Faith and Works: James, Paul, and the Rich Young Ruler

Paper 8 in a 12 Part Series

by Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Two sentences in the New Testament look like Scripture arguing with itself.

James writes, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (Jas. 2:24). Paul writes, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28). Both men are writing about the same person, Abraham. Both quote the same verse about him, Genesis 15:6. And they arrive, on the surface, at opposite answers.

This has been one of the loudest fault lines in Christian history. It split Europe in the sixteenth century. It still produces two instincts in ordinary readers today, usually without either instinct being examined. Some hear James and conclude that a person had better perform, or his standing with God is in doubt. Others hear Paul and conclude that works are a kind of optional overflow, pleasant when they appear and not finally serious when they don't. Each camp has a verse it reaches for and a verse it hurries past.

Start with who these two letters were written to, because it settles more than it seems to. Paul writes "to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints" (Rom. 1:7), and he calls them *brethren* all the way through the letter (Rom. 1:13; 7:1; 8:12; 12:1). James calls his readers "my brethren" in his second verse (Jas. 1:2), and he's still calling them that when he asks whether faith without works can save (Jas. 2:14). Neither man is telling a stranger how to be saved. Both are writing to people who already belong to God, about something those people still need to hear.

Then notice something that changes the whole question: Paul says both things himself. In Romans he shuts the laborer's wage out completely: "to him who works, the wages [misthos] are not counted as grace but as debt" (Rom. 4:4). Writing to Corinth, he puts the very same word on what a Christian receives at the end of his life: "each one will receive his own reward $misthos$ according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8). English gives you *wages* in one verse and *reward* in the other. Paul wrote one word twice — barred in the first, required in the second. He does the same with *justified*. One chapter before he writes that men are "justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24), he writes that "the doers of the law will be justified" (Rom. 2:13). So the problem was never Paul against James. It's Paul against Paul, and Paul never once writes as though he had a problem.

He didn't, because he was describing two judgments. The first falls the moment a man believes. It rests on the blood of Christ and nothing else, and it is never reopened (Rom. 3:24-26; 11:29). The second falls at the Judgment Seat of Christ, on what a man did with his life after that, and it hasn't happened yet (2 Cor. 5:10). There are two because death reached a man in more than one place. He is spirit, soul and body (Gen. 2:7; 1 Thess. 5:23) — Paper 1 of this series works that out at length — and the verdict on his soul and the redemption of his body come together at the second judgment, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

James is writing about the second of those judgments, and so is Paul whenever he talks about wages paid and rewards measured. That leaves Abraham, the man both of them reach for. It would be easy to assume that Genesis 15:6, the verse they both quote, records the night Abraham was first made alive to God. It does not. By then he'd been walking with God for years, and that one fact, as the rest of this paper will show, shapes what both men are saying about him.

The Mainstream Landscape

This series normally sets its subject beside three traditions: Reformed, Wesleyan/Arminian, and Catholic. All three are here, because all three have a worked position on faith and works, and because the differences among them on this question are sharper than on almost anything else. Eastern Orthodoxy gets its own companion paper in this series and is not one of the three engaged doctrine by doctrine here.

One word needs defining before any of them can be read fairly. To **justify** in ordinary theological usage means to declare or make a person righteous — to settle that he is right with God. Every tradition below uses the word that way, *as a single event or state. *What changes from one to the next is whether a man's own actions can affect it, and what happens to him if his life shows nothing.

Reformed

Reformed theology holds that a person is justified by faith alone, with nothing of his own added. The Westminster Confession, the standard Presbyterian statement, puts the ground of it outside the man entirely: God justifies "not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ's sake alone" (WCF 11.1).

Good works still matter, and the Confession is careful about what the term covers. They are "only such as God hath commanded in His holy Word, and not such as, without the warrant thereof, are devised by men out of blind zeal, or upon any pretense of good intention" (WCF 16.1) — obedience to what Scripture actually requires, not sincere invention. But in this system, their job is to serve as evidence. They are "the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith" (WCF 16.2). On this reading, when James says Abraham "was justified by works," he isn't naming a second route to being justified. He's naming the proof that the man was right with God already — the demonstration, not the cause.

So what does this system say about a professing Christian who shows no fruit at all, or lives for years in open and unrepented disobedience? Not that he has lost anything. Reformed theology holds that a truly justified person cannot become unjustified, and that those truly in Christ will persevere to the end (WCF 17.1). The conclusion runs the other direction: sustained absence of fruit is treated as evidence that the profession was never the real thing. The man is not a saved man who failed. He is a man who was never saved, now showing it.

Wesleyan/Arminian

The Wesleyan position starts in much the same place and ends somewhere else. The Methodist Articles of Religion, which Wesley himself abridged from the Thirty-Nine Articles, keep works downstream of justification: good works "are the fruits of faith and follow after justification," they

"cannot put away our sins and endure the severity of God's judgment," and yet "by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit" (Article X). Wesley's working phrase for the Christian life was "faith working by love," and his preaching gave the term real content rather than leaving it general — works of piety (prayer, searching the Scriptures, fasting, the Lord's Supper, Christian conference) and works of mercy (feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and the imprisoned), laid out in "The Means of Grace" and "The Scripture Way of Salvation."

Where Wesley parts from Geneva is on whether a man can walk away. Grace can be resisted. Article XII addresses sin after justification directly, holding that such sin is not automatically unpardonable and that "the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification" — which concedes, in passing, that a justified man can fall into it and may not repent. Classic Wesleyan-Arminian theology follows that through: a man who persists unrepentant can finally fall from grace and lose his salvation. Not because works ever purchased it. Because continuing in faith was always part of what grace made possible, and a man is free to stop.

Put the two side by side on the same hard case — a man who professed, then lived thirty unrepentant years — and the Reformed answer is that he was never saved, while the Wesleyan answer is that he was saved and isn't now. Different mechanisms, and the same number of outcomes at the end: two.

Catholic

Catholic teaching divides the question in a way neither Protestant system does. Initial justification is unearned. A man does nothing beforehand to deserve it; it comes by grace, through faith, in baptism (CCC 1992; Trent, Session VI, ch. 7). On that narrow point the distance from the Reformed position is smaller than the polemics suggest.

