

James

Preached by Phil Kayser at DCC on 2020-12-13

James is one of the first books that I memorized as a child, and because it is a super-easy book to memorize, I highly recommend it for children. And yes, young children can memorize entire books of the Bible. All the kids in my class did - and we started at age 6. I think by age 10 I had memorized five books of the Bible plus a bunch of individual verses. And this is a wonderful book to memorize because it is so practical. We won't be able to get into these practical issues, but this book deals with step by step guidance on how to gain wisdom from God rather than wisdom from below. This book teaches you how to rejoice even when everything is going wrong and you are being persecuted. It teaches what practical Christianity looks like, how to improve your relationships in the church, what agape love should look like, why self-help-techniques on taming the tongue are not enough and why we need the Holy Spirit's supernatural taming work. It teaches us how to crucify our pride, how to engage in spiritual warfare, how not to be overwhelmed by the fact that rich people in the deep state control so much. It teaches us about healing, prayer, and other issues that we simply won't have the time to explore. Some people call James "faith with work boots." I like that. I think that summarizes the book rather well. It shows the difference between fake faith and true God-given faith. And this morning I want to show how every point in this chiastically arranged book¹ reinforces that central theme.

Chiastic Outline of James

By Phil Kayser

A How to handle trials (1:1-8): An example of trials (v. 1), Patience (vv. 2-4), prayer of faith (vv. 5-8) – Nature of genuine faith

B The low exalted; the rich made low (1:9-11): Life like grass; end of the rich

C Lust & anger versus God's gifts (1:12-20) – evidences of grace

D Right and wrong responses to Scripture (1:21-27) – genuine religion vs counterfeit

E Division caused by partiality (2:1-13) – evidencing the supernatural in godly conduct

F Dead faith vs living faith (2:14-26) – we “show” faith & salvation by works

E' Division caused by an unruly tongue (3:1-12) – evidencing lack of supernatural in our talk

D' Right and wrong responses to wisdom (3:13-18) – genuine wisdom vs counterfeit

C' Lusts & fighting versus God's grace (4:1-6) – evidences of lack of grace

B' The proud & rich made low; the humble exalted (4:7-5:6); Life like vapor; end of the rich. Genuine vs counterfeit

A' How to handle trials (5:7-20): Examples of trials (vv. 7-15), Patience (vv. 7-12), prayer of faith (vv. 13-18) – Genuine faith

Overview of the book using the chiasm

And I'm going to skip over all of the other introductory material and drive straight into the book.

¹ For a marvelous outline of how James is an intricate example of couplets within an overarching chiasm, see E. M. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible, New Testament* (Sevierville, TN: C.T. Haywood, 2005), p. 1847.

The two A sections - how to handle trials in a way that demonstrates grace (1:1-8; 5:7-20)

Verse 1 says, "To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings." The word for "scattered abroad" is diaspora - the same word used in Acts 8 when Saul's persecution of the church scattered everyone except the apostles abroad. These Jewish Christians no longer had a homeland. They were kicked out. They were a Jewish-Christian diaspora.

And contrary to the teachers of British Israelism and the Identity Movement, when these Jews were scattered, they were the remnant from all twelve tribes of Israel. There never have been ten lost tribes of Israel. All twelve tribes returned with Ezra, all twelve are represented in this Jewish church, and all twelve tribes were accounted for in AD 70 in Revelation 12. They were not lost, and they are certainly not the European nations. The early church started with the remnant of all twelve tribes and Gentiles were grafted into Israel. They didn't replace Israel. They were Israel.

But this reference to scattering immediately introduces the trials that these persecuted believers were going through. James does not want them to be surprised by this. The moment a person becomes a Christian, he changes sides, and the devil and his pawns will start to resist him or her. Every Christian has a formidable adversary. So James says,

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, [Why? Why should you count it all joy? Well, there are many reasons, but in light of the central theme of this book, it proves that you are a Christian; it proves that Satan and his demons hate you. "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials,"] 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him. 6 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. 7 For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; 8 he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

How are we to handle trials? In my verse-by-verse exposition of this book I gave several steps that James lays out. We won't have time to get into those details today since I want to focus on the big picture. But very briefly: Just as Jesus called His disciples to rejoice in the midst of persecution, James calls them to live the same impossible life of the Spirit - a supernatural life that makes us look entirely different from fake believers. Rejoicing under trials is one of many evidences of genuine faith that lays hold of the supernatural - in this case, supernatural joy. Every part of this chiasm will be moving toward the center where James will ask, "Where is the evidence of your faith? Where is the evidence that you are saved and indwelt by the Spirit?" That's the theme of the whole book. Do you have a counterfeit faith or a true faith? Do you grumble over trials or does God's Spirit lift you above your circumstances to look at life through His eyes?

