

Drowning in the Tiber (Part 9)
Responding to Francis Beckwith's 2009 Book:
Return to Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic
-The Voice of Scripture #1 -
(Romans 4:6; James 2:21; Hebrews 11:8)

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Transcript of a Sermon Preached at Clarkson Community Church
by
Tony A. Bartolucci on July 19, 2009

This morning we're going to begin with two Scripture readings, one in Romans and one in the book of James. So if you grab a Bible and open it to the book of Romans, chapter four and stand, if you would. Romans, chapter four. I'm going to read verses 1-13 and then I'm going to flip over to James, chapter two.

What, then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man whom God reckons righteousness apart from works, Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and those whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account. Is this blessing then upon the circumcised or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it reckoned? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. And He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised that righteousness might be reckoned to them, and the father of circumcision to those who, not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham, which he had while uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham, or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.¹

James, chapter two, beginning in verse 14:

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food and one of you

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (The Lockman Foundation, 1971).

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? Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself. But someone may well say, You have faith and I have works. Show me your faith without the works, I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one, you do well. The demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works when he offered up Isaac, his son, on the altar? You see that faith was working with his works and as a result of the works, faith was perfected and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. And he was called the friend of God. You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone, and in the same way, was not Rahab, the harlot, also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

May God add His blessing to the reading of His word.

[Opening Prayer]

Well, this morning, as we continue in our study, *Drowning in the Tiber, Responding to Francis Beckwith's Return to Rome*, this is part 9. We're looking at, this week and next, the voice of Scripture. So I want to look at some of the passages that Dr. Beckwith, along with other Roman Catholic apologists, have used to defend the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church from Scripture as it relates to the Gospel. Now there was a time when Rome did not have to be overly concerned with having a clear consistency between what she taught and what Scripture said. Remember, it wasn't long ago that Catholics were discouraged, if not forbidden, to read the Bible for themselves. They're still forbidden to interpret it for themselves, so I don't know what good it is to read. Reading demands comprehension, which is the same thing as interpretation. But if we go back half a millennia we find that the common people did not have access to a Bible. So they were at the mercy of whatever the Church taught as being truth. There was no way to check that (that is, what the Church taught or what the priests taught at the local level). There was no way to check that to see if it was, indeed, true. You basically had to submit to Mother Church. The Roman Catholic Church was the standard. But with the Reformation and along with the providential, and very providential, invention of the printing press, literature began to abound. Bibles may not have sprung from the ground, but there were tracts, essays, sermons, books, booklets that were being published, often filled with Scripture and about Scripture. So the Bible was out of the bag, so to speak. And like the proverbial cat, it was not going back in. So over the past few hundred years, Rome has had to at least attempt to reconcile what they have taught as dogma with the Scriptures. Remember, we uphold and cherish the doctrine of sola scriptura. That is, Scripture is the final and absolute authority when it comes to our faith and practice. So when the Roman Catholic Church or an apologist says, "Well, what we believe is biblical!"—that's of no little concern to us. After all, it would be easy if they said, "What we believe is not biblical, but we have authority to believe it anyways."

Interestingly, I'm working my way through a very rare book. The Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis—his speech to the 1st Vatican Council. It's a book that was published 1870/1871, and Archbishop Kenrick of St. Louis was arguing against adopting a doctrine of papal infallibility. And he argues it from the Scripture and he argues it quite persuasively from history as well. And one of the things that Archbishop Kenrick, a Roman Catholic, flat-out admits is that, "Hey we've got to face it, that our defending our doctrine out of the Bible isn't going to work." And his speech, as you can imagine, didn't go over well and they went ahead imposing papal infallibility apart from the objectors. And he wasn't alone: there were many, many objectors and it was quite a political sort of thing. But, that's not the case today. And so we find that knowledgeable Roman Catholics, knowledgeable Roman Catholic apologists, and again, these abound; we have such access nowadays because of the internet, books that are written left and right. You can go to Catholic Answers, I don't know if it's dot net or dot com, and just get a plethora of ways to debate and answer your evangelical friend. And so in a day when everybody's an apologist, and everyone has an answer, they are quite frequently appealing to Scriptures that Evangelicals have commonly brought up. Well, Beckwith is no different. In his reverting back to Roman Catholicism, he spends a good solid chapter talking about the passages in the Bible, which he has had to re-understand in light of Roman Catholicism, and how he feels that that's a better interpretation than those which he claims to have held beforehand. If you look at those passages, they fall into two basic categories, not really mutually exclusive. But there are those passages that have been used by Roman Catholic apologists for many years. And then, there are those passages that have been trumpeted more recently by advocates of the New Perspective on Paul. Not only passages, but ways of understanding certain key words in the New Testament and concepts, such as law, that sort of thing. We'll address that later as far as the New Perspective on Paul is concerned. I've brought that up several times and I know some of you have said . . . when are you going to define that so we can really get a handle on what you're talking about. Well, Lord willing, next week, we'll look at that.