The divergence is about everything after. The good works a Christian does, empowered by that same grace, are not held to be merely evidential. They are held to increase and preserve the righteousness he received, and to merit the attainment of life. The Council of Trent said so against the Reformers in a canon aimed precisely here, condemning anyone who says the righteousness received "is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of its increase" (Trent, Session VI, Canon 24). The Catechism keeps the same structure, teaching that a Christian can merit "the attainment of eternal life" for himself (CCC 2010), and it fills in what the works are rather than leaving them abstract: corporal works of mercy — feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead — and spiritual works of mercy — instructing, advising, consoling, comforting, forgiving, bearing wrongs patiently (CCC 2447).

James 2:24 is read here at face value on exactly this point: a man is justified by works, and the works are doing something, not merely showing something.

And ongoing unrepented sin? The stakes are higher than in either Protestant system. Grave sin, fully known and fully willed, is held to sever a man from the grace he was given and to put his final salvation at real risk until that grace is restored, normally through the sacrament of penance (CCC 1855, 1861). Here a justified man's standing is not something his later conduct leaves alone.

The Word of the Kingdom Position

Three traditions, three answers, and one shared assumption underneath all three: that there is a *single *thing called justification, settled at a *single* point, which works either prove, preserve, or cannot touch. The disagreement is over which of those three verbs is right.

The position taught here denies the assumption rather than picking a verb.

What it is to be justified

In English, *justified* and *righteous* look like two unrelated words. In Scripture they're one family: to be justified is to be made righteous. And righteousness, in Scripture, is a word about a relationship. The Hebrew noun *tsedaqah* and its verb *tsadaq* describe one party meeting the expectations of another, and carry the sense of rightness, justice, and fairness. It's the word in the verse at the center of this paper: "he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness [tsedaqah] (Gen. 15:6).

The Greek carries the same idea. *Dikaiosune*, righteousness, is conformity to what is right. *Dikaiosis*, justification, is the act of establishing a man as righteous. *Dikaioo*, to justify, either brings out the fact that a man is righteous or, where he isn't, makes him righteous. All three grow from the root *dike*: a standard imposed, with a penalty for falling short. The noun *dike* itself appears only four times in the New Testament, rendered "judgment," "vengeance" twice, and "punishment" (Acts 25:15; Acts 28:4; Jude 7; 2 Thess. 1:9). The NKJV follows the Received Text at Acts 25:15; the critical Greek text reads *katadike* there, "a sentence of condemnation," which lowers the count to three without changing what the word means.

Between man and God, there's no question whose standard is in force. God is holy, and He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil" (Hab. 1:13); "the face of the LORD is against those who do evil" (Ps. 34:16). That is where judgment comes in: acceptance or denial, measured by God's standard of right. To be made righteous, then, is to have that judgment come out in your favor. It doesn't mean God lowered the standard and excused the man, or that the man improved himself until he reached it. God met His own standard for him: "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

The word *justified* by itself never tells you which verdict is meant, and Paul shows that inside one letter. "The doers of the law will be justified" (Rom. 2:13) is a verdict still ahead, based on a man's works (Rom. 2:6, 10). "Being justified freely by His grace" (Rom. 3:24) is a verdict handed down apart from works (Rom. 4:6), on the ground of Christ's blood, to the one who believes. Same verb, one chapter apart, two different verdicts. The definition of *dikaioo* holds both: at 3:24 God makes righteous a man who was not, and at 2:13 He brings out that a man is righteous by what he has done. The context decides which, every time.

So three questions come with the word wherever it appears, and a reader who keeps them in hand won't be thrown by a single verse in this paper. Right about what? Before whom? And when? The verdict Paul describes in Romans 3 is the one God hands down the moment a man believes, on the ground of Christ's blood. The verdict James describes is the one handed down at the Judgment

Seat, on what that man's faith produced during his lifetime (2 Cor. 5:10). Both men are using the word correctly. They aren't using it of the same verdict, and neither of them says they are.

Two judgments

Here are the two side by side, before either passage is opened.

The first falls the moment a man believes. It settles whether he stands right before God, and its ground lies entirely outside him, in the blood of Christ (Rom. 3:24-25). Nothing a man does afterward reopens it, because nothing he did produced it: "for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). The jailer at Philippi asked what he must do and was told one thing — "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31). No works were named, because none belong there. And the verdict stands for good, since "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29).

The second falls at the Judgment Seat of Christ. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). That's said to Christians, about Christians, and what it weighs is conduct. Paul pictures it as fire going through what a man built: "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:14-15). The man is safe. What's at stake is his reward and his portion in the coming kingdom. Paper 2 of this series works that judgment out in full.

Between those two lies the whole of a Christian's walk, and that's where works belong.

The two passages, in front of you

Here is what Paul wrote, starting where his argument starts, because the argument runs on its internal joints and a reader needs to see them.

> "But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law."What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man

> to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: 'Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.'" (Rom. 3:21-4:8)

And here is James.

> "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,' but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.' Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!"But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.' And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (Jas. 2:14-26)

One more thing before either is opened. "Faith" and "believe" are not two ideas in these chapters. They are one Greek word in two parts of speech — *pistis* the noun, *pisteuo* the verb. Wherever this paper says a man believed, it is naming the identical thing Scripture elsewhere calls his faith, not a smaller step on the way to it.

Paul: what work cannot do

Paul was not writing to one kind of man. The church at Rome had two, and he names them each time he pairs "the Jew" with "the Greek" (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9). They had come to Christ from opposite ends.

The Jew was already one of God's own. He belonged to a nation brought out of Egypt under the blood of a lamb, a nation that had kept the Passover year by year as God commanded (Exod. 12:13, 24-27). But a nation is made of men, and each one came under that blood for himself. "Every man shall take for himself a lamb" (Exod. 12:3), and it was the blood on his own door God would see: "when I see the blood, I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13). The Passover was kept the way Moses first kept it: "By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood" (Heb. 11:28). An Israelite who believed God and came under the blood was redeemed and alive to God, one of "the people whom You have redeemed" (Exod. 15:13).

