

PAUL AND JAMES RECONCILED:
THE RIGHT HANDS OF FELLOWSHIP

*How Paul Led James
To Abandon James's Transitional Doctrine Of Justification By Works
And To Accept Paul's Revelation Of Justification By Faith
(Or Why It Is Error To Teach Christians Today That "Faith Without Works Is Dead")*

Extended Summary

Following the Introduction (**Part I**), **Part II** of the essay briefly discusses the apostle Paul. As the essay demonstrates, he was an apostle and a teacher of God's Word. His broad ministry extended to Jews and Gentiles, and to churches, some started by him and others not. Paul wrote about half of the books in the New Testament. Additionally, more than half of the Book of Acts, Luke's historical record of the early church, pertains to Paul's dissemination of the gospel.

Paul wrote his epistles to *Christians*, and thus to a church(es) or to individual Christians. In **part III** we explore Paul's terminology of justification in those letters and prove the following. When Paul says that a person is "justified by faith," the essential meaning of "faith" is: *that part of the "fruit of the Spirit" consisting of the belief inside the Christian, and "with the heart," that what God says is true. "Faith" here is a technical term for Paul.* Moreover, when Paul teaches that a person is "justified by faith," the underlying process is: *"faith is counted for righteousness."* For Paul, this

righteousness is a gift from God, justification is by God's grace, and Christians are continually "justified by faith."

Paul also employs the phrase "justified by works." By that phrase, *Paul refers to two processes that a person engages in pursuant to a contract: (1) a person engages in "works" and (2) in return God "pays" that person with righteousness as a debt God owes for the "works."* For Paul, the word "works" in this context means *outward conduct done with the expectation of receiving righteousness from God in return as payment of a debt owed by Him.* And Paul teaches that no one is "justified by works" as he utilizes this phrase. Nor is anyone "justified by works of the law." "Works of the law" for Paul consist of outward conduct done *because it is required by the law of Moses* and with the expectation of receiving righteousness from God in return as payment of a debt owed by Him. (When we refer below to the "law," we refer to the law of Moses.)

Part IV briefly discusses the roles of the law and good works in the life of the Christian according to Paul's teaching. The essay reviews the Scriptures showing that the law was transitional. That is, God intended the law to lead people to Christ but, once they become Christians by faith, they are dead to the law and no longer under it. Christians sometimes sin and offend God but, because Christians are not under the law, their sins do not break the law and therefore are not transgressions; Christians cannot be found guilty of violating the law; and there is no condemnation for Christians. Moreover, Paul teaches at Romans 13:8-10 that *love, one of the nine parts of the fruit of the Spirit,*

already has completely fulfilled the law; therefore, there is no need to “keep” or comply with it. Paul emphasizes that Christians are to do “good works,” but they have no role in Paul’s concept of justification by faith.

Part V discusses the apostle James. There were numerous people named James in the New Testament; the James discussed in this essay was the half-brother of Jesus Christ. James was an apostle but the scope of his ministry was narrower than the scope of Paul’s ministry. James’s ministry extended to Jews, and especially to the Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem church. He wrote only the Epistle of James. Notably, James wrote this epistle to the “*twelve tribes* which are scattered abroad[.]” (Jas. 1:1, italics added.) As the scope of James’s ministry was narrower than Paul’s, James is mentioned only three times in the Book of Acts and, each time, he is in or near Jerusalem.

In **part VI**, we explain that sometimes in the Bible the same term can have different meanings. For example, Luke 18:18-19 record that a ruler once asked Jesus, “*Good* Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Italics added.) Jesus replied, “Why callest thou me good? *None is good*, save one, that is, *God*.” (Italics added.) The ruler was using the word “good” with its ordinary meaning among the Jews; Jesus was using it with a technical meaning making “good” an exclusive attribute of Deity. Jesus was trying to teach the ruler not to call Him good unless he acknowledged, correctly, that He was God.