We have a parallel set of verses on trials, patience, and prayer in chapter 5:7-20. God calls us to walk in the Spirit and in the realm of the supernatural, and to pray for God to live His life through us, and to pray for wisdom for how to walk in a way that is pleasing to God. Every one of these points shows us how to demonstrate that we are truly justified

Christians indwelt by the Spirit. There are a lot of other practical things that each section teaches as well, but I am going to focus on the big picture of James' overarching argument.

The two B sections - the humble exalted and the proud/rich made low (1:9-11; 4:6b-5:6) - life like grass/vapor, end of rich; genuine vs counterfeit

The two B sections contrast the false Jewish idea that the rich are blessed by God, and if you don't have riches, it is evidence you don't have faith. It was the early expression of the name-it-and-claim-it movement. And James will strongly say in the second section that riches is no evidence that you are blessed. How do you explain all the rich people who oppress the poor and engage in tyrannical evils? The Jewish false confidence that because we are rich, it is evidence that we are blessed, and if we are blessed, then we are saved, is a bad, bad, bad idea. The true evidence of God's favor, of our salvation, and of our faith is the same evidence that Jesus gives in the Sermon on the Mount. Both Jesus and James say that believers are able to do things no unbeliever can do. That's the evidence that grace is present. In fact, many commentators say that James not only borrows heavily from the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament, but that it also borrows heavily from the Sermon on the Mount in every section of this. It's one of several evidences that it was written after Matthew was written - or after AD 40.

Anyway, in the first chapter and a half James will introduce every theme that he will expand upon in the rest of the book. And people have recognized this chiastic-like approach as early as one hundred years ago.

In terms of the B sections, what I have just outlined is shown in a brief way in the first B section. Chapter 1, verse 9 says, "Let the lowly brother glory in his exaltation, but the rich in his humiliation..." Can you glory in things that others have a hard time glorying in? Why would a poor person glory in being exalted when he is still poor? Because he has spiritual eyes. What billionaire glories in his humiliation and being made equal with you and me? Only a Christian billionaire who has had his eyes open and realizes the true state of his own neediness. If you can't glory in all circumstances, then you need God's grace.

The second B section gives more information on how to be able to glory in things others cannot glory in. Beginning at chapter 4:6.

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble."

Verse 10 echoes the same paradox:

Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.

God exalts those who have true humility and he humbles those who lack true humility. And the verses in between speak of the power that we have in spiritual warfare when we are humble. Even Satan cannot stand against us. When we are humble, we have access to the Spirit, and by the Spirit's grace we can stop judging others (verses 11-12), a very difficult thing to do. And yet God's Spirit enables us to do this impossible thing quite regularly. We

can trust God with the future (verses 13-17), another very difficult thing to do. If you are a worry-wart, James tells you that you are not fully embracing God's supernatural grace. We can have a totally different perspective of the billionaires who seem to control politics and economics (chapter 5:1-6). No longer do we see them as enviable people. We feel sorry for the judgments that God will heap upon them. Grace gives us a different perspective on life.

Both B sections of the chiasm liken life to something that vanishes quickly. Those who are truly saved don't focus on life; they focus on God. Both B sections point out the true end of the unbelieving rich. Both point to the need to humble ourselves before God and to receive of His grace to handle our trials. They have a lot of other practical lessons too, but thematically they are helping to point us to the heart of the chiasm - where is the evidence that you are truly justified? It's in acting by grace in all of these practical areas of life. It's not showing us how to *get* saved. Quite the opposite. The whole book is asking us to show that we *have* faith by a transformed life.

The two C sections - lust, anger, and fighting versus God's gifts and grace (1:12-20; 4:1-6).

The two C sections deal with lust, excusing sin, anger, fighting, impatience, and trust in self. If those kinds of things persist in a Christian's life, he can question whether he has truly experienced God's grace.

In contrast, James powerfully presses home the character of a true Christian who:

1. Finds blessing in the midst of trials
2. endures temptation
3. trusts God rather than trusting himself
4. gives God the credit for every good thing in his life
5. treats God as faithful and trustworthy
6. gives evidence of a new nature
7. is swift to hear
8. is slow to speak
9. is slow to wrath

These are all evidences of a supernatural grace at work. None of these things are things that pagans can produce. And James makes it quite clear that if you lack those things, there is no evidence that you are saved. All saved people begin to exhibit at least some change; at least some supernatural.

The second C section gives much the same contrast, but since John Mayes did such a nice job of preaching on that last week, I'll hurry on. I'm just giving the big picture flow to show how every section is building logically toward the center of the chiasm. This will help you to see that the Auburn Avenue interpretation of the heart of the book does not fit the context at all. The context is not about how our works save us. The context is how already saved people show that they are saved. And this morning we will focus on the heart of the book.