His standing had always rested on the Lamb "foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Pet. 1:19-20), which is the only reason the lambs he offered ever counted for anything. When Jesus came on the scene, the Jew was called to repent and believe (Mark 1:15), to put his faith in Him as that Lamb and the promised Messiah. John the Baptist had pointed at Him and said it: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). *Believing* didn't give the Jew a second "first-salvation." What it did was make him eligible for the inheritance his nation was being offered, the heavenly portion of the kingdom (Matt. 4:17), which Paper 6 of this series traces in full.

That is what was riding on a Jew's believing, and the nation as a whole refused. Jesus told its leaders what it would cost: "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it" (Matt. 21:43), and "your house is left to you desolate" (Matt. 23:38). What Israel lost was the heavenly inheritance, not her standing, for "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom. 11:29). The Jews in the Roman church were among those who did believe, "a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5). A reader who takes the Jew's believing as his first coming to God will read the nation's refusal as a people who were never God's to begin with. The catastrophe was that God's own people turned down the greater inheritance and crucified the Heir who offered it. Jesus had told them they would, in the parable that ends with the kingdom taken from them: "This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38).

The Gentile, on the other hand, had nothing. Paul describes the Gentile's former condition in another letter: "without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). What the Gentile had to believe was that Jesus died for him, and believing it brought him from death to life. It also brought him into the standing of Abraham's seed — "if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29) — and with it, eligibility for the same heavenly portion the nation had been offered first.

Two men, two starting points, one route: "the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference" (Rom. 3:22). Notice whom John said the Lamb was for — the sin of the *world*. A Jew who believed Jesus was that Lamb was believing that the same Lamb covered the Gentile sitting beside him in the assembly. Paul asks exactly that a few verses later: "Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also" (Rom. 3:29).

That's why the deeds of the Law cannot be the ground. If they were, the Gentile could never arrive at all, and the Jew would have something to point to — and Paul shuts that door in a sentence: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded" (Rom. 3:27). Faith is the only road both men can walk.

Look at what God did to make the verdict possible. "Whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood" (Rom. 3:25). *Propitiation* is *hilasterion*, the word the Greek Old Testament uses for the lid of the ark of the covenant, the mercy seat. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, the high priest went behind the veil alone and sprinkled blood on it (Lev. 16:14-15). Nobody else went in, and nobody saw it. Now God has *set forth* His own Son in the open, with His own blood. That's how God can let guilty men go and stay a righteous judge in the same act. The penalty was not waived; it landed on a substitute, "that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). Keep the mercy seat in mind. It comes back when this paper reaches the Christian's walk.

Then Paul applies the verdict to both men at once: "there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith" (Rom. 3:30). If *justified* meant "became one of God's people," that sentence would make no sense of the circumcised man, who already was one. It does not mean that. It's a verdict about righteousness, and one God hands it down on one ground no matter which of the two men is standing before Him.

Then Paul calls a witness, and he picks the man the Jews in the room called "our father" (Rom. 4:1). Before he's done, he will show the Gentiles that Abraham is their father too (Rom. 4:11).

Paul is not asking when Abraham was saved. He is asking what God has ever counted as righteousness, and whether it was ever anything other than believing. "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Rom. 4:2-3).

Go back to the scene Paul is quoting. God brings Abraham outside at night, tells him to count the stars, and promises him descendants he does not have and a land he does not own (Gen. 15:5, 18-21). "And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). That is the first time Scripture writes the principle down in words — believing, and righteousness reckoned to it, in one sentence. It is not the night Abraham first believed God or was first made alive to Him.

By then Abraham had been walking with God for years. He had left Ur at God's word, and Hebrews says how he went: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance" (Heb. 11:8). A man with no spiritual life can't act on spiritual ground (1 Cor. 2:14). Abraham was already alive to God when he packed.

Abraham was **uncircumcised** when God reckoned his believing as righteousness, so his case tells the Gentile that circumcision does not stand between him and God. But Abraham was not **unsaved**, so his case tells the Jew the same thing from the other side. He is father to both men in the room for exactly that reason.

Back in Romans, the very next sentence after the Genesis 15:6 quote shuts out earning of any kind: "Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt" (Rom. 4:4). *Accounted*, all through this chapter, is *logizomai*, a bookkeeping word — to reckon, to credit, to enter on a ledger — and Paul uses it eleven times in Romans 4. *Wages* is *misthos*, the ordinary word for a laborer's pay, and *debt* is *opheilema*, what someone is obligated to hand over. If a man works, then when payday comes God owes him, and a debt paid is not a favor. A wage and a gift cannot be the same transaction. Paul says it outright seven chapters later: "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace" (Rom. 11:6). And notice whom God is said to justify in the next verse — not the improved, or the promising, but "the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). David is the second witness, a man with blood on his hands blessed because the LORD "shall not impute sin" — *logizomai* again, with a *not* in front of it (Rom. 4:7-8).

Then Paul dates it:

> "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised." (Rom. 4:9-12)

Abraham was ninety-nine when he was circumcised (Gen. 17:24), fourteen years or more after the night under the stars. A seal is put on something already there. And Paul names both men in the Roman church in one sentence. Abraham is "the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised" — that's the Gentile. He's also "the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith" — that's the Jew who believed Jesus was his Messiah, not every man who was circumcised. Notice Paul's picture of faith in that last line. It is not only a moment. It's a set of footsteps other men walk in.

So the men in Rome pressing circumcision on Gentile Christians were asking of them what God never asked of Abraham. And what they were really disputing was the inheritance. Paul's next words say so: "For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void" (Rom. 4:13-14). Paul answers them by showing what work cannot do: the deeds of the Law can never be the ground on which God counts a man righteous. Not at the moment he believes, and not in the years he walks afterward.

Paul again: what faith must do

Two chapters later the same apostle turns around and puts work back in.

Chapter 5 ends on "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more" (Rom. 5:20), and Romans 6 opens on the objection that sentence invites: "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?" (Rom. 6:1-2). Look at the answers Paul doesn't give. He does not say a man who lives like that was never saved, or that he'll lose the verdict of chapter 3. He answers with a master:

> "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16)

Obedience leading to righteousness. There's no third option. Every man serves something, and a man already justified is not standing outside the arrangement watching. He's in it, and the live question is which master he hands himself over to. Paul is talking to people who were raised to "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), and he tells them, "do not let sin reign in your mortal body" (Rom. 6:12) — which you don't say to a man who couldn't let it.