Similarly, Paul and James use the terms “faith,” “works,” and “justified by works,” and Paul employs the phrase “justified by faith” while James employs the phrase “justified . . . by faith only.” Despite the fact that the terms that the apostles utilize are the same or similar, Paul, unlike James, has technical meanings for the terms “faith,” “works,” “justified by faith,” and “justified by works.”

In part **VII**, we examine James’s terminology of justification in his letter and demonstrate the following. In Jas. 2:14-26, “faith” involves belief that what God says is true. Moreover, a major key to understanding what “faith” is for James is to recognize that he teaches that just as a body without a spirit is dead, so “faith without works” is dead. (Jas. 2:26.) He therefore implies that just as a body with a spirit is living, so “faith with works” (by this we mean “faith . . . working with . . . works” (Jas. 2:22)) is living; otherwise “faith with works” is dead too and there is no point in James distinguishing between “faith without works” and “faith with works.” That means that, for James, just as a body can be dead or living and in that sense there are two kinds of bodies—a dead body and a living body—“faith” can be dead or living and in that sense there are two kinds of “faith”—dead “faith” and living “faith.”

As we will see, James’s first kind of “faith”—“faith without works”—does not save, and it is profitless, dead, alone, unshown, the kind that a demon has, and the “faith” of a vain or foolish man. Further, James’s discussion of Abraham shows that James’s first kind of “faith” does not work with “works,” is not perfected by “works,” does not

fulfill Gen. 15:6 and is not counted for righteousness, is not the “faith” of a friend of God, and is not the “faith” of a Christian.

On the other hand, James’s second kind of “faith”—“faith with works”—saves and is profitable, living, not alone, and shown, and it is not the kind that a demon has and is not the “faith” of a vain or foolish man. Moreover, James’s second kind of “faith” works with “works,” is perfected, fulfills Gen. 15:6 and is counted for righteousness, and is the “faith” of a friend of God and the “faith” of a Christian. (Nonetheless, James never says that this second kind of “faith” is part of the fruit of the Spirit or belief with the heart.)

James leaves us to deduce his essential meaning of “faith” from his two kinds. His essential meaning of “faith” (in the context of humans, not demons) is: *belief inside a person that what God says is true*. (And unlike Paul, James never teaches that “faith” in its essential meaning is part of the “fruit of the Spirit” or belief “with the heart.”)

The essential meaning of “faith” for James is *neutral* and there are only two possibilities for such “faith”; it is either (1) the first kind and not the “faith” of a Christian *or* (2) the second kind, the “faith” of a Christian. “Faith” in its essential meaning for James does not tell you *which* kind it is. Which kind it is depends on an additional fact: whether the “faith” is without “works” or whether the “faith” is with “works.” When “faith” is without “works,” that “faith” is James’s first kind. When “faith” is with “works,” that “faith” is his second kind. In the context of justification, *“faith” in its*

essential meaning for James is thus not the technical term that “faith” is in its essential meaning for Paul.

Moreover, unlike Paul in his epistles, James in his epistle does not indicate that James is writing exclusively to Christians. James begins his epistle, writing to the “twelve tribes.” (Jas. 1:1) *These are Jews*, some of whom are Christians *and some of whom are not*. James’s letter is like Old Testament writings to the Jews, some of whom trusted in God and some of whom did not. Thus, when James uses the word “faith” with its essential meaning for him, *he uses that word with its ordinary, common meaning among the “twelve tribes,” i.e., the Jews*. Nothing in James’s letter demonstrates that the Jews to whom James writing would understand “faith,” with its essential meaning, to refer exclusively to the “faith” of a Christian.

When James says a person is “justified by works,” *James is referring to four processes*. According to Jas. 2:21-24, those processes are (1) “faith” works with “works,” (2) by “works” “faith” is perfected, (3) the person’s “faith” is counted for righteousness, and (4) the person is called the friend of God. This “faith” is James’s second kind. *“Works” are outward conduct that show “faith.”* Notably, James never says that his second kind of “faith” is part of the fruit of the Spirit. Moreover, James teaches that Gentiles are “justified by works,” because he teaches that Rahab the harlot, a Gentile, was “justified by works.” James also utilizes the phrase “justified . . . by faith

only.” *It means justified by the first kind of “faith,” i.e., “faith without works.”* But James teaches that no one is “justified . . . by faith only.”