Chapter 6 of Beckwith's book is entitled, "Every Word a Little Branch" and that's the chapter where Beckwith goes to task in citing scripture after scripture to support, in his view, a Roman Catholic view of salvation, namely, that justification is progressive. He calls it the "journey of justification." In other words, I can be saved today, lost tomorrow, be saved again the next day, lost the day after that, or maybe I'm saved, justified for a week or for a year, but then I lose grace and I'm lost, and back and forth it goes, whereas, biblically speaking, and this is what we've upheld as biblical truth, something that was re-ignited – not invented – re-ignited during the time of the Reformation, is that justification is forensic. That is, it is God's once-for-all declaration that the believer in Jesus Christ, the elect, is not guilty. And that is something that only happens once. If it happens, it doesn't happen again. So, while sanctification, we would say, is progressive, justification is a moment-in-time declaration of God where the believer is declared not guilty because of the work of Jesus Christ on his, or her, behalf. The chapter, chapter 6, that Beckwith writes, begins with a wonderful quotation. I think this is a bit ironic. He heads it off with a quotation by the reformer Martin Luther, and it's really a wonderful quote. Here's how the quote goes:

For some years now, I have read through the Bible twice every year. If you picture the Bible to be a mighty tree and every word a little branch, I've shaken every one of those branches, because I've wanted to know what it was and what it meant.

So, again, Beckwith, the Roman Catholic, citing Luther, the great reformer. Wonderful way to start the chapter (it all goes downhill from there). He says, on page 96, quoting now Beckwith:

Although it had become clear to me that the Church fathers were far more Roman Catholic than they were Protestant, I needed to be convinced that their views on justification were consistent with Scripture, and it did not take me long to be persuaded.²

If you remember back, if you look at the chronology he gives in his book, he spent less than 6 months in studying these things, so it, indeed, did not take him long. And, by the way, to argue that the Church Fathers were more Roman Catholic than they were Protestant, is another non-sequitur. It's an anachronistic error. Carl R. Truman, Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary, has a chapter in a recent book that he wrote, a chapter where he talks a bit about Beckwith's reversion back to the Roman Catholic Church. And, in fact, Beckwith, at least at one point, if not more, favorably quotes Truman. I think unfairly, but he favorably quotes Truman. Well, so Truman writes:

As to the Patristic Writings being more Catholic than Protestant, I would be the first to concede that modern Evangelicalism has not been strong in its study and use of Patristic authors.

Let me just stop there. I would heartily "amen" that after going through 5 years of Bible College and another several years of seminary. It was very weak in the area of history, church history, my studies were, and that seems to be typical of Evangelicals (among Evangelicals today). So I totally concur with Truman's observations. But he goes on:

To argue that the Patristic authors are more Catholic than Protestant is arguably to impose anachronistic categories upon the first 5 centuries.³

You know what an anachronism is, don't you? It's attributing something to a time frame in which that something didn't exist. It's sort of like the Book of Mormon talking about windows on the barges as the Neophytes, or whoever they were, traveled across the ocean to the Americas, and windows didn't exist on ships at that time. Or saying that somebody used a compass in 2100 BC

²Francis J. Beckwith, *Return To Rome: Confessions of an Evangelical Catholic* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2009), 96.

