks to the word for his new existence, says, "There is no point of departure for any idea of human performance." See Laato, "Justification According to James," 54.

36. Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James*, 207.

James 2:18-20: The First Argument

In the previous verses (2:14-17) James has emphasized that the living faith, which is the faith that is able to save, will inevitably prove its effectiveness and usefulness by producing the good works. In this section (2:18-20), James argues for the vanity of barren faith by stressing the impossibility of the segregation between the knowledge of truth and the acts of love. Any faith that has only the knowledge of certain doctrines is in vain, for even the demons has that kind of faith.

To convey his argument in this section, James employs one of the most common Greco-Roman rhetoric features, the diatribe. In a diatribe, a speaker will involve one or more imaginary interlocutors, often as the opponents, to create a kind of debate forum where the speaker wishes to articulate his argument. James begins (2:18) with the statement of an imaginary interlocutor who he calls “someone” (τις). Scholars have been debating this diatribe for a long time, forasmuch as there are some difficulties in interpreting it. Who is this “someone” that James introduces in his diatribe? Is he the one who stands at the same side as James, or an opponent of James? How far does the remark of this “someone” extend? It is not easy to decide where the words of this imaginary interlocutor end because most of the Greek manuscripts lack the punctuation marks. Apparently, many exegetical decisions have to be made regarding this section. Dibelius himself, when attempting to interpret this section, admitted that it is “one of the most difficult New Testament passages in general.”³⁷ Most of the scholarly commentaries on James have dedicated a rather long space to discuss the issues portrayed above.³⁸

Some might think that “someone” in James 2:18 is an ally of James, from whom James quoted his statement to support his argument. In this view, the whole verse 18 comprises all the words of the

37. Dibelius, *James*, 154.

38. The work of McCartney, one of the most recent commentaries on the Epistle of James, has nicely summarized the discussion in an enumerated list, showing the many suggested solutions by the scholars concerning Jas 2:18-19. See McCartney, *James*, 157-61.

“ally.”³⁹ The view that “someone” is James’s proponent is supported by the noticeable consistency of the pronouns employment in 2:18.⁴⁰ This view, however, is hardly true, mainly because of the “strong adversative” ἄλλα (“but”) that begins this verse, suggesting that James’s imaginary interlocutor was in disagreement with him.⁴¹ Moreover, James’s designation to this interlocutor as “foolish person” or “vain man” (KJV) in 2:20 suggests that the person in view is not a supporter of James’s idea. It is more likely that this “someone” is an opponent or objector of James.⁴²

The view that an objector is speaking in James 2:18 is not without problem. Scholars are disagreeing on how far the objector’s words go. Some argues that this opponent’s words might be simply “You have faith” (Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις), and the rest of the verse 18 was James’s response. Others even think that the whole words in verses 18 and 19 belong to the opponent, and James’s response begins at verse 20. Many suggestions have been proposed, but each has its own weakness.⁴³

39. Moo provides a paraphrase of Jas 2:18 to point the ally’s corroboration to James’s notion: “You [the false believer of the illustration in 2:14-17] say that you have faith; and I have works. But you cannot show me your faith because you do not have works; I, on the other hand, can show me your faith by my works.” See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 127.

40. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 127. So Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 10. The second person singular “you” (and “your”) always refers to the one whose faith does not produce works, and the first person singular “I” (and “my”) always refers to James or his ally, who contends for the impossibility of true faith to be fruitless.

41. Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 10. So Fung, “‘Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” 148, and Laato, “Justification According to James,” 78-79. For other possibilities on the use of ἄλλα, see Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 124.

42. Bauckham suggests that since James’s debates in these verses take place in a rhetorical device, it is not necessarily to think that the imaginary interlocutor here is an opponent. Rather, it is better to consider the interlocutor as “a student slow to grasp his teacher’s point.” Consequently, Bauckham argues that James is not confronting a dangerous doctrine here. See Bauckham, *James*, 125.