Part VIII examines the role of the law of Moses in the life of the Jew according to James’s teaching. For James, Jews, whether Christians or not, are under obligation to the law of Moses and must comply with it; their sins break the law, i.e., they are transgressions; and all Jews will be found guilty under the law. Jews who have shown no mercy are not Christians and God will judge these Jews without mercy. However, Jews who are Christians show mercy, and God will show them mercy despite their guilt.

It is only when one grasps that Paul and James use the same or similar terms with different meanings that one understands the fundamental differences in what these apostles have to say on justification and the role of the law. **Part IX** highlights the contrasts. There, the essay contrasts (1) Paul’s essential meaning of “faith” with James’s essential meaning of “faith,” (2) Paul’s essential meaning of “faith” with James’s “first kind of faith,” (3) Paul’s essential meaning of “faith” with James’s second kind of “faith,” (4) Paul’s “works” with James’s “works,” (5) Paul and James on justification and “faith,” (6) Paul and James on “justified by works,” and (7) Paul and James on the Christian and the role of the law.

The essay then turns to the reconciliation of what Paul and James have to say on justification and the role of the law to answer the question: how can we be just before God?

In **part X** the essay focuses on the fact that when Paul refers to the “gospel,” he refers to the “gospel” that *he* preached. He proclaims that his “gospel” was a “revelation of Jesus Christ,” the same phrase John used at the beginning of the Book of Revelations. In other words, Paul’s “gospel” was just as much a revelation to Paul as the Book of Revelations was a revelation to John.

Part XI discusses the *content* of Paul’s “gospel.” As discussed there, the “gospel” included things that every apostle would know, e.g., Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day. But beyond these basic truths, Paul’s “gospel” *unveiled special, new truths: that a person was “justified by faith” and was not “justified by works” or “justified by works of the law” as Paul used those terms, and that Christians are free from the obligations of the law of Moses and free to live a Scriptural lifestyle that excludes complying with the law and its commandments for any purpose.*

Paul also taught that Christians are free to engage in a *nonobligatory* compliance with the law as a way of life to honor God in accord with preference or conscience. Finally, Paul taught that when Christians interact with people who comply with the law as a way of life (whether they are Jews, or whether they are Jewish Christians who are not obligated to comply with the law), Christians are free to engage in a *nonobligatory* compliance with the law to avoid offending such people.

Part XII explores Paul’s introduction of his “gospel” *to the apostles in Jerusalem*. This part proves from Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians his independence from the other

apostles and the independence of the source of his doctrine. Beyond that, part XII proves that when Gal. 2:1-2 record that Paul “communicated” his “gospel” to “them,” *“them” referred to the apostles in Jerusalem.* Part XII also proves that those apostles did not know about the special truths of Paul’s “gospel” until he introduced them to the apostles. First, Paul “communicated” his “gospel” to the apostles. The Greek word translated “communicated” means to explain or clarify, at the same time providing additional or different information. If the apostles knew all of the truths of Paul’s “gospel,” there was no need for him to explain it; *this shows there were truths of Paul’s “gospel” that the apostles did not previously know.*

Second, Paul communicated his “gospel” “privately” to the apostles “of reputation,” who were or included *James*, Peter, and John. Paul did this privately to the apostles “of reputation” because he was afraid that if he did it publicly, their reputation among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem might have caused the apostles “of reputation” to reject the special truths of Paul’s “gospel.” If the apostles already had known these truths, Paul’s fear would have been unwarranted. *This too demonstrates that there were truths of Paul’s “gospel” that the apostles did not previously know.*

Galatians 2 also teaches that when Paul communicated his “gospel” to the apostles “of reputation,” they “added nothing” to him during that conference. That means James did not add to Paul the doctrines of justification and the role of the law that James taught in his epistle. And Paul had never previously taught those doctrines. Accordingly, Paul’s

“gospel” remained the same before and after his conference with the apostles “of reputation”; his “gospel” was unadulterated.

