

## The Book of James

The author is generally considered to be James, the brother of Jesus. While James did not originally accept Jesus as the Messiah, he later became a pillar in the early Jerusalem church. Additionally, there are parallels in the language of the epistle and the speech of James at the Jerusalem council. Scholars also note that the author speaks with a tone of authority befitting the position of James, as the half brother of Jesus. While this is the current primary view, it is not universally held.

The date of the epistle is also a subject of disagreement. The most prevalent view is that it was written as early as 34-35 AD, making it the earliest, or one of the earliest of the New Testament epistles.

Exactly why James was written is unknown. Some view it as a reaction to some of Paul's teachings; others suggest it was written to both Christian and non-Christian Jews, who continued to worship together in the early church, but were having increasing conflicts. It is unique in the canon for its explicit support of Torah observance, that is, the law.

The Book of James has raised 2 questions through the years:

- 1 – Should it be in the Canon?
- 2 – Do the teachings of James conflict with Paul's writings?

## BIBLE STUDY AIDS

### James Overview Chart

# JAMES

<b>Faith</b>	When stretched, it doesn't break.	When pressed, it doesn't fail.	When expressed, it doesn't explode.	When distressed, it doesn't panic.
<b>Deeds</b>	Authentic stability	Authentic love	Authentic control and humility	Authentic patience
	<u>Greeting</u>	<u>Partiality and prejudice</u>	<u>The tongue</u>	<u>Money matters</u>
	<u>Trials</u>	<u>Indifference and mere intellectualism</u>	<u>The heart</u>	<u>Sickness</u>
	<u>Temptation</u>	<u>Obedience and action</u>	<u>The will</u>	<u>Carnality and correction</u>
	<u>Response to Scripture</u>			
	<b>CHAPTER 1</b>	<b>CHAPTER 2</b>	<b>CHAPTERS 3-4</b>	<b>CHAPTER 5</b>
<b>Background</b>	The difficulties of life caused the scattered saints to drift spiritually, leading to all forms of problems—unbridled speech, wrong attitudes, doubt, strife, carnality, shallow faith.			
<b>Characteristics</b>	"The Proverbs of the New Testament," James contains many practical, straightforward exhortations. Emphasis is on importance of balancing right belief with right behavior. The book has many Old Testament word pictures and references.			
<b>Theme</b>	Real faith produces authentic deeds.			
<b>Key Verse</b>	2:17			
<b>Christ in James</b>	Jesus is the glorious Lord, who inspires true faith and authentic works (2:1, 14-26).			

Copyright © 1983, 1998, 2010 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights reserved worldwide.

(<https://insightforliving.swncdn.com/images/ifl-usa/content/ascendio/resources/bible/59-James.png>)

View Chuck Swindoll's chart of James (<https://insightforliving.swncdn.com/images/ifl-usa/content/ascendio/resources/bible/59-James.png>), which divides the book into major sections and highlights themes and key verses.

*2d suggestion of breakdown*

- *Salutation (1:1)*
- *Faith and Wisdom (1:2-8)*
- *Poverty and Riches (1:9-11)*
- *Trial and Temptation (1:12-18)*
- *Hearing and Doing the Word (1:19-27)*
- *Warning against Partiality (2:1-13)*
- *Faith and Works (2:14-26)*
- *The Tongue (3:1-12)*
- *The Wisdom from Above (3:13-18)*
- *Friendship with the World (4:1-10)*
- *Judging a Brother (4:11-12)*
- *Warning against Boasting (4:13-17)*
- *Warning to the Rich (5:1-6)*
- *Patience and Prayer (5:7-20)*

# Justification by Faith and Justification by Works

## DID JAMES CONTRADICT PAUL?

### A Chart Comparing and Contrasting the Teaching of Paul and James

Paul and James did not contradict each other; but rather they complemented each other. What both men wrote was inspired by God (2 Tim. 3:16) and true. Paul's focus was on the unsaved man and how he might get right with God. James' focus was on the saved person and how he might show his faith and demonstrate the reality of his faith.