The two D sections - right and wrong approaches to the wisdom of God/Scripture (1:21-27; 3:13-18) - genuine religion/wisdom versus counterfeit

The two D sections are contrasting right and wrong approaches to the wisdom of God and to the Scriptures. And both sections show what true genuine Christianity looks like versus the counterfeit. Let me just read both sections. Starting in chapter 1:21.

James 1:21 Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; 24 for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. 25 But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

James 1:26 If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless. 27 Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.

Again, the focus is on the genuine versus the counterfeit. The whole book ties together on that theme. The second D section starts in chapter 3:13-18.

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. 15 This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. 16 For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. 17 But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. 18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

People claim to have wisdom, but James says that the evidence that your wisdom is a gift from God is that it changes you. If you persist in having envy, self-seeking, boasting, lying, sensuality, confusion, then you are giving evidence that your wisdom is at a minimum simply earthly wisdom and at worst is demonic wisdom. But if you have a wisdom accompanied by purity, peaceableness, gentleness, willingness to yield, mercy, lack of hypocrisy, and other good fruits, then it is evidence that you are genuinely saved and indwelt by the Spirit because only the Holy Spirit could produce those kinds of things. And by the way, both sections illustrate the difference between a Hebrew conception of wisdom and a Greek conception of wisdom. The Hebrew conception is that wisdom transforms our lives. The Greek conception of wisdom is just filling your head with facts.

So, just as the Sermon on the Mount was forcing people to recognize the difference between flesh-wrought Pharisaism and Spirit-wrought Christianity, James is doing the same throughout the book. Obviously I'm skipping over most of the applications and simply focusing on the big picture so that you can see that the historic Reformed interpretation of the justification passage makes more sense of the context than the Auburn Avenue interpretation.

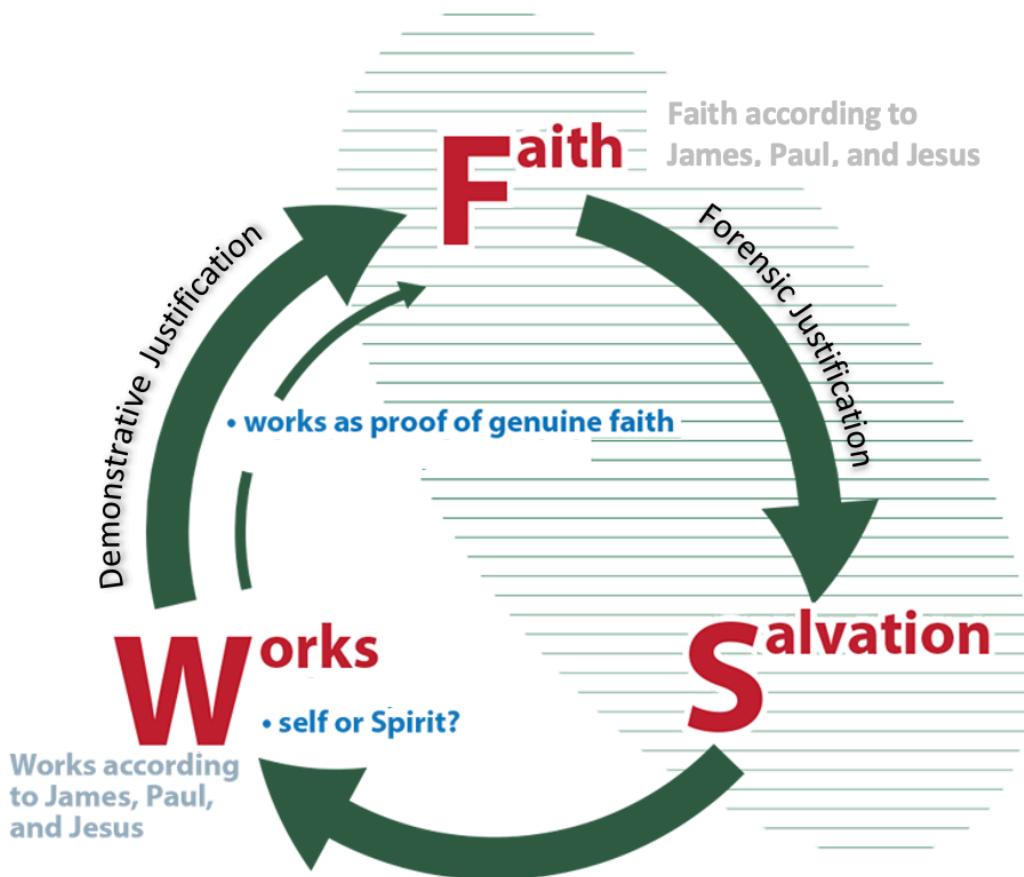
The two E sections - division because of partiality and unchecked speech (2:1-13); 3:1-12) - evidencing (or lacking evidence of) the supernatural in our conduct and speech

The two E sections address ungodly division in the church. This too shows that something is wrong with our faith. As chapter 2:1 words it, "My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality." If you've got genuine faith, then favoritism within the church should increasingly disappears from our lives. Why? Because faith that is focused in the Lord of glory humbles us and equalizes us and makes us appreciate how unworthy we are of anything.