43. For an elaborated contemporary discussions on the extent of the interlocutor’s words, see Moo, *The Letter of James*, 128-29; Fung, “‘Justification’

Other confusing issue in this verse is that the beginning statement of this objector seems to be more natural if uttered from the mouth of James. Stein expresses this problem well:

An opponent challenges what James has said in 2:14-17 by saying, "You have faith and I have works." The problem of this statement is that the opponent attributes to James "faith" and to himself "works," and this view is the opposite of what James has been arguing in 2:14-17. One would expect from the mouth of James's antagonist, "You have works and I have faith."⁴⁴

This confusion has led some scholars to consider the possibility of emendation of the text, suggesting that the original text was in fact "You have works, but I have faith."⁴⁵ This suggestion, however, suffers from lack of manuscripts evidence, and "should only be a last resort when no other acceptable solution presents itself, and even then they remain dubious."⁴⁶ Admittedly, even the imaginary interlocutor in James 2:18 is better viewed as an opponent of James, this scenario still leaves some questions begging for the logical explanations.

The consensus among most scholars in approaching this adversative-interlocutor issue is to receive the text as what it is, seeing only James 2:18a as the objector's words ("You have faith and I have works"), and James's response begins at 2:18b ("Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works"). Nevertheless, the personal pronouns in the objector's statement are not considered as appointing to "you" and "I." Rather, this statement reveals two different sides with different opinions. Thus, the use of "you" and "I" there is like somebody saying, "One person has faith and another has

in the Epistle of James," 149-50; Laato, "Justification According to James," 78-81; McCartney, *James*, 158-59.

44. Stein, "'Saved by Faith [Alone]'," 11.

45. McCartney, *James*, 158.

46. McCartney, *James*, 158.

works.”⁴⁷ The main point of the conversation in this diatribe is that whereas someone might think that faith and works could be separable, James insists that it is impossible. James challenges his interlocutor “Show me your faith apart from your works,” which is an impossible task. Then he continues with the only way to prove the existence of faith: “I will show you my faith by my works.”

Anybody who thinks can divorce works from faith will leave that faith to be no more than an intellectual assent. But the faith that merely a verbal assent will profit nothing to one’s salvation. James points to the danger of grasping a right theology without implementing it into the acts of love and obedience to God by reminding that even the demons have the right theology, but they shudder (Jas 2:19). Those who believe that “God is one” have to aware that the demons share that same right doctrine as well.⁴⁸ “Correct confession apart from works of love,” therefore, “rises no higher than the faith of demons.”⁴⁹ Despite their excellent doctrine, the demons will share nothing in the blessings of the kingdom of God. Likewise, those who possess faith, even with the right understanding of sound doctrines, but lack the corresponding good works, cannot count their faith as the true and saving faith. The faith that is not surpassing the level of knowing the truth is, as Davids states, “worse than useless.”⁵⁰

The point of James 2:18-19 is that good works always flow out from the true faith; otherwise, that faith will not save. This point might remind James’s readers to the saying of Jesus to his disciples and to the crowds, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so practice and observe whatever they tell you, but not what they do. For they

47. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 123; Moo, *The Letter of James*, 129; Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 11; Martin, *James*, 87; McCartney, *James*, 160.

48. The Greek phrase εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός in 2:19 can be translated either as “God is one” (ESV, NASB, RSV) or “there is one God” (KJV, NIV, NLT). The former is likely meant here, since it is the formula of *Shema*, the well-known Jewish creed taken from Deut 6:4. Cf. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 130.

49. Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 12.

50. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, 126.

preach, but do not practice” (Matt 23:1-3). In the second-temple Judaism, the scribes and the Pharisees have the authority to teach and to preach, of course, partly because of their vast knowledge of the Scripture. Nevertheless, Jesus said that they are not the kind of person to whom people can search for an example. Jesus never commends those who have a right doctrine but never put it into practice. Faith and good works are, indeed, inseparable.

The strong emphasis on the ineffectiveness of barren faith is evident throughout the passage of James 2:14-26. The answer to the rhetorical questions in 2:14 and 2:16 clearly stress this ineffectiveness. In 2:17, James gives a clear statement that faith that has no works is dead. The diatribe in 2:18-19 has also pointed to the vanity of fruitless faith. To make a conclusion in the end of the diatribe, James again confidently states, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless (ἀργή)? (2:20).⁵¹ Furthermore, at the end of the passage, James again restates his axiom, “Faith apart from works is dead” (2:26). James furnishes these emphases through the whole passage, as though he would not let any possibility of the idea of a barren faith could be useful.