³Carl R. Truman, *Minority Report: Unpopular Thoughts on Everything From Ancient Christianity to Zen-Calvinism*, (Geanies House, Fearn, IV20 1TW, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2008), 165.

when the compass wasn't invented. That's an anachronism. So he says that's "to impose anachronistic categories upon the first 5 centuries." Further, given the variegated nature even of extant Patristic writings, it is to beg questions of the kind: whose authors? whose theology? In other words, well, you want to say that these writers fall more in line with what I believe, or what we believe, well, what writers are you talking about? Are you talking about East, West? What time frame are you talking? What area of theology are you talking about? So, Truman brings up a tremendous point. Hindsight, as we know, is 20/20. And it's easy to look back on history and say, "Oh, I think I might see Purgatory there." And that's reading one's presuppositions back into history, rather than drawing out it, not too much unlike the power of suggestion when listening to rock albums backwards, and having all sorts of mumblings pointed out to you as satanic messages. But we're talking about the Scripture now, so Beckwith writes, in that regard:

I will offer a brief account of how I became convinced that the Catholic position has the most explanatory power to account for all the New Testament's presentations of salvation.⁴

Okay, we're talking about the Gospel. This is essential.

He writes:

I know that some of my readers will not see these things the way I have come to see them, but my purpose is not to offer a sophisticated apologetic of the Catholic view. Rather, I am just trying to communicate, as best I can, the internal deliberations that convinced me that I ought to embrace it.⁵

Now, with that [in mind], I want you to go back to Romans, chapter four. Beckwith writes that Romans, chapter four, particularly verses 1-8, is cited by Protestants as the definitive verse, or passage—that verse would be verse 3—the definitive verse establishing the forensic doctrine of justification, that which he would disagree with. If we go to Romans, chapter four, let's begin in verse 1 (Paul, writing about Abraham). He says:

What, then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

Obviously, Paul is drawing upon what he has written in chapter three. There's a case that he is building beginning in chapter one, and in chapter three, he concluded that section by saying that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, verse 23, but justification is a gift by God's grace through the redemption, which is in Christ Jesus (verse 24).

He goes on to say in verse 28:

⁴*Return To Rome*, 97.

⁵*Ibid.*

[W]e maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

So he builds upon the case that he's established, and goes on to draw from the example of Abraham. And he says, verse 2, "If Abraham was justified by works ..."—again, "justified" (we think in the more common Christian language of "being saved").

Again:

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

So, again, Paul's referring to justification as it relates to salvation. Now, that's obvious if you follow the flow of thought culminating in verses 7 and 8:

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and those whose sins have been covered.
Blessed the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.

So, justification is simply one aspect of all that is salvation. It's the moment when, again, in the courtroom of God, the gavel comes down, and God declares the repentant sinner not guilty, because of the person and work of Christ on his, or her, behalf, and that person's trust in the person and work of Christ. So, the word "justification," means "to declare righteous." As I said earlier, it's a forensic term. By that, we mean it's drawn from the courts of law. It's not that God makes us righteous in His declaration. It's that He *proclaims us righteous*. He declares us righteous, because we are now united with Jesus Christ and identified with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection.

Now, one of the problems, as it relates to the Middle Ages, is the Bible translation that was the standard for about 1,000 years. And that was Jerome's Latin Vulgate. And Jerome's Latin Vulgate rendered the Greek words for righteousness, such as δικαιοσυνη and δικαιοω, with the Latin translation of *justificari*, which means "to make righteous." In Latin, *justificari* means "to make righteous," not "to declare righteous." Now, again, this was the Bible of the Church for about 1,000 years, the Bible of the Catholic Church for about 1,000 years without exception. And the idea of "being made righteous" fits Roman Catholic theology. You have to be made righteous in order to have any hope of being saved on that last day. And you are made righteous by the grace and merits of the Church by working, by partaking of the sacraments, by doing good deeds, and those things work together with God's grace in order to inherently make you righteous. Well, the problem is none of us really can be righteous enough, so the end of that is, according to Roman Catholic theology, you get to spend some extended time in a place called Purgatory where the rest of that unrighteousness is purged from you (sort of a celestial spanking). Well, the Bible wasn't written in Latin, it was written in Greek, and the Greek family of words that begin with the letters delta, iota, kappa (δ, ι, κ) do not mean "make righteous," but "declare righteous" and there's a big difference between the two. Now, I found it interesting, several months ago, to read in the forward of Robert Raymond's superb book, *The Reformation's Conflict With Rome: Why it Must Continue*, the words of Dr. Nick Needham of Highland Theological College who writes this:

Although Roman Catholic biblical scholars have, in the wake of the 2nd Vatican Council of 1962-65, virtually conceded the Protestant case concerning Paul's doctrine of justification, this concession has not found its way into Rome's official creedal teaching.⁶

And I read that, and I thought, "Roman Catholic scholars have virtually conceded the Protestant case concerning Paul's doctrine of justification?" That seemed news to me. But one of those scholars that Needham has in mind is the Roman Catholic Joseph A. Fitzmyer. I've since purchased a copy of Fitzmyer's commentary on the book of Romans, and in that commentary, Fitzmyer, the Roman Catholic, declares:

Justification is drawn from Paul's Jewish background expressing a relationship between human beings and God; a judicial relationship, either ethical or forensic, that is related to human conduct and law courts. The word δικαίος, righteous, upright, usually denoted a person who stood acquitted or vindicated before a judge's tribunal [*And he gives some examples from the Old Testament*] . . . and thus, a right relationship with other human beings.⁷

Now, Fitzmyer goes on to say:

When, then, Paul, in Romans, says that Christ Jesus justified human beings "by His blood" (3:25; 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 His death") by His blood as "a manifestation of His uprightness at the present time to show that He is upright and justifies, [*or vindicates*], the one who puts his faith in Jesus" (3:26, cp 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 . . .*

⁶Cited in Robert Reymond, *The Reformation's Conflict With Rome – Why it Must Continue* (Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-Shire, IV20 1TW, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2001), 8.

⁷Joseph A. Fitzmyer, S.J., *Romans, A New Translation with introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible Series (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 116.

I mean, this is reformational language by a Roman Catholic who recognizes that facts are facts as it relates to the Greek language:

. . . it is not something that they have produced or merited, but it is an alien righteousness [*That is, it's outside of themselves*] one belonging rightly to another (to Christ) and attributed to them because of what another has done for them. So Paul understands "God justifying the godless" (4:5) or "crediting uprightness" to human beings "quite apart from deeds (4:6; see Käsemann, Kertelge, Lyonnet, Reumann, Schlatter, Schulz).⁸

So the words and the meaning of the words are important. It's something that is integral to the Gospel of grace; it's something we need to understand and appreciate, not only that we can more greatly understand and appreciate our own salvation, but that we can be better equipped in the times such as we live when so many contrary voices abound. If you go back to verse 2, Paul writes:

If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

In other words, if it were at all possible for Abraham to be justified, or saved, by his works(εξ ἑργων, "out of his works") then he would, indeed, have grounds for boasting before men, not before God. You see the same thing in Ephesians, chapter two by the same author, the apostle Paul, who says:

By grace you've been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not a result of works that no one should boast.

Now, he goes on in verse 3:

What does the Scripture say?

Well, what Scripture? Paul is quoting the Septuagint version of Genesis, chapter fifteen, verse 6. That is the Greek translation of the Old Testament that his readers would have been familiar with as far as the Old Testament was concerned. So he quotes Genesis 15:6:

And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned [*or credited*] to him as righteousness.