Then the chapter closes:

> "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting $age-lasting$ life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal [age-lasting] life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:22-23)

Fruit, then *holiness*, then *the end* — *telos*, the place a road arrives. Life is waiting at the far end of the walk, not at the trailhead. And *wages* in verse 23 is not *misthos*, the laborer's wage Paul barred in chapter 4 (Rom. 4:4). It's *opsonia*, a soldier's rations and pay, issued at intervals for as long as he stays in the ranks. Sin here is not a judge passing sentence. It's a commanding officer paying his troops, and what he pays out is death. The men drawing that pay are the only men in the paragraph — Christians, "slaves of God," told whom to serve. The gift is still a gift. It's *charisma*, given and never owed, and nothing a man does turns it into pay. But Paul puts it at the *telos*, the end of the

road a slave of God walks (Rom. 6:22). That's what the chapter makes conditional: not whether the life is a gift, but whether a Christian arrives where it's given. The verdict of chapter 3 isn't in question. Which master he serves along the way is (Rom. 6:16).

Paul says it again two chapters on, with the address in the sentence: "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (Rom. 8:12-13). And he says what the walk by the Spirit accomplishes that the Law never could: "that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:4).

Then the word he barred at Romans 4:4 comes back at the fire — "each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8) — *misthos*, the very word. And Paul had said it in Romans itself, while he was still proving every man guilty: God "will render to each one according to his deeds," with "glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good" (Rom. 2:6, 10).

The same man bars the wage from one verdict and requires it at the other, and he never stops to explain the switch, because to him they were never the same verdict. A verdict handed down on the ground of somebody else's blood cannot be a wage. A recompense measured to a man's own labor cannot be anything else. James stands exactly here.

Righteous along the way

Which raises a question every Christian eventually asks. If the first verdict is closed and never reopened, what happens when a Christian sins?

Paul has already given half the answer. A man serves one of two masters, and at any hour he's serving one or the other (Rom. 6:16). When he sins, he isn't serving God in that moment, and the sin does something real. It does not touch his standing; that verdict was rendered on the ground of Christ's death and shed blood and cannot be revoked. What it breaks is *communion*. God told Israel, a people already His own, "your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear" (Isa. 59:2). That was said to the redeemed nation about its walk, and what it describes is fellowship cut off, not a people un-redeemed.

Scripture tells the Christian what to do about it, in a sentence built out of the same word family as *justified*: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). *Confess* is *homologeo*, to say the same thing — to agree with God about what the sin is. *Just* is *dikaios*, righteous. *Unrighteousness* is *adikia*. So when a Christian agrees with God about his sin, God is righteous in forgiving it, and what He cleanses away is unrighteousness.

That is righteousness along the walk, in Scripture's own words, and it does not convene a new court. It does not need to. The matter was settled at the cross, and the blood is already on the mercy seat. What happens along the walk is that settled verdict being applied, by a High Priest who "always lives to make intercession" for those who come to God through Him (Heb. 7:25; cf. 1 John 2:1). Sin brought to Him is forgiven, communion is restored, and the man walks on — as often as he needs it, for as long as he lives (1 John 1:7).

Righteousness along the way was always what God's deliverance was for, even for Israel. When Zacharias, John the Baptist's father, got his voice back at his son's birth, he said why God was sending the Messiah: "to remember His holy covenant, the oath which He swore to our father Abraham: to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life" (Luke 1:72-75). Righteousness before God, all the days of a life — and the oath it fulfills is the one sworn to Abraham. In the same breath Zacharias says what John would bring: "to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins" (Luke 1:77). *His people* were already His. What John brought them was cleansing and forgiveness for a redeemed nation, not a first salvation.

Abraham's own life shows it. Genesis 15 and Genesis 22 are thirty years or more apart, and Abraham didn't walk the years between them without stumbling. In the very next chapter after the night under the stars, he and Sarai stopped waiting on the promise and arranged an heir themselves, through Hagar (Gen. 16:1-4). Paul names what that was: "he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh" (Gal. 4:23). Years later Abraham passed Sarah off to the king of Gerar as his sister (Gen. 20:2). It was half true, since she was his father's daughter (Gen. 20:12), but he said it to hide that she was his wife, out of fear (Gen. 20:11), the same deception he'd used in Egypt before Genesis 15 ever happened (Gen. 12:13). Neither failure reopened what God had reckoned to him, and neither cancelled the promise. When God appeared to him after Ishmael was born, He did not revisit the reckoning. He said, "I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1). Every time, what was at stake was the walk. And God brought him to Moriah anyway.

Agreeing with God about sin is itself a work of faith. A man who believes what Scripture says about the blood on the mercy seat, and about Christ's present work as High Priest, will act on it, and the acting is belief put into action like any other work faith produces. It is not nothing at the Judgment Seat; but it is the floor. Peter stacks seven things on top of faith — "add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge, self-control; to self-control, perseverance; to perseverance, godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Pet. 1:5-7) — and says that is what supplies the entrance: "for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting $age - lasting$ kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11). And James, as we're about to see, reaches past all of it to a man with a knife on a mountain.

So the two work together, and they are not the same thing. Cleansing keeps a man in a condition to bear fruit. The Judgment Seat weighs the fruit. It does not re-try sin a man brought to the mercy seat. What it weighs is the walk — and sin he never brought there shows up not as a charge read against him but as a life that produced nothing, with the wage attached that Paul named to brethren: "if you live according to the flesh you will die" (Rom. 8:13).

James: the verdict he has in view

Start with who is being written to. James addresses his letter "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad" (Jas. 1:1), and it was written early, while the kingdom was still being held out to the Jewish nation — the offer Paper 6 of this series traces from John the Baptist through the apostles. His readers are Jews who had believed Jesus was their Messiah, and partway into his first chapter he tells them what that made them: "Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of

truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures" (Jas. 1:18). Firstfruits are the first of a harvest, offered ahead of the rest — these men were meant to be the first of the nation. That setting explains why James's vocabulary runs the way it does, and it changes nothing for the Christian reading him today, because what was offered to that nation and refused is now held out to the Church, received or forfeited on the same terms.