James 2:21-26: The Second Argument

The key issue of James 2:14-26 is that the indicative of true and living faith always followed by the imperative to produce works of love. Any faith without works is useless and contributes nothing to obtain the salvation. James has argued in 2:18-20 that separating works from the true faith is impossible, for faith without works will be nothing more than the faith of the demons. In this section (2:21-25), James is sharpening his argument on the character of the true faith by using examples from the famous Jewish tradition of Abraham and Rahab. The argument that James wishes to point out here is the faith that God pleased with is the

There is a textual variant in this verse. Some manuscripts, such as \aleph A C² P Ψ 33 ω , have νεκρά (“dead”) instead of ἀργή. The KJV’s use of “dead” in this verse rests on this variant.

faith that completed by works, because it is the true faith that can cause one to be justified.

The first illustration that James employs is from the story of Abraham offering his son Isaac to God in Genesis 22:1-14.⁵² James uses this instance to make clear that the characteristic of true faith, as the one Abraham has, always evident in acts of obedience to God. The most important issue that James points out here is that God was pleased with Abraham's deed, and as the result, Abraham was justified: "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?" (2:21).⁵³ The use of particle οὐκ in this question implies the expected answer is "yes."

It is this verse (Jas 2:21) and its confirmation in 2:24 that trigger the much-debated issue on justification since Martin Luther. Before touching the issue of justification, it is worth to note that some scholars, under the influence of Roman Catholic tradition, are trying to reconcile James and Paul by posing that the notion of "works" in James is different from what Paul meant. Paul does use the term "works of law" (ἔργα νομῶν) in Romans 3:28, and James never uses that term. These scholars say that the "works" that James means are the deeds of love or acts of charity, whereas "works" in Paul refers to the ceremonial works of Jewish law. Therefore, they argue that Paul is saying that a man is not

51. This story of Abraham has been a well-known tradition in the Jewish circle, as it is reflected in 1 Macc 2:51-52: "Remember the deeds of the fathers, which they did in their generations; and receive great honor and an everlasting name. Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" (RSV).

52. James uses the plural "works" here whereas the offering of Isaac by Abraham was a single act. Some scholars (e.g., Dibelius, *James*, 162; Hartin, *A Spirituality of Perfection*, 86-87) suggest that the plural refer to the Jewish tradition (the ten trials of Abraham) that Abraham has undergone many trials in his life and God's commandment for Abraham to offer Isaac was the culmination of all trials. For a good survey on the teaching of ten trials of Abraham in Jewish tradition, see Dibelius's excursus on "The Abraham Example" in *James*, 168-74. Fung, however, argues that this plural ("works") is better viewed as "a plural category," seeing it as a singular in concept. See his arguments for his view in Fung, "'Justification' in the Epistle of James," 152.

justified by doing what the law demand. If this distinction is true, James’s concept of justification might be not contradict to Paul’s teaching. A closer look at Pauline letters, however, reveals that Paul actually means that a person is not justified by *all* kind of (good) works. It is true that Paul states that justification is not by the “works of the law” (Rom 3:20, 28; Gal 2:16 [3X]; 3:2, 5, 10), but elsewhere in his letters Paul refers to simply “works” when he teaches about how one is saved/justified (e.g., Rom 4:2-4; 11:5-6; Eph 2:9; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5). Paul apparently does mean a person is never justified by all kind of works, not just ceremonial works of Jewish law. The so-called contradiction between James and Paul, therefore, cannot be reconciled by proposing the different notion on the term “works” they employ.

The other proposal to reconcile James and Paul is the historic Protestant view, initially proposed by Calvin, that James and Paul use the same term “justified” in different meanings.⁵⁴ This view is still very popular among the evangelical scholars today. Justification in Paul is understood as a forensic or legal term for declaring someone is standing right before God. It is a “judicial pronouncement of innocence, not a moral quality of personal piety.”⁵⁵ Paul’s use of “justification” mainly refers to the declaration of righteousness at the eschatological judgment, though sometimes he indicates that the declaration even has take place now (e.g., Rom 5:1). The basis of this justification is solely rests upon the work of Christ (Rom 3:24; 5:9; 10:9-10; 1 Cor 6:11; Gal 2:16; Tit 3:4-7).

Meanwhile, justification in James is often understood in the demonstrative sense: One is demonstrated or proved to be righteous.