But back to the big picture, the first E section shows that the division came through partiality and the second E section shows division that comes as a result of a tongue that is set on fire by hell rather than being sanctified by the Spirit. Did you know that demons can set your tongue on fire? They can. Both sections are rich in instruction, but the only thing I have time to highlight is that both sections say that our conduct and speech either gives *evidence* of the supernatural grace of God at work in us or gives *evidence* that it is not at work in us. The whole book from start to finish is giving the *evidences* that we have saving faith. Though we are saved by faith alone, that faith always results in change. It is a faith that works. It's not enough to claim to be justified. If your life shows no sanctification, then it is unlikely that you were justified or saved in the first place. Any interpretation of the central section that speaks of works as the means of *getting* saved rather than the evidence of an *already* accomplished salvation is failing to take the context of the whole book into account.

The central F section - Dead faith versus living faith (2:14-26) - those who have genuine faith & justification will demonstrate the reality of it with their conduct

And I want to spend the remainder of our time giving what I consider to be the true interpretation of James 2:14-26, which is the heart of the chiasm. I want to start by having you look at the diagram I made on page 3 of your outline. This chart helps you to visualize what is wrong about some of the false views of justification.



You will see a large diagonal orange line that divides the chart into two parts. To the right of that line is forensic justification, which is being declared to be righteous in a court of law. Paul, James, and Jesus are equally clear that the unrighteous are declared to be righteous because of our union with Jesus by faith alone. Our works do not factor into our being declared to be 100% righteous the moment we put our trust in Jesus. The moment you introduce works into that side of the equation you have a false Gospel according to Galatians. There are no works in that forensic justification other than the works of Christ.

But the green arrow shows that the faith that unites you to Jesus and forensically justifies you is a living faith, and that living faith always results in the works that are to the left of that orange line. Works can obviously be done in the flesh or in the Spirit. James and the Sermon on the Mount show that the only works that demonstrate faith are works done by the Spirit because faith by its very nature receives the grace to do those works from the Spirit. So those genuine works prove or demonstrate or show that we have a genuine faith. We call that demonstrative justification. Those works don't save us. Those works demonstrate that we are already saved. Those who are forensically justified will (as the green arrow shows) always (without exception) begin to be changed in their lifestyle and begin to showcase works done by the Spirit. And because those works demonstrate that we

are saved and demonstrate that we have genuine faith it is called demonstrative justification by theologians.

But unlike what might be implied by the orange line, the picture is one whole that cannot be divided up. You can distinguish between forensic justification and demonstrative justification but you cannot separate them. One follows the other inevitably. You cannot divide it up like the Carnal Christian theory does. The Carnal Christian theory believes that you can be forensically justified and never have anything on the left side of the orange line. They artificially divide that picture so that a person has a ticket to heaven but does not have a transformed life. And Paul just as vigorously fights against that notion in Titus as James does in the book of James.

Enough on that picture. I believe that picture gives the overview of what James 2:14-26 is talking about. Let's read that entire passage.

James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith [that] save him? [In the Greek there is a "that" in there. Verse 15] 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 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? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

James 2:18 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. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 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. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

James 2:25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?

James 2:26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

Roman Catholics and at least some Auburn Avenue teachers have at least two things in common - they deny this distinction between forensic justification in God's court room and demonstrative justification before men and they believe that you can lose your justification if you don't persevere in good works. They wouldn't say it quite like this, but it amounts to justification by *perseverance* rather than justification by faith. They say that you can start off justified, but if you backslide and stop doing good works, you lose your justification. We hold say you don't have it in the first place. They don't see two different kinds of justification; they see a continuum of the same justification. It's very similar to the Wesleyan five-point Arminians who confuses sanctification with justification. Of course, both Roman Catholics and Auburn Avenueists will insist that it is all of grace ("we're not legalists - it's all of grace") since God's grace precedes, enables, and finishes it all, but they insist that we are declared righteous by God by both faith *and works* (so there is no sola fide there) and that faith-works are unto justification. Let me give some hints that James himself addresses two quite different kinds of justification.