James also tells you what his letter is about before he reaches the argument. "Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21). It's the word of truth he named three verses earlier, the word that brought them forth, and now he says what it can still do in them. *It can save their soul*. These men already have a settled standing with God; James calls them "my brethren" throughout (Jas. 1:2; 2:1; 2:14). The soul is what is still in play in them. Peter names the same thing as a goal yet to be reached: "receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:9). The writer of Hebrews names it as the thing that separates two kinds of Christians: "we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:39).

And he tells you a judgment is coming, two verses before the famous passage. "So speak and so do as those who will be judged by the law of liberty" (Jas. 2:12). Then, without a break: "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14). The "save" of verse 14 stands next to the "judged" of verse 12, and both are addressed to brethren. Earlier in the same letter he had already named what is handed out there: "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 1:12). Approved, then given a crown. And in the paragraph immediately before this one, he had called his readers "heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him" (Jas. 2:5).

Endurance, approval, a crown, a kingdom, heirs, a judgment, and the saving of a soul. That is the vocabulary James is working in, and none of it is the vocabulary of a man finding out whether he belongs to God.

So when James says Abraham "was justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar" (Jas. 2:21), he isn't producing Genesis 22 as evidence that something was already true in Genesis 15. He is naming a verdict of its own. That verdict, for the Christian, is declared at the Judgment Seat of Christ, and it is not the judgment that settled whether a man is God's — it is the judgment that settles what he receives. This is Paul's Romans 2:13 and his fire in 1 Corinthians 3, in James's words. It isn't a correction of Romans 4.

Read James's next line with that in place and it stops being strange: "Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?" (Jas. 2:22). "Made perfect" is *teleioo*, from *telos* — an end, a goal, the place a road arrives. Abraham's faith was brought to its goal by what he did with it. That is why James can then say "the Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness'" (Jas. 2:23). A statement made in Genesis 15 was *filled full* by an act in Genesis 22, thirty years or more on. James isn't using the old verse as a receipt. He's saying the belief it recorded finally arrived somewhere.

Rahab makes the same point from the opposite end of the social world (Jas. 2:25). She had no history with Israel's God, no covenant standing, nothing but a report of what He had done at the

Red Sea and to the kings of the Amorites — and she believed it. Then she hid two men in a city that would have killed her for it. Hebrews records what her believing was worth: "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31). Belief and risk, in that order, with the second making the first count for something.

And the hard sentence in the middle of James's argument lands where it should. "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (Jas. 2:19). James is not telling Christians they might be demons. He's saying that assent by itself reaches a ceiling, and that it is possible to hold a true thing about God and have it change nothing — which is a thing demons manage, and so can a man.

James closes on an image that says the same thing from the inside of a man: "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jas. 2:26). A corpse is not a man who has stopped existing. It is all there, every part of it, and it cannot do anything, because what animated it has gone out. That's the comparison James chose for faith with nothing coming out of it. He never says such a man has no faith. He says the faith is lying there — present, inert, producing nothing, and at the reckoning it will be worth what a body is worth without breath in it.

Hebrews 11: what faith with works looks like

Hebrews 11 is usually read as the Bible's roll call of people who believed, with "believed" left undefined. The chapter doesn't start there. It starts four verses earlier, in chapter ten, and those verses fix what the whole list is about.

> "Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:"'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.'"But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." (Heb. 10:35-11:3)

Count what's in those few lines. A reward. Endurance. Doing the will of God. Receiving a promise. Someone coming who hasn't come yet. The possibility of drawing back. And the saving of the soul, named outright in the last sentence before the chapter turns to Abel. "By faith" in the verses that follow carries the sense it was given here, and here the letter is still on the subject it announced back in chapter two: "the world to come, of which we speak" (Heb. 2:5).

The chapter then tells you what faith does, in a verse people quote half of: "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Two things must be believed, not one. That God exists — and that He pays. Strip the second clause out and faith becomes bare theism, which is the exact thing James said the demons have. Leave it in and faith has a forward lean built into it: a man believes there is something out ahead worth seeking diligently, and his diligence is the evidence that he believes it.

That is the shape of every portrait in the chapter. Nobody in it merely held an opinion. Abel brought something. Noah built something, "moved with godly fear," over a warning "of things not yet seen"

(Heb. 11:7). Abraham went out "not knowing where he was going" (Heb. 11:8). Each one did something costly now on the strength of something God had said about later. And the letter pauses in the middle of the list to say what they were all actually after:

> "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." (Heb. 11:13-16)

They died without it. They had seen it from a distance and spent their lives accordingly. They could have gone back — the road was open, and the writer says so — and they didn't. The thing they wanted was a country and a city, and the one being prepared for them was a heavenly one, which is the same heavenly portion of the coming reign this series has been describing since its opening papers.

Then Abraham again, at the moment James reaches for:

> "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, 'In Isaac your seed shall be called,' concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." (Heb. 11:17-19)

Look at what the test actually cost. Every promise Abraham had — the descendants, the land, the blessing to the nations — ran through this one boy, and God had said so in the plainest terms: "In Isaac your seed shall be called." Now God told him to kill the boy. The two statements could not both stand unless God intended to do something Abraham had never seen done. And Hebrews tells us what went through his mind on the three-day walk: he was "concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." He didn't resolve the contradiction by softening either half. He carried the knife up the mountain holding both, having worked out that the God who promised could raise the dead if that's what keeping the promise required.

That's what faith with works looks like. Not sincerity, and not effort. A man acting now, at cost, on the strength of what God has said about something he cannot yet see — because he has concluded that God is able, and that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

The chapter ends by saying none of them collected: "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise" (Heb. 11:39). A good testimony obtained, a promise not yet received. The whole chapter is pointing at a reckoning still out ahead.

The rich young ruler: one man, the whole distinction

A single encounter in the Gospels puts the two kinds of works in the same room. It's recorded in all three synoptics (Matt. 19:16-30; Mark 10:17-31; Luke 18:18-30).