53. McCartney lists five possible meanings of the word (“justify”) in biblical literature: (1) “To give justice to someone; to correct wrong”; (2) “To declare someone righteous . . . ; to render a verdict of ‘innocent’; to vindicate or acquit”; (3) “To prove or demonstrate that someone is righteous or in the right”; (4) “To clear a debt obligation”; (5) “To cause someone to behave righteously.” For the scriptural references and further explanation on each meaning, see McCartney, *James*, 162-63.

54. Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],” 12.

This demonstrative sense of justification has its clear example in Matthew 11:19 (par. Luke 7:35) and even Paul has used this notion as well (Rom 3:4; 1 Tim 3:16). The proponents of this view argue that Abraham has been declared “righteous” because of his faith (Gen 15:6; Jas 2:23)—hence parallel with Paul’s concept of justification—then in offering Isaac his righteousness was shown or proved in the act of obedience to God (Gen 22). Their argument, therefore, is that justification in James 2:21 & 24 has no forensic notion.⁵⁶ The good works actually do not justify Abraham, but only show that Abraham was truly a man of righteousness.

The argument for demonstrative nature of justification in James is corroborated by the word βλέπεις (“you see”) in 2:22, denoting that one can see with his very eyes how Abraham does not only have a right acquaintance with God, but also shows his faith through works. Moreover, the challenge of James to his imaginary interlocutor, “*Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*” (2:18) often taken as a strengthening argument for the notion of this demonstrative sense. Likewise, in the second example, James uses the story of Rahab the prostitute from Joshua 2:1-21 to show that Rahab was shown right (justified) when she protected the messengers from Joshua from the ruler of Jericho (2:25).⁵⁷ Despite Rahab’s faith is not

55. Some scholars who adopt this view of “two meanings of justification” are Fung (“Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” 153), Davids (*The Epistle of James*, 127), Martin (*James*, 91), Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 12-13), and Hartin (*James*, 153-54). McCartney (*James*, 276-77) adopts the same view, though he posits a possibility that James includes both meanings. Laato has a different view from these scholars. He posits that theologically James and Paul are maintaining the same thesis of righteousness through faith and of the significance of the living character of faith for justification. What makes them different is James employs the OT usage of justification with its emphasis on work-righteousness, whereas Paul avoids the terms of work-righteousness to Christians and replaces with other expressions, as “the fruit of the Spirit,” “living according to the Spirit,” “love as the fulfillment of the Law,” or “the fulfilling of the Law of Christ.” See Laato, “Justification According to James,” 76-78.

56. Fung, following Ropes, is probably right in suggesting that “the specific designation of Rahab as *the harlot*, in marked contrast with the

explicitly stated here, her works is viewed as derived from her faith.⁵⁸

If the justification in James is taken as demonstrative sense, James really does not contradict to Paul, for both maintain the faith as the basis of justification. But to take “justify” in James in this sense does not fit the context of the passage James 2:14-26. As has been clear in the previous discussion, the main issue of this passage is what kind of faith that God will approve in the last judgment. James starts his argument with the question “Can that faith (without deeds) save him?” (2:14). The salvation in view is the eschatological one and James’s concern is that a believer should have faith that will survive the future judgment. This emphasis on final judgment also fits with the letter’s theme of eschatology. Thus, it seems odd if James does not use the term “justify” to denote a soteriological emphasis.⁵⁹ It is more natural to see James’s

description of Abraham as ‘our ancestor’, suggests . . . James intends Rahab as ‘an extreme case, where, if anywhere, James’s argument might seem to fail’. . . , the two instances thus covering ‘the whole wide range of possibilities’ and showing the theological principle of [2:24] to be universally valid.” See Fung, “‘Justification’ in the Epistle of James,” 156-57; cf. Ropes, *The Epistle of St. James*, 224-25.

57. Stein is right to see that the example of Abraham sets the pattern for the example of Rahab. The adverb ὁμοίως δὲ (“And likewise”) in the beginning of Jas 2:25 signifies that the previous context of Abraham’s example should be applied to Rahab as well. See Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],’” 15. Bauckham (*James*, 125) notices that there is a tradition of Rahab’s faith, in which Rahab’s scarlet cord was understood as the “sign of faith” and thus “attesting her faith in the God of Israel” (cf. Josh 2:11). Therefore, it is presumable that the readers of James, who were mainly Jewish people, would understand that Rahab was a woman of faith.

