

God's instruction over the sacrifice of his son Isaac (James 2:21-22). This apparent contradiction of St. Paul's doctrine may offer a more significant reason why it took such a long time for James' letter to be accepted into the canon, despite its marvellous ethical teaching.

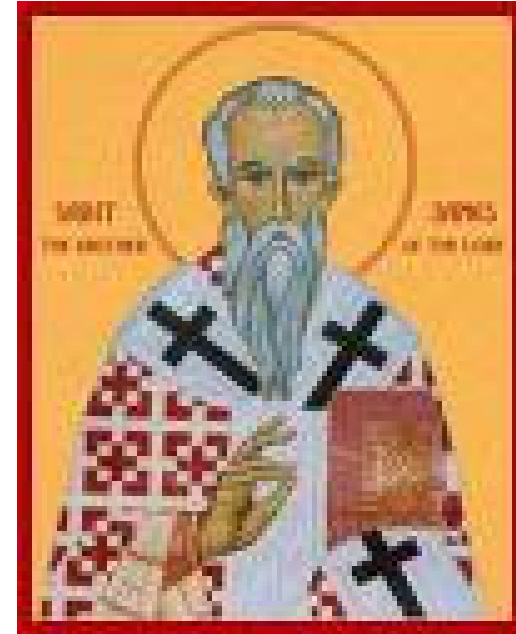


It is interesting that Martin Luther read St. Paul's doctrine in the same way as James did but, instead of rejecting it, felt inspired by it to understand Jesus' salvation in a way that rejected the Catholic view about the dual and parallel importance of faith **and** good works. For Luther, the emphasis given to good works could not guarantee salvation to anyone because, if so, it implied that somehow they obliged God to save those who performed them. Luther felt (actually quite correctly) that no action by human beings can in any way oblige God. In addition, it seemed to him that the emphasis on such good works undervalued the salvation made possible by the death of Jesus Christ. For Luther, St. Paul seemed to say that Justification means a person is **declared** righteous in the eyes of God (a **judicial** process) and this comes about by Faith alone. However, St Paul only stated that **initial** Justification came about through Faith in Jesus, not that that was the end of the matter. Also, St. Paul did **not** say 'by Faith **alone**' It was Luther who added that single word 'alone', thereby presenting a subtly different doctrine.

St. Paul's 'Justification statement' was stressing that we become righteous in the eyes of God through Jesus' death when we believe in him as our saviour. But the Catholic Church has always understood St. Paul's broader teaching to mean Justification also gives rise to a **real change** in the person, who is simultaneously imbued with grace, the inflowing of the Holy Spirit (especially Rm.5:5; 8:11), meaning that justification is not a judicial process of simply being **declared** righteous. Faith in Jesus also simultaneously starts a process whereby a person **is actually made** righteous. And so, the justified and graced Christian is now more capable of performing good works that serve to prove and demonstrate that state of righteousness, which is a **real change** in the individual. Indeed, the justified are **expected** to do so.

## The Non-Pauline Letters of the New Testament

### 3. The Letter of James



#### Questions

1. Does James' minimal direct teaching about Jesus surprise you?
2. Could James emphasis on good works be explained by his concern for his Jewish Christian audience and their background of the Jewish Law?
3. Is there really a difference in attitude between St. Paul and James over the role of faith and good works in Justification?

#### For Reflection

## Authorship and Date

There are 3 possible New Testament candidates for authorship of the letter bearing the name James:

1. the Apostle James, son of Zebedee, and brother of St. John
2. the Apostle James son of Alphaeus (Mtt.10)
3. James ‘the brother of the Lord’ (Mk.6, Acts 12, 15 and 21, 1 Cor.15, Gal. 1 and 2)



It can not be the first, because he was martyred by Herod Agrippa in 44AD, it could be the second but no information exists about his

mission, but it most likely to be the third. This is because of the nature of the letter’s contents, addressed as it is to Jewish Christians, and recognising that this James had become the head of the Jerusalem Church, even ahead of St Peter. According to the Church historian, James was martyred in 62AD, so if this James was the author the letter it was written about the time St. Paul was writing his letters, and this may be significant when aspects of its content are considered (below).

It is possible that the author was another, otherwise unknown, James, or possibly someone who adopted the name to add authority to his letter, as was often the case in the ancient world. On this basis the letter could have been written somewhat later, possibly in the 90’s AD.

## The Contents of the Letter

The letter is written for Jewish Christians “the 12 tribes of the dispersion” (1:1). The letter presupposes that his readers will relate to and understand the several allusions he makes to the O.T., especially its Wisdom literature. It is essentially moral and ethical in nature with little of the traditional Kerygma, that is, the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, his Incarnation, Death, Resurrection or Glorification (but 2:1; 5:7). This may be one reason why it was only in the 4th century that it was accepted into the Christian canon of Holy Scripture.

Scholars have tried to put some semblance of structure into the letter by proposing that the ethical exhortations are, in fact, grouped into 12,

one for each of the 12 Jewish patriarchs. However, the following summary more accurately links related topics:

1. **Persevere** with trials and temptations (1:2 -4, 12-15 and 5:10-11) and especially when awaiting the Parousia, the expected return of Jesus (5:7-8).
2. The importance of **prayer and faith** (1:5-8 and 5:13) and prayer with good intentions (4:2-3 and 5:17) and the power of prayer to help the sick (5:14f) (the latter being the key text for the Sacrament of the Sick)
3. The **danger of riches** (1:9-11 and 4:13-5:6) and the blessings of the poor (2:5-9) - with an injunction against judging by appearances (2:1-4)
4. The paramount importance of doing **good works** (1:19-25, 27 and 2:14-26 and 3:13)
5. The extreme dangers of a **loose tongue** (1:26) a small appendage of the body but one with potential for great wickedness (3:2-12 and 4:12 and 5:9).
6. The value of **true virtue** (3:13-18)
7. The dangers of **ambition** and attachment to the world (4:1-10).



## Are We Made Righteous by Faith or by Good Works? James’ Challenge to St. Paul’s Doctrine of Justification?

Although the letter of James is essentially ethical in character, one aspect of that emphasis concerns the role of ‘good works’ (item 4 above) which is often seen as a direct challenge to St. Paul’s doctrine of Justification (being recognised as righteous) by Faith outlined in his letter to the Romans 3:21-26 et al. James is challenging what he sees as Paul’s view that we become righteous in God’s eyes without doing any good works, but simply through our acceptance of Jesus as Lord, and being wrapped in his goodness so that he somehow adopts our sins, thereby enabling God to overlook our intrinsic unworthiness. James argues that faith is not sufficient and good works prove and show our righteousness. He directly contrasts St. Paul’s analogy of Abraham’s **faith** (Rm.4) by pointing to Abraham’s **action** in obeying