Paul's Teaching	James' Teaching
You cannot be saved by works (Ephesians 2:8-9)	You cannot show that you are saved without works (James 2:14,18)
How can a person be saved?	How can a person show that he is saved? How can he "show his faith"?
By faith alone (Rom. 3:28)	Only by works (James 2:18)
Faith without works saves (Romans 3:28) This is a living faith (saving faith)	Faith without works does not save (James 2:14) This is a dead faith (James 2:17,20,26)
Faith alone saves	The faith that saves is not alone
A person is not saved by works ("works" are rejected by Paul as <b>the means of salvation</b> : it is wrong to say that a person must do good works in order to be saved)  These are meritorious works, that is, works done to try to merit or earn salvation	A saved person will perform good works ("works" are understood by James to be <b>the result of salvation</b> : a person does good works because he is saved)  These are faith works, that is, works that spring from a faith that is real and living.
Paul agreed with James  He taught that good works must accompany saving faith (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:8; Gal. 5:6; Phil. 2:11-12).	James agreed with Paul  He taught that a person inherits the kingdom only by faith (James 2:5) and that Abraham was justified by faith (2:23)

Paul used the example of Abraham when he first believed in God (Rom. 4:3 and compare Genesis 15:6).	James used the example of Abraham when his faith was tested by God, about 40 years later (James 2:21 and compare Genesis 22)
The error Paul corrected: Salvation is by the works of the law (the error of legalism)	The error that James corrected: Works are unnecessary after a person is saved (the error of antinomianism)
Paul wrote about how a guilty sinner may be justified before God.	James wrote about how a believer can show that his faith is genuine (justification or vindication before men)
At the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 the key issue was that salvation is by grace through faith and not by the works of the law. See the error in Acts 15:1 and Peter's conclusion in Acts 15:9,11. James, who took a lead role in this discussion never voiced any disagreement with Peter or Paul over this crucial matter.	
Paul's perspective: He was viewing the guilty sinner who needed to be right with God. (The sinner is in view)	James' perspective: He was viewing the believer (or professing believer) who needed to demonstrate that his faith was real. (The believer is in view)

## The Example of Abraham

Both Paul and James turned to the life of Abraham to illustrate justification. Paul writes, "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 reckoned to him as righteousness" (Rom 4:2-3). James seems to contradict Paul when he writes, "Was not our father Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" (James 2:21) A careful analysis will help shed light on this apparent disagreement.

Paul makes it clear that it was faith alone that justified Abraham. He was referring to Genesis 15:6, where Abraham put his trust in the divine promise that he would be the father of many nations. It was his assurance that God's character guaranteed the completion of this promise for which God justified him. Thus, Abraham was not justified by works of the law, but by faith when he believed God.

The event James is alluding to occurred in Genesis 22, when Abraham obediently offered Isaac as a sacrifice according to God's command, until at the last moment God forbade him. It is notable that James also recites Genesis 15:6, thus inferring that Abraham *was* justified by faith earlier in his life, in agreement with Paul's teaching. Likewise, verse 24 states, "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone." In addition, James teaches that Abraham was justified by works "*when* he offered his son Isaac on the altar." Therefore, James is suggesting that Abraham was first justified by faith years before he was justified by works. Yet, the question remains: "If Abraham was completely justified by faith, why must he also have been justified by works?"

The answer to this can be found by identifying the difference between what James and Paul mean by justification. The emphasis in James is that faith is not living unless it is outwardly shown and demonstrated. "Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and **I will shew thee my faith by my works**" (James 2:18). This is because, as Paul states, faith is a personal belief that takes place in the mind and heart, and thus cannot be seen in and of itself. Thus, while God knows whether or not one has faith, there is no way for another person to recognize it exists unless there are works in his life that directly point to it. Consequently, while Paul is dealing with the necessity of faith before God, James is concerned with an outward demonstration of such faith before men through works. Therefore, unlike Paul, who teaches

justification before God, James portrays justification before men. However, their views on justification are complementary. Paul stresses acceptance before God entirely by grace through faith, whereas James presents the continual evidence before men of the initial transaction.

Abraham's life was chosen as an example because it wonderfully illustrates what kind of faith-evidencing works James had in mind. Works in James are the outworking of faith; apart from a living faith, they would be dead works. Abraham's work of faith was seen not only in his obedience to God's command, but especially in the fact that he believed that God would raise up his son (see Gen. 22:5; Heb. 11:19). God had promised Abraham that Isaac would have children (see Genesis 17:19; 21:12), and he believed that God would keep this promise even though God had commanded him to kill Isaac (Gen. 22:2). How can a dead Isaac have children? Abraham knew that the only solution to this impossible dilemma was that God would have to raise his son from the dead. Abraham's momentous faith in God's ability to fulfill His Word despite such difficulty, which faith is evident from Genesis 22:5 ("we will come back to you"), is commended by the writer of Hebrews (Heb 11:19). Abraham's faith manifested itself in his willingness to obey God when all reason would repudiate his actions.