Let's look first of all at verse 24. This is the verse that is so frequently misquoted by the Roman Catholics. Verse 24 says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Roman Catholics treat the word "only" as if it said "alone" - as if it was an adjective. And sadly, 5 of the 37 translations that I checked mistranslated this. The way they mistranslate it, it says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone." But the Greek word is clearly an adverb ("only"), not an adjective ("alone"). That makes all the difference in the world. Let me quote a commentator on this to clarify the distinction. He says,

"The Greek adverb "only" ($\mu\acute{o}vov$) ... does not qualify (or modify) the word faith, since the form would then have been $\mu\acute{o}v\eta\zeta$. As an adverb, however, it modifies the verb justified ... ["and not only justified by faith"]. James is saying that a by-faith justification is not the only kind of justification there is. There is also a by-works justification. The former type is before God; the latter type is before men."²

And actually, many Reformed people have demonstrated five types of justification in the Old Testament. I won't get into these five types in detail, but I discuss them in detail on page 3 of your outlines.

² Zane C. Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character Through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 71.

Five Old Testament Uses of “Justification”

Just as the word “sanctification” has a variety of meanings,¹ the word “justification” has a variety of meanings as well. The Old Testament used the term “justification” in at least three ways:

- 1) **stative justification** - a *state* of being righteous (eg., Job 4:17). In this sense, God is justified.
- 2) **demonstrative justification** - being *shown* to be righteous (Jer. 3:11).

Three types of forensic (court room) justification (the most common usage), where a person is *declared* righteous by a court of law (Deut. 25:1).²

- 3) First in order was **mediate justification** (that is, the *means* of getting justified - an appeal to a court). This was key as there could be no justification/acquittal apart from appeal: (“state your case that you may be acquitted [same word as justified]” – Is. 43:26). In this sense the accused is justified by *appeal*. You can see how this parallels our spiritual justification by faith.
- 4) Second in order was **meritorious justification** (the presentation of the merits/grounds/evidence of the case). According to Biblical principles of justice, there had to be merits to the case (“Let them bring out their witnesses, that they may be justified” - Is. 43:9).
- 5) The third forensic component was **judicial justification** (the judge’s legal declaration of acquittal/justification (Deut. 25:1). Such a declaration could not happen apart from a) appeal and b) evidence that justified such a declaration. (Once a person left the court room, he was called upon to show the truth of the court’s declaration (declarative justification - #2) above. He was not subject to the court any longer, but he still had an implied obligation to live his profession.)

Four Kinds of Justification Related to Us

Forensic
Justification
(These three
justifications
take place in the
court room.)

Demonstrative
justification (this
takes place when
we leave the
court room)

1. We are justified **MEDIATELY** by faith alone (Rom. 3:26,30; 4:5; 5:1; Gal. 2:16, 3:24; James 2:23). Faith is the legal channel or means by which that righteousness is claimed or received. Unless we appeal to the court for justification, we are not justified. But in the court room we must by faith appeal to Christ’s works, not our own. The moment our own works are brought into the court room, a guilty verdict must come against us. As James makes clear, if we violate even one law, we have broken all (2:10). In the court room, faith alone can shine, because faith alone appropriates Christ’s merits.
2. We are justified **MERITORIOUSLY** by Christ alone (Is. 53:11; Rom. 3:24; 4:23,25; 5:8,9; 10:4). This is the legal ground (basis/merit) for that declaration of God. Since God “justifies the ungodly” (Rom. 4:5), the ungodly sinner who comes for mercy has no merit of his own. Instead, the righteousness of Christ must be imputed to him. When faith unites us to Christ, our sins were imputed to Jesus (who suffered in our place) and His righteousness is imputed to us. There can be no justification apart from the perfect works of Christ.
3. We are justified **JUDICIALLY** by God alone (Rom. 3:26,30; 8:30,33). This is a legal declaration that was made by God as Judge once and for all that we are: 1) legally not guilty and 2) we are legally righteous. No one but God can make this judicial declaration.
4. We are justified **EVIDENTIALLY** by works alone (James 2:21-25; 1 Jn. 2:4,15,19; 3:6-10,24; 4:8,20). Works is the visible demonstration that we have a saving faith and that the court has indeed vindicated us. Since faith is an inner quality that cannot be seen, faith cannot demonstrate anything. Works are the only demonstration by which others can see that we are justified Christians. (See Christ’s statement: “by their fruits you will know them.”) If there are no works, it is evident that there was no faith, and thus that there was no judicial declaration that we are acquitted. As the Reformers worded it, “We are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.”