> "Now behold, one came and said to Him, 'Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?' So He said to him, 'Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments.' He said to Him, 'Which ones?' Jesus said, '"You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "Honor your father and your mother," and, "You shall love your

> neighbor as yourself.'"'The young man said to Him, 'All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.' But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions." (Matt. 19:16-22)

Most readers have met this passage as a lesson about earning salvation by obedience, or as a warning about loving money. Neither is what's happening. The man standing in front of Jesus is the Jew this paper has already described, one of a redeemed people who came under the blood for himself (Exod. 12:3, 13). Nothing in the account narrates him being made alive; nothing suggests he needed to be. He's an obedient Israelite asking a question about something else.

His own wording says what. Matthew has him asking what he must do to *have* eternal life; Mark and Luke both record the verb as *inherit* — "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). An inheritance is never how somebody joins a family. It is what a family member stands to receive because he already is one. And "eternal life" here is *aionios* life — life for the age — the subject Paper 5 of this series works through in full. Mark records Jesus answering in the same frame: not a hundredfold now only, but "in the age to come, eternal [age-lasting] life" (Mark 10:30).

Watch how many ways the one subject gets named in this single account. The man asks about *having eternal life* (Matt. 19:16). Jesus answers in terms of *entering into life* (19:17), then of being *perfect* (19:21) — *teleios*, brought to the goal, the adjective of the same *telos* James used of Abraham's faith. Jesus then speaks of a rich man *entering the kingdom of heaven* (19:23). The disciples, appalled, ask "Who then can be *saved*?" (19:25). And Jesus closes by promising those who have left everything that they will *inherit eternal life* (19:29). Having, entering life, being perfected, entering the kingdom, being saved, inheriting — six phrasings, one subject, and it isn't the new birth. It's a place in the coming kingdom.

So when Jesus tells this man to keep the commandments, He isn't setting him a performance test for entry into God's family. He is telling a Jew living under the Mosaic Law, during the period when the kingdom of the heavens was being held out to his nation, what obedience looks like for him. And then He goes past the Law to the thing the Law couldn't reach — what the man loved. "Sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven." That instruction wouldn't have destroyed his wealth. It would have moved it.

He went away sorrowful, and the account tells you why: "for he had great possessions." Jesus had already said what that does. The deceitfulness of riches chokes the word and the man bears no fruit (Matt. 13:22). Here is a living case of it — a man who heard the message of the kingdom, cared enough to seek Jesus out and ask about it personally, kept the commandments from his youth, and would not pay what it cost. He wanted both, and no one can serve God and mammon (Luke 16:13).

Then Peter, who had been listening: "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" (Matt. 19:27). Jesus doesn't correct the question. He answers it — thrones in the regeneration, a hundredfold, and inheriting age-lasting life (Matt. 19:28-29). Peter asked the rich man's question and got the rich man's answer, with one difference between the two men. One of them had left everything.

The specific instruction was tailored to the one man's one idol, and Christians today aren't told to liquidate. They're told to do good with what they have, to be "ready to give" and "willing to share,"

and so to store up "a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal [age-lasting] life" (1 Tim. 6:18-19) — a thing laid hold of, which is not how Scripture ever speaks of a gift already in hand. The principle hasn't moved an inch. What the kingdom costs is still everything a man is holding onto instead.

What "works" actually are

None of this describes a man striving in his own strength. Scripture's own name for what's in view is bearing fruit, and fruit is not manufactured by the branch: "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Much of this fruit is inward, and no one but God ever sees it. Submitting your thoughts to His Word. Letting your heart be searched and cleansed. Bringing your own will under His — which is the harder half, and the half nobody can perform for an audience. Some of it is outward and visible: charity, kindness, truth-telling, mercy, forgiveness (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 5:1-11). Both count as works in the sense Scripture means wherever it ties obedience to reward, and both are produced by the Spirit in a man who is yielding rather than by the man bearing down.

Paul says it in one sentence, and the sentence sits immediately after the one everybody quotes against works: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). Verse 9 shuts works out of the spirit's judgment. Verse 10 names them as the reason the man was made new. They were waiting for him before he arrived.

So the four-part summary of the whole subject runs like this:

- Works have no place in initial salvation. Jesus did that work at the cross; a man believes, and the verdict is handed down (Eph. 2:8-9; Acts 16:31).
- Works of the Law, performed without faith, are not accepted — which is the thing Paul spends Romans 3 and 4 shutting out.
- Faith without works that come out of faith is useless. It arrives nowhere, and nothing is credited to it (Jas. 2:17, 20, 26).
- Faith with works that come out of faith is counted as righteousness, and it leads to the saving of the soul (Jas. 2:22-24; 1 Pet. 1:9).

Where They Align

Set the position back alongside the three traditions — Reformed/Calvinist, Wesleyan/Arminian, and Catholic — and the common ground runs wider than the disagreements suggest. Four points:

- **No tradition here teaches that a man earns his way in.** All three hold that initial righteousness before God is received, not achieved, and so does this paper. Nobody on this page is arguing with Ephesians 2:8-9.
- **All three agree that bare assent is not faith.** Every one of them reaches for James 2:19 — "Even the demons believe—and tremble!" — and concludes that something which produces nothing was never the article in question.
- **All three refuse to let Scripture contradict itself.** No tradition surveyed treats Romans 4 and James 2 as a genuine collision to be resolved by picking a winner. Each works out a reading in which both stand.

- **All three expect real obedience and treat its absence as serious.** They disagree sharply about what the absence proves and what it costs. None of them shrugs at it.

Where They Diverge, and Why

Every tradition above treats justification as one thing. The argument among them is only over the relation works bear to that one thing: evidence of it (Reformed, and Wesleyan in substance), or cause of its increase and preservation (Catholic). That shared premise is what forces each of them to bend one of the two passages.

The Reformed and Wesleyan readings keep Paul's language intact and pay for it in James. "Justified" in James 2:24 has to be downgraded from a verdict of its own to a demonstration of an earlier one — James saying *shown to be righteous* where he wrote *justified*, in a letter whose author had just told his readers to live as men who will be judged (Jas. 2:12). Catholic teaching keeps James's language intact and pays for it in Paul, since the righteousness by which a man stands before God is reopened to works that Paul excluded from it by name.