The final example of justification by works given by James was that of Rahab, who belonged to Jericho just before Israel was about to attack it. Her good works involved sheltering Hebrew spies and ensuring them a safe passage. Like Abraham, she demonstrated faith by her belief in the supremacy of the God of Israel and His providential plan for his people, in spite of apparently insurmountable odds (conquering a great walled city!).

## Reasons why Paul and James did not contradict each other:

1. Each man had a very different perspective. Paul was declaring how a guilty, lost sinner could get right with God. James was writing about how a saved person could SHOW that his faith was real.
2. Both writers used Abraham to illustrate their doctrine but they did not choose the same incident of his life. Paul used a time early in Abraham's life, before he had given birth to any children, and the Genesis account declares that this was when Abraham was justified by faith. He believed God and because of this God put righteousness to his account (Gen. 15:6). James, while not disputing the fact that Abraham was justified by faith (see James 2:23), nevertheless chose an incident in Abraham's life which took place many years later, when he offered up Isaac. According to James, this is when Abraham showed his faith by his works (the Genesis account indicates that this is when Abraham's faith was "tested"—Genesis 22:1).
3. Both writers mention "works." Paul teaches that works are unnecessary but James teaches that works are essential. This apparent contradiction is solved when we realize that Paul was speaking of those good works that an unsaved person tries to do in order to win God's favor or work his way to heaven. James on the other hand was referring to those good works that a saved person performs which gives evidence of a real, living, saving faith.
4. James does not teach that good works are necessary in order to gain salvation and Paul never teaches that good works are unnecessary after a person is saved. On the contrary, Paul agreed with James that for the person justified by faith, good works are essential (Phil. 2:12-13; Titus 3:5-8; Eph. 2:8-10). Likewise, James agreed with Paul that the only condition for inheriting the kingdom was faith and faith alone (see James 2:5 and also Acts 15 where at

the Jerusalem Council James never expressed disagreement over Paul's teaching that salvation was by faith and not by the works of the law).

5. The Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 very clearly shows that James was not in disagreement with Peter or Paul in their teaching that salvation was by grace through faith and not by works. In Acts 15:1 we see that certain men were teaching that a person could not be saved unless he kept the deeds of the law (in this case, circumcision). Peter, in his speech, made it very clear that people are saved in only one way: by faith through grace [see v.7—"hear the word of the gospel and believe"; verse 9—"purifying their hearts by faith"; verse 11—"through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved."] Soon thereafter James gave his speech, and if he had been in disagreement with Peter and Paul, this would have been the time to say so. He could have said, "Men, I must respectfully but very strongly disagree with your teaching that salvation is by simple faith in Christ alone. I agree with these men who are teaching that justification is by the works of the law, and not by faith alone. It's not enough to simply believe on Christ. We also must try to keep the law of Moses and in this way try to earn our way to heaven." But James never said any such thing. He was in complete harmony with the teaching of Peter and Paul.
6. Both men speak of justification but there is a slight difference of emphasis or meaning. Paul is speaking of a lost sinner being justified or declared righteous before a holy God based on the work of Christ on the cross. James is speaking of a saved person being justified or vindicated by works. In other words, the works prove that his faith was real and not just a dead faith. Paul's message: In order to be saved, you must be justified by faith. James' message: If you have really been justified by faith, then prove it! Show me your faith by your works! Paul was writing about something that an unsaved person needed to do; James was writing about what a saved person needed to do. So it is with the example of Abraham. Abraham at the beginning needed to be justified by faith. Abraham later on in his life needed to have his faith tested and vindicated. He showed that his faith was real. His faith was so real and vibrant that he believed that if he were to kill his only son, God would raise him back to life (see Hebrews 11:17-19 and see Genesis 22:5—"we will come again to you").
7. CONCLUSION: We are justified by faith alone (Paul's teaching). The faith that justifies us is not alone; it must be accompanied by good works (James' teaching). Faith alone saves but the faith that saves is not alone! We should also note that James agreed with Paul that faith alone saves (James 2:23; 2:5 and Acts 15) and Paul agreed with James that the faith that saves is not alone (Eph. 2:10; Tit. 3:8; Phil. 2:12-13). Thus the conflict between Paul and James is only apparent; it is not real.

---

The Middletown Bible Church  
349 East Street  
Middletown, CT 06457  
(860) 346-0907

[More articles under Doctrinal Studies](#)

[The Relationship Between Good Works and Salvation](#) - a helpful chart