¹ Sanctification has at least the following meanings: a) Christ setting us aside by the ransom of His death (Heb. 10:10), b) being outwardly set apart (1 Cor. 7:14; 1 Tim. 4:5), c) being once and for all set apart at conversion as saints – definitive sanctification (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11), d) ongoing growth in holiness – progressive sanctification (Heb. 2:11).

² For other Scriptural examples, see John Murray, “Justification,” in *The Epistle to the Romans*, vol. I, pp. 336-362. Murray shows how the Hebrew verb for justified has “a variety of significations” including, “Stative... Causative... Demonstrative... [and] Forensic.”

I’ll just quickly summarize four of those five. We are justified judicially by God alone according to Romans 3:26 and a bunch of other verses. Second, we are justified meritoriously by Christ alone according to Isaiah 53:11; Romans 3:24 and a bunch of other Scriptures. Third, we are justified mediately by faith alone according to Romans 3:26,30 and a bunch of other Scriptures. And fourth, we are justified evidentially by works alone

according to James 2:21-25; 1 John 2:14,15,19 and a bunch of other Scriptures. I say “works alone,” not because such works are possible apart from faith (they are not), but because men can’t see our faith. The only thing they can see is our transformed life; our works. Roman Catholics are not being sensitive to the five definitions of that word. The key point is that since the word “only” is an adverb, not an adjective, it should be obvious that there is more than one kind of justification. The grammar absolutely demands it. This is not some artificial construct simply to explain away Roman Catholic doctrine. It flows straight from the text.

Second hint: James appeals to two quite different times in Abraham’s life to illustrate these two kinds of justification. Look at verse 23. This verse could easily be put into the book of Romans or Galatians and it comes from exactly the same period in Abraham’s life that Paul argues from – when God made His covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. Verse 23 says, “And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’” That’s exactly what Paul says. In Galatians 3:6 Paul says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” That’s word-for-word identical with Paul’s phrasing. The phrase, “And the Scripture was fulfilled,” points back to Genesis 12. In the Hebrew the word believed is in the perfect tense - also pointing back to Genesis 12. The word “accounted” is a legal term that belongs to a court of law. It is the Greek word logizomai, which means to account or to credit something or to impute something. In systematic theology, this is the word for imputation. Something we don’t have is being imputed to us. What is being imputed? Righteousness. The last phrase of verse 23 doesn’t indicate that Abraham earned God’s friendship. It says, “And he was called the friend of God.” When? At the time he was justified. And when was that? At the moment he believed (perfect tense), God treated him as righteous even though he was not righteous in himself. The righteousness was imputed to him. It was Christ’s righteousness credited to his account. So far so good. This is identical to Paul’s theology.

But in verses 21-22 we have an entirely different justification, and the reason we know it is entirely different is because it takes place 40 years later than verse 23. If you look at your diagram on the bottom of page 3, you will see that James 2:23 is on the right-hand side of that orange line - in the forensic or courtroom justification before God. James 2:21-22 is on the left-hand side of that orange line - the justification before man where he seeks to live consistently with the court declaration. The later justification by works that occurs in verses 21-22 occurred in Genesis 22, when he offered up his 25 year old son Isaac. And Abraham was 125 years old. Which, by the way, shows Isaac’s faith too. A 125-year old man will not be able to tie up and sacrifice a 25 year old Isaac unless Isaac agrees to it. Just for the record, Abraham lived to be 175.

But let’s keep these contexts distinguished in our minds. In verse 21, a man who has already been a justified saint for 40 years is said to be justified by works. Is it obvious which category that should fit into? Yes. It’s the fourth category of evidential or demonstrative justification. Let’s read the verses:

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?

It wasn't his *justification* that was made perfect - as so many false teachers claim. That is a gross misinterpretation of this verse. It was his *faith* that was made perfect. It wasn't his court justification that took place by works. That was 40 years earlier. The first justification was a justification before God. He's out of court now. This was a justification before man that his faith in God expressed years before was so authentic, that he was willing to give up his dearly beloved son to the Lord. His faith was tested. And according to Hebrews, Abraham was so convinced of the truth of God's promise in Genesis 15, Abraham believed that God would be obligated to raise Isaac from the dead if he had to carry through on the sacrifice. You can read that in Hebrews 11. He demonstrated the reality of the faith that had earlier justified him.

And that is a good question to ask each of you. "If you were on trial by men for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" Is your life so characterized by good works that everyone would know that you are different; you're a Christian.

Notice that James keeps using the term "show" in this chapter. In verse 18 it says, "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." The Greek word is *deixon* which means to exhibit or to show or to display. And you see this all the way through the chapter. Shown, show, speak and do, shown, show, show.

But let me go through each verse and outline thirteen proofs that James is trying to contrast the genuine from the counterfeit consistently with the rest of the book. If they truly have saving faith, why are they so content with a shallow Christianity and why do they lack zeal for holiness? That's his question. So look at verse 14.