This reading doesn't split the difference. It says both men wrote exactly what they meant, about two different verdicts, and it has Paul's own word for it: he bars *misthos* from the one (Rom. 4:4) and requires it at the other (1 Cor. 3:8), and he uses *justified* of both inside a single letter (Rom. 2:13; 3:24). Paul in Romans 3 and 4 is barring the deeds of the Law as the ground on which God counts a man righteous, at the moment he believes (Rom. 3:24-26) and in the years he walks afterward (Rom. 4:12). One of his proofs is a date on a calendar: Abraham was counted righteous before he was circumcised (Rom. 4:10). James is naming a judgment that has not happened yet, on men already in the family, in a letter that calls them heirs of a kingdom (Jas. 2:5) and promises a crown to the one who endures (Jas. 1:12).

Three further differences follow from that.

What is at risk. In the Reformed account nothing is finally at risk for a truly saved man; the fruitless professor turns out never to have been one. In the Wesleyan account his salvation itself is at risk. In the Catholic account his standing is at risk and must be repaired. Here, what is at risk is neither his life nor his standing but his inheritance — his place and portion in the coming kingdom, heavenly and earthly, which is precisely what the three New Testament passages on this subject say: the word in every one of them is *inherit*, not *enter* and not *become* (1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5). An inheritance is what an heir receives. It is not what makes him one. Paper 2 carries that case in full.

What Romans 3 and 4 are about. All three traditions read those chapters as the New Testament's central account of how a sinner is first justified. That's half of it. The verdict Paul describes at 3:21-26 is the one handed down at belief. But he describes it to Christians — saints, brethren, two halves of one room — to settle a quarrel among men who already have it: whether the Gentiles among them have to take on the Law. And the witness he calls is Abraham, a man who had been walking with God for years when Genesis 15 took place. Read that way, nothing in Romans 4 has to be held off from the Christian walk — Paul himself calls faith the "steps" men walk in (Rom. 4:12) — and nothing in James has to be held off from being a real verdict.

Where the man's own effort belongs. Not in the first judgment, where it has no place at all. Squarely in the second, where Scripture puts it without apology — "each one may receive the things done in the body" (2 Cor. 5:10), and "then He will reward each according to his works" (Matt. 16:27).

Answering the Objections

Objection One: This is salvation by works

The charge. Whatever the vocabulary, a system in which what a man does determines what he finally receives has made works a condition of salvation. Call it the soul rather than the spirit, call it inheritance rather than entrance, and Paul's "not of works, lest anyone should boast" has still been undone.

The answer. The question to put to any such system is the one this series keeps putting to every doctrine: saved from what, and when? Works have no place whatever in the first answer. A man dead in trespasses is made alive by God on the basis of a finished work that was not his (Eph. 2:1, 5, 8-9), and the one thing asked of him is belief (Acts 16:31). This paper does not add a condition there, qualify it, or make it probationary. The verdict is handed down and it stays handed down.

What is conditional is what Scripture itself attaches conditions to, in letters written to men whose standing is already settled. Paul tells the Corinthians that each man's work will be tried, that one man will receive a reward and another will have his work burned and "suffer loss" while he himself is saved (1 Cor. 3:13-15). That is loss without loss of the man. The charge only holds if the two can't be told apart, and Paul tells them apart in one sentence.

Objection Two: Galatians 5:4 says exactly what you deny

The charge. Paul writes, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4). He uses this paper's own word — *justified* — and he says men seeking it are severed and fallen. A system that makes a future justification depend on conduct is the thing Paul condemns here.

The answer. Read the verb and then read the next verse. "Attempt to be justified" is *dikaiousthe*, present tense — men already inside who are presently running a program of law-keeping, not outsiders trying to get in. And the severing verb, *katergethete*, is the word for something rendered inoperative, the same word Paul uses of a law that no longer has force over a person (Rom. 7:2, 6). He states the practical effect himself two verses earlier: "Christ will profit you nothing" (Gal. 5:2). A supply has been cut off. A family membership has not been revoked.

Then verse 5, which belongs with verse 4 every time it's quoted: "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith" (Gal. 5:5). A righteousness still ahead, awaited by men who already have the Spirit. That is this paper's own structure, stated by Paul in the sentence immediately after the one produced against it. He condemns the method, not the future verdict. And he goes on treating these people as his own — "I have confidence in you, in the Lord" (5:10), *brethren* throughout (5:11, 13; 6:1, 18).

One more thing settles it. The letter that forbids circumcision commands strenuous effort a few verses later: walk in the Spirit, and those who practice the works of the flesh "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:16, 21); "he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting $age-lasting$ life" (Gal. 6:8). Paul's contrast in Galatians was never working against not working. It was law-keeping against faith working through love (Gal. 5:6), and flesh against Spirit (Gal. 3:3).

Objection Three: James says "save," and save means save

The charge. James writes, "Can faith save him?" (Jas. 2:14). The word is *sozo*, the ordinary New Testament word for being saved. Reading it as something other than salvation is special pleading by a system that needs it to mean something else.

The answer. The word is ordinary; what it saves a man from is supplied by context every time, and James supplies his. He states his subject in chapter one as the word "which is able to save your souls" (Jas. 1:21), and Scripture names the salvation of the soul elsewhere as a goal still being reached toward (1 Pet. 1:9; Heb. 10:39). He names a judgment two verses before the question (Jas. 2:12). He names a crown for the man who endures and is approved (Jas. 1:12). He calls his readers heirs of a kingdom (Jas. 2:5). He addresses them as brethren more than a dozen times. And he closes the letter telling them to be patient "until the coming of the Lord" (Jas. 5:7).

Nothing here is read into James. It is read off the letter, and most of it off the same two chapters the objection is quoting.

Objection Four: Hebrews 11 is about saving faith, not reward

The charge. Hebrews 11 is the Bible's great chapter on faith, full stop. Turning it into a chapter about reward narrows something Scripture left broad.