58. Despite James’s obvious stress on the eschatological salvation, some of his grammars are confusing because they seem refer to the present verdict. James uses the aorist verb ἐδικαιώθη (“were justified”) instead of future verb to say about Abraham and Rahab’s justification (Jas 2:21, 25). Moreover, James’s statement, “Abraham our father [was] justified by works *when* (aorist participle ἀνεγγκας) he offered up his son Isaac on the altar” (2:21) seems means that the justification of Abraham has taken place at the present time. Schreiner proposes that the better way to read these verses is to see the justification as “belonged to Abraham in history” (Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 603). On Jas 2:21, Moo thinks it seems likely to take the

usage of “justify” as implying the same notion as Paul—that is, “to declare someone righteous before God.”⁶⁰ Both James and Paul are likely use the term *dikaion* in forensic sense, to refer to the right relation with God—the salvation. Thus far, it is apparent that the distinction between James and Paul is not in the meaning of “works” they employ, neither in their usage of the term “justify.”⁶¹ It means that the “contradiction” with Paul still exists, forasmuch as James argues that one is declared righteous before God at the eschatological judgment by his works and not by faith alone.

The significance of the context of James 2:14-26 to understand rightly this passage again has to be highlighted. James is criticizing the unfruitful faith that cannot save; he is questioning the dead and useless faith that contributes nothing to one’s salvation. The thesis of James, therefore, is “the saving faith is the faith that works.” With this thesis in mind, apparently when James says, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (2:24),” the faith he refers to is the dead faith that does not produce good works. To paraphrase this verse positively, “The faith that truly justifies can never be separated from works.”⁶² Both James and Paul agree that the verdict of righteousness before eschatological court of God is solely based upon the faith. Their

participle “as specifying one of the “deeds” of Abraham,” as clear in REV: “Was it not by his action, in offering his son Isaac on the altar, that our father Abraham was justified?” See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 135-36.

59. Schreiner, following Westerholm, argues that the word *δικαιω* in Paul refers to “extraordinary righteousness—a righteousness given to ungodly,” whereas *δικαιω* in James refers to “ordinary righteousness, that is, God declares those who do good works to be in right before him.” See Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 601.

60. Moo suggests that the resolution of the tension between James and Paul comes from recognizing the different notion of “justify” in their usage. Paul refers to the “initial declaration “of one’s righteousness, whereas James to the “ultimate verdict” of righteousness at the eschatological judgment. See Moo, *The Letter of James*, 141. The same position is opted by Stein, “‘Saved by Faith [Alone],” 13), and Chester (“The Theology of James,” 27-28).

61. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 604.

distinction in the emphasis of justification is due to the different situations they faced.⁶³ Paul emphasizes justification by faith alone in the Epistles of Rome and Galatians because he faced "the Judaizers," who were promoting legalism to obtain salvation. Paul reminds them that never any goodness of humankind can buy God's favor and cause them to be justified. James, on the other hand, wrote to the people who thought that faith and works can be segregated and can stand independently.⁶⁴ Consequently, he reminds them never to assume such faith without works can save. Understanding the distinction between the audiences of Paul and James is crucial in interpreting their employments of the term "justify."

James never points to the priority of works as a basis of one's justification. One can have a right relation with God only by faith that comes from the word implanted in him by God (Jas 1:21). This faith, however, was an active one, as clear from the example of Abraham: "You see that faith was working with (συνήργει) his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected" (2:22, NASB). This verse does not imply the insufficiency of faith alone to obtain the justification. Rather, Abraham's faith "'worked' with works to produce a 'working faith'."⁶⁵ Here "works" is not something that added to faith, but "works done in faith, works of faith."⁶⁶ Works in James are always rooted in faith. In other words, those who have good works in their lives without having faith in the message of the gospel will not be justified.

62. Childs rightly says that Paul and James are "addressing different questions from very different perspectives." The issue of justification in Paul is "the relation between the divine and the human in acquiring salvation," whereas in James is "the relation between the profession of faith and action consonant with it." See Childs, *The New Testament as Canon*, 442.

63. There is a possibility that James's readers were complacent in their monotheistic belief and they thought that their right doctrine has secured them from God's judgment, so they have neglected the need to show the acts of love and charity. See Bauckham, *James*, 126.