1. Verse 14 says, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that (*η*) faith save him?" The NKJV has left out the word "that" from the Greek. He is not saying, "Can faith save him," but can that kind of a faith save him." If you look in the Greek interlinear you will see that there is an extra Greek word in there to distinguish a certain kind of faith from another.
2. Second, in verses 15-16 he is basically saying that words are empty without action. So faith without works is empty faith and words without works are empty words. So that fits what we have been saying in the rest of the book outline.
3. Third, in verse 17 he gets to the nub of the issue and says that such faith by itself is a dead faith. I have underlined the "by itself" because this was a key phrase for the reformers. They said that we are justified by faith alone at conversion, but not by a faith that is alone. If you have a faith that is by itself or that is alone, it is a sterile, dead, counterfeit faith, and is therefore not a saving faith. Our works don't save us in God's court room. All they can do is condemn us. But any faith that is sterile will also be a faith that cannot lay claim to God's righteousness. It is a counterfeit faith. James is saying that if you have a faith that is by itself, and is not zealous for good works, you need to get saved. You are dead in your sins. God has never regenerated you and given you His faith. Every supposed grace you have is a counterfeit grace. So it is a dead faith. That too is consistent with what we have said and ties in with the whole chiasm.

4. Fourth, verse 18 quickly corrects an error on the opposite extreme, and that is whether there can be good works apart from faith. And he says, "Obviously not." So he is dealing with both sides of the equation just as Paul does. James doesn't major on the problem of dead works like Paul does. He majors on dead faith. But both Paul and James oppose dead works. "But someone will say, 'You have faith, and I have works.'" [And James says, "It doesn't work that way.] "Show me your faith without your works [which is an impossibility], and I will show you my faith by my works." Any faith that can be shown without works is a different faith than James has, and any works that can be produced without faith is a different works than James has. The two have to go hand in hand.
5. Fifth, verse 19 says that mere doctrinal belief is not saving faith, since demons have good doctrine but no salvation. In fact, they probably know more doctrine about God than you do. They've been around for six thousand years. The Bible says that Satan knows the Scripture. But he hates it and disobeys it. The amount of doctrine you believe is not sufficient. Biblical faith involves the mind, the will and the affections all embracing God.
6. Sixth, in verse 20 he says again that faith without works is a dead faith. That too fits what we said - counterfeit versus real faith.
7. Seventh, look at verses 21-23. Proof of what has been said can be seen in that Abraham demonstrated the saving faith that he started his Christian life with 40 years earlier. His faith simply grew as it expressed itself in works. Let's draw that out a bit more.
8. Look at verse 21. Justification by works is by works alone. Obviously faith produces those works (the next verse says so), but humans can't see that faith. All they can see is works that illustrate the faith. James picks an example of works that flowed from his saving faith that are recorded in Scripture. He could have picked many other examples, but Genesis 22 (which was 40 years later) serves his purpose of clearly distinguishing the two kinds of justification.
9. Verse 22: Notice that he says that "faith was working..." Abraham already had faith, but it was working. Secondly, notice that he says, "by works faith was made perfect." It does not say his justification was made perfect. The only way to mature in faith is to challenge faith with good works. And good works are works that no pagan can do. Faith is tested not only when Joshua was called to cross the Jordan River, but when we are called to love the unloveable, to have joy when we are persecuted, to conquer besetting sins, etc. According to Hebrews, Abraham so trusted that God would raise a seed through Isaac (the very thing promised in Genesis 15), that he knew that God would be obligated to raise Isaac from the dead if he had to go through with the sacrifice. That is faith. It banks on the word of God and acts even when all the evidence seems to go against it. Every example of faith in Hebrews 11 is a faith that acts; a faith that works. Works is simply the perfection or natural outgrowth of faith. But in any case, the verse says that faith was perfected, not justification. This is not about getting saved; this is about growing his faith.

