



**"Drowning in the Tiber (Part 9)"**  
**Responding to Francis Beckwith's *Return to Rome:***  
***Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic***

The Voice of Scripture 1 | *tiber071909(9)* | Selected Scriptures



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## Introduction

### I. Romans 4:1-8

#### A. The meaning of justification

"Justification' is drawn from Paul's Jewish background, expressing a relationship between human beings and God, a judicial relationship, either ethical or forensic (i.e. related to human conduct and law courts: Deut 25:1; cf. Gen 18:25-26). *Dikaios*, "righteous, upright," usually denoted a person who stood acquitted or vindicated before a judge's tribunal (Exod 23:7; 1 Kgs 8:32; Job 31:35-37), and thus a right relationship with other human beings."

"When, then, Paul in Romans says that Christ Jesus "justified" human beings "by his blood" (3:25; cf. 5:9), he means that by what Christ suffered in his passion and death he has brought it about that sinful human beings can stand before God's tribunal acquitted or innocent, with the judgment not based on observance of the Mosaic law. Thus "God's uprightness" is now manifested toward human beings in a just judgment, one of acquittal, because Jesus "our Lord...was handed over (to death) for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (4:25). This was done for humanity "freely by his grace" (3:24). For God has displayed Jesus in death ("by his blood") as "a manifestation of his [God's] uprightness...at the present time to show that he is upright and justifies [= vindicates] the one who puts faith in Jesus (3:26; cf. 5:1). Thus God shows that human activity, indeed, is a concern of his judgment, but through Christ Jesus he sets right what has gone wrong because of the sinful conduct of human beings. Paul insists on the utter gratuity of this justification, because "all alike have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:23). Consequently, this uprightness does not belong to human beings (10:3), and it is not something that they have produced or merited; it is an alien uprightness, one belonging rightly to another (to Christ) and attributed to them because of what that other has done for them. So Paul understands God "justifying the godless" (4:5) or "crediting uprightness" to human beings quite "apart from deeds" . . . [Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Romans, A New Translation with introduction and Commentary, The Anchor Bible Series* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), pp. 116-118.]

#### B. How do Romans 4, James 2 and Hebrews 11 fit together?

**Hebrews 11:8** By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going

**Romans 4:6** Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

**James 2:21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?

"If Romans is Scripture, then it follows that justification in Abraham's life took place at a point in time prior to circumcision, not afterward. Since Abraham received that sign in Genesis 17, when Ishmael was thirteen years of age, Paul cannot be saying that Abraham was again justified in Genesis 22. And the justification that was his in Genesis 15:6 cannot be a "re-justification" after having been initially justified in Genesis 12, since this, too, would undercut Paul's entire position with his opponents. They could then point to Abraham's act of obedience in leaving Ur as evidence against Paul's stated thesis: Justification is by grace through faith without works. Justification, then, must be a point-in-time declaration, not a process that is repeated, or else Romans 4:1-8 is not inspired Scripture. To say otherwise is to make a complete mockery of the entirety of Romans 4." [James White, The God Who Justifies, 222-23]

## II. James 2

### A. Does James contradict Paul?

1. First thing we need to note is the direct parallel to 1:22-27

### B. The passage in question (James 2:14-26)

1. Verses 14-20

2. Verse 21

a. "Justified" = δικαιωω

This is a word that carries a variety of meanings, including "to show justice; to vindicate; to be acquitted, to be freed, to be justified, to be made pure." [Cf. Strong's Enhanced Lexicon and Bauer Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, s.v. δικαιωω.]

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? [NIV translation of verse 21]

3. Luke Timothy Johnson - "James sees the offering of Isaac as the demonstration of this faith rather than its replacement."

"We do not become righteous by doing what is righteous; but having become righteous, we do what is righteous." [Martin Luther]

The Council of Trent, Canon XXIV. If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof. let him be anathema.

III. The emphasis of the N.T. is that good works (a changed life that glorifies God) necessarily follows from genuine saving faith

<b>James 2:15-16</b>	<b>1 John 3:15-17</b>
If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?	Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

The issue is the type of faith that one has. The Bible is clear that there is such a thing as spurious or non-saving faith. Non-saving faith becomes evident by what it confesses (is it orthodox) and by the change of life that regeneration produces (good works). That James' readers were orthodox is evident from 2:19. However, many were not demonstrating the change of life that issues from true repentance (Matthew 3:8). James, therefore, qualifies what genuine saving looks like. James is consistent with the doctrines of grace when he says "*faith without works is dead*" (2:26). Note that he does not say, "*works without faith are dead.*" The issue falls on the quality of faith, not works.

<u>Issue</u> : can faith with no change of heart save from sin?	14 What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can <b>that</b> faith save him?
<u>Illustration</u> : no demonstration of love for a fellow believer (cf. 1 John 3:15-17)	15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?
<u>Conclusion</u> : faith that has no works is dead faith	17 Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

<b>Two Kinds of Faith</b>	
<u>Faith - Works = Dead Faith</u> <i>Belief in Christ without evidence of repentance demonstrates non-saving belief</i>	<u>Faith + Works = Living Faith</u> <i>Belief in Christ with evidence of repentance demonstrates saving faith</i>
<p>In both cases the issue is the type of faith. To place the emphasis on meritorious works is to miss James' entire argument. The emphasis is on the nature of the profession of faith; works cannot bring life to dead faith!</p> <p>Therefore, James is qualifying faith, not works. This is consistent with Jesus' statements in Matthew 7 that, ". . . every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit."</p>	