The answer. The chapter's own introduction decides this, and it sits four verses before the chapter break. Those verses hold a reward, endurance, doing the will of God, receiving a promise, the danger of drawing back, and "the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:35-39). Then the chapter opens: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for" (Heb. 11:1) — things hoped for, which are by definition not yet in hand. It defines faith as believing two things, that God is and "that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). It says the elders "obtained a good testimony" by it (11:2). It says the patriarchs died "not having received the promises" and were after "a heavenly country" and a prepared city (11:13-16). And it closes by saying all of them, "having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise" (11:39).

A chapter whose first and last word is an unreceived promise is a chapter about something out ahead. Reading it that way doesn't narrow it. It's what the letter has said it was about since chapter two: "the world to come, of which we speak" (Heb. 2:5).

Objection Five: If Genesis 15 is not Abraham's justification, Paul's witness fails

The charge. Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in the middle of an argument about the verdict God hands down at belief. If that verse is not the moment Abraham was first justified, Paul's witness doesn't testify to the thing he called him to testify about.

The answer. It testifies to exactly that. Paul's question is not when Abraham was saved but what God has ever counted as righteousness, and the answer has to hold at every point a man is reckoned righteous or it isn't a principle at all. Genesis 15:6 is the first place Scripture writes it down. Paul's own proof is comparative and dated: whatever happened in Genesis 15 happened before Genesis 17, so circumcision was not the ground of it (Rom. 4:9-11). That holds no matter which verdict Genesis 15:6 records.

Scripture is what dates Abraham's walk, not this paper. He left Ur at God's word before Genesis 15, and Hebrews says he did it "by faith" (Heb. 11:8) — which a man without spiritual life cannot do (1 Cor. 2:14). The context of Genesis 15 is a seed, a land, and a reward (Gen. 15:1-6, 18-21), and Paul keeps that context when he expounds it, calling the promise one of being "heir of the world" (Rom. 4:13). That is also why Abraham can be father to both men in the Roman church: he was uncircumcised when the reckoning was written, which speaks to the Gentile, and already God's, which speaks to the Jew (Rom. 4:11-12). Scripture does not narrate the hour he was first made alive. It does not narrate it for any Old Testament saint, and building a doctrine on the assumption that a particular verse must be it is the mistake, not the correction of it.

Objection Six: This is Roman Catholicism with Protestant vocabulary

The charge. A righteousness that a Christian's works contribute to, assessed at a judgment that decides what he finally receives, is the Tridentine position in different clothes.

The answer. The two systems put different things at risk, and that is the whole of the difference. Trent's canon is explicit that the righteousness by which a man stands justified before God is itself increased and preserved by his works (Session VI, Canon 24), and Catholic teaching holds that grave sin severs him from that grace until it is restored (CCC 1855, 1861). On this page, the verdict that settled a man's standing is closed, cannot be increased, cannot be diminished, and is not in view at any later judgment. What later conduct decides is an inheritance — a place in a coming reign — which is exactly the word Scripture uses for it (1 Cor. 6:9; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5).

There's a second difference, and it runs the other way, toward the Reformed side. The passage both Rome and this series lean on is 1 Corinthians 3:11-15. It's the primary Catholic proof text for purgatory and the primary text here for real loss alongside untouched standing. The parting is visible in the text itself: Paul puts the *work* into the fire and brings the *man* out of it — "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (1 Cor. 3:15). Purgatory puts the man in.

Why It Matters

Separating the two judgments is not a tidying exercise. It changes how a Christian reads four things he has probably been reading against himself.

- **It removes the pressure that makes people misread both writers.** A reader who has been taught that James threatens his standing will find a way to blunt James. A reader who has

been taught that Paul makes obedience optional will find a way to blunt Paul. Once the two judgments are separated, neither verse has to be managed, and a Christian can read the warnings in Hebrews and James without wondering each time whether he is still God's.

- **It puts the word *inherit* back to work.** Three New Testament passages warn Christians that certain conduct means they "will not inherit the kingdom of God." Read as threats against salvation they are unbearable and, taken at face value, unanswerable. Read as what they say — an inheritance withheld from an heir — they are serious, survivable, and consistent with everything else Paul wrote to the same congregations.
- **It makes Hebrews 11 usable.** The chapter stops being a hall of exceptional people and becomes a description of how any Christian lives: acting now, at cost, on what God has said about something not yet visible, because He rewards those who seek Him diligently.
- **It gives the rich young ruler back his question.** He asked how to inherit, and Jesus answered about inheriting. Taught as an account of how a man is saved, the exchange never does make sense, and most readers quietly conclude Jesus was being harder on him than He needed to be. He wasn't. They were both talking about the kingdom.

Conclusion

Paul and James were never arguing.

Paul had men in front of him who wanted to add the Mosaic Law's physical requirements to faith, and he shut the door on that with a date: God reckoned Abraham righteous in Genesis 15, and the sign of circumcision did not arrive until Genesis 17. Whatever was reckoned to Abraham, circumcision didn't produce it. James had different men in front of him, brethren who had settled into a faith that cost them nothing and changed nothing, and he told them where that ends — at a judgment, with a verdict, having arrived nowhere. "Faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (Jas. 2:17).

The two of them are not describing one event from two angles. They're describing two judgments, and between those judgments lies the whole of a Christian's life.

What that life looks like, Hebrews already said: a man who believes God is, and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him, and who acts on it at cost before he can see the thing promised (Heb. 11:6, 13-16). Abraham walked up a mountain with a knife and a son and the promises of God all held together at once, having concluded that God could raise the dead if that's what it took. That isn't proof of something he already had. It's faith arriving where faith was always headed — "by works faith was made perfect" (Jas. 2:22).

The rich young ruler stood at the same kind of turn and would not make it. He had kept the commandments from his youth and he went home sorrowful, because what was asked of him was the one thing he was holding. Nothing in that account says he was not God's. It says he did not receive what he came asking about.

That is the distinction this whole paper has been drawing. A man's standing before God is settled, once, by believing, and it is never reopened. What he does afterward is not evidence submitted about that verdict. It is the substance of a different one, still ahead, where the question is not whose he is but what he has done with what he believed.

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Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.