10. But in verse 23 he hastens to clarify that he is not denying forensic justification by faith alone. He describes justification by faith alone when Abraham was 85 years old - forty years before. "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." We've already talked about that. It's in the perfect tense, so technically he was justified in Genesis 12. Abraham's first justification was immediate (not progressive), declarative (not earned), legal (not outside the court room), and was once and forever (not in jeopardy). The second justification was before man and proved that he was indeed a believer. That is ongoing. Forensic justification brought Abraham from the state of being an enemy to being a friend of God. Evidential justification *proved* that Abraham was a friend of God. He acted like a friend.
11. Eleventh, look at verse 24. "You see then..." He is appealing to the two justifications he has just discussed in Abraham's life. Now he is saying to his readers: "Do you see now that there are two kinds of justification that you need to be concerned about. You've all experienced the justification of verse 23, but what about the other one?" There is a justification by faith alone (and you are good church members and you know about that), but there is also a justification before me and before others that you are saved. Nothing but faith is appropriate in the court room. In the court room only Christ's works will justify. But outside the court room (and you are believers, so you should be outside the court room), no one can know that you have faith without the works that flow from faith. As Christ said, "by their fruits you will know them." Not by their profession but by their fruits. James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only."
12. My twelfth point is James goes on to show that though you can distinguish forensic justification from demonstrative justification, you cannot separate them and have one without the other. So in verse 25 James uses Rahab to illustrate the truth that faith and works cannot be separated because all four aspects of justification took place on the same day in her life. You can distinguish, but you cannot separate. God saved her with the first three justifications, and she immediately showed that she was a justified person by taking dangerous action that required true faith. "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" His point is that no person who is justified by faith can ever escape being justified by works. You cannot have one without the other. So distinguish, yes (your eternal salvation depends on distinguishing), but verse 25 says don't separate.
13. And finally, in verse 26 he says, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Just as body and spirit need each other, so faith and works need each other. It's because of the nature of faith that the two justifications cannot be separated. And of course, the whole book is trying to distinguish between fake faith and true faith. Saving faith leads to demonstrating faith. Faith that justifies before God will eventually justify before men.

So this interpretation of these verses gives them the same force that all the other sections of the chiasm did. Throughout this book James is contrasting true faith, grace, wisdom, and religion with counterfeit faith, grace, wisdom, and religion. In this section he is contrasting

true faith and works from counterfeit faith and works by highlighting demonstrative justification. It fills out the picture perfectly. Like Paul insisted upon in his epistles, if you are truly saved, you will persevere. If you have true faith, it will result in works.

Here's an illustration. When you come to Christ in faith, God calls the ground holy and demands that you take off your work boots and humbly bow before Him. You can only be saved by what Jesus has done. But once you are saved, you put on your work boots and go from that place as sons and daughters who delight in serving the Father.

These Jewish Christians were beginning to act as if they didn't have faith; as if they weren't saved; as if they weren't children. And James is testing them to see whether they were in the faith. Paul did exactly the same thing in Titus and in other books. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 he says, "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you are disqualified." And how were they to examine themselves? By their repentance and works. They had ignored Paul twice, and Paul was questioning whether they were true believers. He is doing exactly the same thing that James is.

In Titus 2:16 Paul said, "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work." "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him." Paul is in essence saying that if you don't have demonstrative justification, you are denying that you ever knew Him in forensic justification. Claiming to be a Christian is not enough. If you really were justified in the court room, then prove it with your life. Here's how he worded it in the previous five verses: Titus 2:11-15.

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who [get this: "who] gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

You see both sides of the diagram on page 3 in that statement. May we be a people who testify by our lifestyle what God has already testified about us in court – that we are saints – a righteous people. That means that we should start living as a righteous people. And may He receive all the glory. Amen.

Left out material:

Internal evidence shows that this book was written after the scattering of Christians to the four winds in Acts 8 - so after AD 35. In fact, it borrows so heavily from the sermon on the Mount that it was probably written after Matthew, which was written in AD 40. But there are evidences that it was written before the Jerusalem council, before Gentiles started coming into the church, and before the Gentile controversy even arose. Well, that would mean that it had to be written before AD 49. And there is other evidence that points to even earlier. I won't bore you with all of the evidence, but I believe it was written in AD 45 - the same year that the Gospel of Mark was written.

This is yet another book that blows me away with its beautiful macro and micro structures. James borrows so heavily from the wisdom literature of the Old Testament that some have claimed it is a kind of wisdom literature. But it has a lot of similarities to Matthew as well, which makes sense, since both books were written to a Jewish audience. It is a very Hebraic document that is filled with various forms of parallelisms, inversions, contrasts and comparisons. Its chiastic structure was recognized more than 100 years ago. Scholars like Bullinger³ recognized that James introduces all the main themes of the book in the first one and a half chapters and then expands on each of those same themes in reverse order. So unlike some chiasms, there is far more material in the second half of the chiasm, even though it is dealing with the same themes.

Verse 1 says that the author was James. The question is, "Which James?" There are three possible candidates. Two apostles had the name of James, so it could be one of them. And the half-brother of Jesus became the pillar of the church in Jerusalem. Most commentators opt for him being Christ's brother because there is strong early church tradition to that effect, but I'm not sure we can rule out one of the two apostles.

³ For a marvelous outline of how James is an intricate example of couplets within an overarching chiasm, see E. M. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible, New Testament* (Sevierville, TN: C.T. Haywood, 2005), p. 1847.