64. Martin, *James*, 93. To put it in a negative way, "Without works faith does not work" (Dibelius, *James*, 161).

65. Bauckham, *James*, 121.

True faith has to produce works and those works bring the faith to perfection, so that that faith can serve as a basis of justification. It does not mean that works have any merit in the perfection of faith. Rather, faith attains its genuineness when the acts of obedience to God become apparent.⁶⁷ In the cases of Abraham and Rahab, their faith is proved genuine because they have showed obedience to God whom they believed. The intended objective of the true faith in God is that its owner become like gracious God, who is generous (Jas 1:5, 17), also compassionate and merciful (5:11).

James's argument in this section (Jas 2:21-26) again proves that faith without deeds is dead, just like "the body apart from the spirit is dead" (2:26). The genuine faith always perfected by works. The real faith—the faith that bring one to be justified by God—reaches its intended purpose only when it yields good works as the sign of love and obedience to God and of love to one's neighbors.

Conclusion

The surface reading on James 2:14-26 inevitably results in the question of whether James is teaching something contradicts to Paul. The well-known Paul's doctrine "justification by faith alone" is challenged by James's "justification by works and not by faith alone." There has been a long debate since the Reformation on this issue, but a unanimously consensus on how to resolve it has not been reached yet. Scholars still have some differences on how some key terms in James 2:14-26, such as "faith," "works," and "justify," should be understood.

A careful analysis of the Epistle of James, however, shows that

66. Some illustrations serve well to make clear James's statement, "faith was completed by his works" (2:22). "Just as a tree is made perfect by its fruits in that it attains its legitimate development in the bearing of fruits, which shows that it is a living tree, so faith is brought to due expression in appropriate actions" (Fung, "Justification' in the Epistle of James," 155); "Just as a prophecy is "fulfilled" or brought to its expected completion when the predicted event happens, so faith is fulfilled when it eventuates in works" (McCartney, *James*, 274).

the so-called contradiction between James and Paul does not really exist. James is not opposing Paul's teaching on justification by faith alone. The key to grasp the right understanding of James's idea is to understand the context of the passage (Jas 2:14-26) and the larger context of the letter. James's concern in this passage is not to teach a theological treatise on faith, but rather a practical admonition on how a believer should have a right understanding of an effective and productive faith. Believers have to maintain perfection in their lives, as apparent in the theme of perfection that framed the letter, by avoiding the "double-mindedness" in separating claim of faith with the acts of faith. Thus, the passage that has regenerated so many theological discussions actually is about a very practical issue of Christian life.

James's main thesis is the kind of faith that can save. Every believer has to reconsider whether his faith will survive the final judgment of God. Thus, the strong purpose in this passage of exhortation is to prepare believers to face the eschatological judgment. Accordingly, the term "justify" he employs indicates the forensic sense of justification. The eschatological-saving faith is the faith that shows the evidence in works; works are indispensable in the genuine faith. Faith is not only a right knowledge of doctrine and never can be separated from the acts of loyalty to God; otherwise, it will be a useless faith. James highlights the ineffectiveness of fruitless faith throughout this passage, implying that discerning well one's kind of faith is important. "No orthodoxy that fails to lead to orthopraxy comes anywhere near authentic Christian faith."⁶⁸ Therefore, when James says that one is justified by works and not by faith alone (2:24), the faith he refers to is the faith that apparently cannot save because it lacks the works as the proof of authentic faith.

Paul emphasizes justification by faith alone and not by works because he faced the Judaizers who taught that obedience to the stipulations of law is necessary to obtain salvation. He insists that one is justified—to be declared righteous before God—only by faith in Christ. Paul himself will agree with James in the emphasis of the necessary of

67. Martin, *James*, 100.

works in Christian life, as apparent in his letters (e.g., 2 Cor 9:8; Gal 5:6; 1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11). Moreover, Pauline corpus is characterized by the “indicative-imperative” nature. The indicative of justified by God in Christ leads to the imperative to live in a life that accords to the ethics of God’s kingdom.⁶⁹ Obviously, for Paul, works are also inseparable from faith and true faith must bear the acts of obedience.

James and Paul indeed have the very same understanding in the priority of faith for salvation and the need of the authentic Christian faith to produce good works. Bauckham aptly analyzes, “When Paul says that justification is not by works he does not have in mind at all these works done in faith. When James says that justification is by works he does not have in mind at all the works of self-reliance which compromise faith.”⁷⁰ If one views James and Paul in their own contexts correctly, there is no contradiction at all in their teachings.

68. For a good survey on the issue of the importance of works in Paul, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 573-85.

69. Bauckham, *James*, 134.