In fact, in the discussion of the “right hands of fellowship” in **part XIII**, we see that “on the contrary,” it was Paul who “added” to James, Peter, and John, who were “reputed to be pillars.” Paul caused them to *see* that God had entrusted Paul’s unadulterated “gospel” to Paul for him to take it to the Gentiles, and God had entrusted *Paul’s unadulterated “gospel”* to *Peter* for him to take it to the circumcision, i.e., to Jews who emphasized compliance with the law as a way of life. Paul also caused James, Peter, and John to *recognize* the “grace” of Paul’s apostleship, and ministry of the “gospel,” to the Gentiles. *These too were truths that James, Peter, and John did not previously see or recognize.*

Part XIV reconciles Paul and James, showing that, based on their newly gained understanding, James, Peter, and John gave to Paul and Barnabas the “right hands of fellowship” that Paul and Barnabas would take Paul’s “gospel,” with its basic and special truths, to the Gentiles, and James, Peter, and John would take Paul’s “gospel,” with its basic and special truths, to the circumcision. This was not merely a division of labor in the *work* of evangelizing but an agreement concerning the *content* of the “gospel” to be disseminated—both groups of apostles would disseminate Paul’s unadulterated “gospel.”

Accordingly, when James gave the right hands of fellowship, he necessarily abandoned the doctrines of justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish

Christian that he previously had taught in his epistle, and adopted Paul's "gospel" on the doctrines of justification and the role of the law in the life of the Christian. Paul and James reconciled.

Gal. 2:11-21, and particularly Gal. 2:11-16, confirm that James abandoned his doctrines of justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian. Those verses record an incident that occurred in the church in Antioch, Syria after the giving of the right hands of fellowship. There, Paul directly confronted Peter, and, indirectly, other Jewish Christians present, for their hypocrisy because they had been eating with Gentiles but stopped when certain persons "came from James." Peter stopped because he feared "the circumcision," i.e., he feared the circumcision would judge him for not complying with the law of Moses.

Paul withstood Peter to his face, confidently implying that all Jewish Christians present, *including the circumcision from James*, knew that (1) Christians are "justified by faith" and not "justified by works of the law" (as Paul used those phrases) and (2) Christians are free from the obligations of the law and free to live a Scriptural lifestyle that excludes complying with the law and its commandments for any purpose.

Paul could confidently imply that the circumcision from *James knew* this because he knew that they had been taught Paul's "gospel" after the right hands of fellowship. This confirms that at the right hands of fellowship, James abandoned his doctrines of

justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian, and adopted Paul's "gospel" on these issues.

Moreover, there is no record that any of the Christians present, including the circumcision from James, *disputed* Paul's confident declaration. This provides additional evidence that the circumcision from James had been taught Paul's "gospel" on these issues. This in turn provides evidence that the right hands of fellowship occurred before that teaching, and that at the right hands of fellowship James abandoned his doctrines of justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian, and adopted Paul's "gospel" on these issues.

Further, if James did not abandon his doctrines of justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian, then the doctrines of Paul and James on these issues must be taught today, and the resulting teaching is contradictory.

The fact that Paul teaches that Abraham was *not* "justified by works" and James teaches that Abraham *was* "justified by works" is not contradictory. Those teachings would be contradictory only if the two apostles meant the same thing by the phrase "justified by works." But the apostles do not mean the same thing by that phrase.

However, if the doctrines of Paul and James on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian must be taught today, the contradiction is more fundamental. For example, Paul has one essential meaning for "faith," James has another, *and each apostle received his respective meaning from Jesus Christ. Yet Paul,*

declaring that his essential meaning for “faith” is that part of the fruit of the Spirit consisting of the belief inside the Christian, and with the heart, that what God says is true, *would deny James’s teaching that the essential meaning of “faith” is simply belief inside a person that what God says is true. James, declaring that his essential meaning of “faith” is simply belief inside a person that what God says is true, would deny Paul’s teaching that the essential meaning of “faith” is part of the fruit of the Spirit consisting of the belief inside the Christian, and with the heart, that what God says is true.*

Similarly, Paul has one meaning for “justified by works,” James has another, *and each apostle received his respective meaning from Jesus Christ. However, Paul, maintaining that “justified by works” means his two contract processes, would deny that that phrase means James’s four processes. James, maintaining that “justified by works” means his four processes, would deny that that phrase meant Paul’s two contract processes.* If the doctrines of Paul and James on justification and the role of the law must be taught today to Christians, the resulting purported Biblical teaching is contradictory. However, “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor. 14:33).

The reconciliation, as previously discussed, is to view James’s doctrines on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian as transitional. It should be no surprise, then, that Paul’s doctrines on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Christian are taught in various New Testament books, but the only New

Testament book containing James's doctrines on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian is the Epistle of James.

In **part XV**, the essay focuses on the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. There, the apostles and elders came together to consider the role of the law in the lives of Gentile Christians. Acts 15 teaches, for Jewish and Gentile Christians alike, salvation by grace; Gentile Christians are free to live a Scriptural lifestyle that excludes compliance with the law; and it is futile for Jewish Christians to try to bear the yoke of obligation to the law. Moreover, part XV demonstrates that, as a matter of sequence, (1) Barnabas brought Paul to Antioch at Acts 11:26; (2) later, Paul's trip to Jerusalem and the giving of the right hands of fellowship occurred as recorded at Gal. 2:1-9; (3) the confrontation at Antioch at Gal. 2:11-21 followed; and (4) subsequently, the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 occurred.

Part XVI considers a later incident recounted at Acts 21:17-26. There, Paul came to Jerusalem and James asked Paul to "keep the law" for the sake of the Jewish Christians there who were "zealous of the law." Paul did so, participating in a ceremony based on the law of Moses. Paul thus made clear that Jewish Christians (such as those in Jerusalem) were free to enjoy a lifestyle that included a nonobligatory compliance with the law to honor God in accord with preference or conscience. Paul also made clear that a Christian (such as Paul), interacting with people such as the Jewish Christians "zealous of the law," was free to engage in a nonobligatory compliance with the law simply to avoid offending them and to respect Jewish traditions and culture.

The essay in **part XVII** reviews the timing of the writing of the Epistle of James, the events of Galatians 2, and Paul's writing of the Epistle to the Galatians. The essay establishes James wrote his letter before Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians; this is evidence that Paul was aware of James's letter when Paul wrote his Galatian letter.

This awareness may explain why: (1) of the four times that Paul refers to James in Paul's letters, three of the four are found in the first and second chapters of Paul's Galatian letter, where Paul establishes the independence of his apostleship and of the source of his doctrine, including his independence from *James*, (2) when identifying the three apostles who were "reputed to be pillars," Paul put James's name *first* at Gal. 2:9, (3) Paul teaches in Gal. 2 that God *entrusted* Paul's "gospel" to *Peter* for him to take it to the circumcision, and did not record that God entrusted it to *James* for that purpose; and (4) when Paul identifies Jewish Christians wavering from the "truth of the gospel" and implicated in hypocrisy during the confrontation at Antioch, Paul names not only Peter and Barnabas, but makes a point of saying that "certain came from *James*." (Italics added.) This suggests James too had wavered from Paul's "gospel," even if neither the circumcision from James, nor James himself, joined Peter's hypocrisy.

In **part XVIII**, the essay discusses why James taught in his epistle his doctrines on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian. James, an apostle, received them from Jesus Christ. They were correct at the time that James taught them in his epistle but were no longer correct and no longer to be taught to Christians after the

right hands of fellowship of Gal. 2:9. This is not to say that James's entire epistle was transitional but that his doctrines on justification and the role of the law in the life of the Jewish Christian were transitional. **Part XIX** contains a conclusion.

Appendix A discusses in detail the point made in part IV that Romans 13 teaches that the Christian's love already has fulfilled the law. **Appendix B** proves the point noted in part VII, i.e., that James was writing to "the twelve tribes," some of whom were Christians and some of whom were not.