This is a classic passage to which we would refer the doctrine of imputation. This is an example of Christ's righteousness imputed, or credited, to the one who believes, resulting in God's justification. So we could put it this way: "When you, as a sinner, dead in trespasses and sins, heard the message of the Gospel, and that message made sense to you for the first time and you responded, it was because God had quickened your heart. He had regenerated you, and the moment that you were regenerated, you believe and then Christ's righteousness is credited to you, it's imputed to you. God's gavel of justice comes down and He says, 'I declare you not guilty because of what Jesus Christ has done on your behalf.'" So it's not our own good works; it's not our own righteousness;

⁸Ibid., 117-118. Emphasis Mine. My comments bracketed in italics.

it's foreign; it's based totally on the sinless life of Christ, on His sacrificial death, burial and resurrection on our behalf. And that's why it's a once-for-all sort of thing. And it's a perfect sort of thing. We can't add to that or take away from it. So this passage is one of those classic examples of Christ's righteousness being imputed to the believer. Now, that's the way that Paul is using it as he's talking this side of the cross, although he's using an example that's on the other side of the cross. Even though Abraham was justified by grace through faith, the final object of that justification for Abraham was God, the true God, the only God, but yet his sins would be paid for some 2,000 years later at the cross of Jesus Christ.

So "Abraham believed God." This is Paul's point. This was when God appeared to him and said, "Don't be afraid. I'll be a shield for you and I'll reward you." Abraham thinking—as would any man of antiquity who was childless, especially without a son (and I'm taking this out of Genesis, chapter fifteen)—said, "Lord, what will you give me since I'm childless?" And God's answer to him was, "One shall come forth from your own body; he shall be your heir." And God took Abraham outside and said, "Now, look, look at the heavens, count the stars if you're able to count them. So shall you, childless Abraham, advanced in age, married to Sarah, advanced in age, so shall your descendants be." And we know that this promise entailed much more than a progeny for a man who lived over 4,000 years ago. This was God's promise to use this man (who Jesus would later say, ". . . rejoiced to see My day) to bring forth that very Savior who would redeem saints, both Old Testament and New. So Abraham's response, Genesis 15:6, Paul quoting it in Romans 4:3, is one of belief. It's faith. He believed in the Lord [and] it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Paul uses this as an illustration; an illustration of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to everyone who believes.

Now Paul goes on to argue that this is apart from works, deeds, human effort to be made right with God. Verse 4:

Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.

An example of that would be if I hire somebody to do a job and we agree on a price [say] \$10.00 an hour. And they work ten hours—and I *don't* say, "Well, I'll be gracious and give you a check for \$100.00. I know that is due them; they worked for it and it's due them. It's not a favor.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him Who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned [*or credited*] as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works.

Then he goes on to quote from Psalm 32:

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.

Now, quite predictably, Beckwith, following many others, tries to bifurcate works into two categories. You see, there's got to be a way to get around this whole thing, and this is the way it's

done. "Well, there are, number one, works of the Law (capital "L") and then there are works of faith, which we could call little "w." So these folks would argue that, "Oh no, of course, works of the Old Testament Mosaic Law will not justify anyone, but works of faith, the second category, they will." And this is what Roman Catholics refer to as works of merit, or works of faith, or faith working in love: our works of merit done under the auspices of grace, that is, the grace of the church, are the means of our salvation. Now, far better scholars than I will argue that as it relates to contributing to our salvation, this is a false dichotomy. In the end, folks, works are works. Think about it. What was the apex of the Old Testament law? If you took all of the Old Testament, and the Jews counted some 613 laws, but if you wanted to give somebody a summation, a kernel of all of the Old Testament law, where would you turn to? The 10 commandments, right? Now, we see this, the 10 commandments, affirmed in the Roman Catholic catechism, Section 1980:

The old law is the first stage of revealed law. It's moral prescriptions are summed up in the 10 commandments.

Now, it's logical – follow me here – that when Paul writes as he does in Romans 3:28 that "we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the law" that "law," whatever else it may include, would also include the 10 commandments. You follow me? Does it make sense? Yet the Council of Trent teaches that the 10 commandments are obligatory for Christians and that the justified man is still bound to keep them. The Second Vatican Council confirms:

The bishops, successors of the apostles, received from the Lord the mission of teaching all peoples and of preaching the Gospel to every creature, so that all men may attain to salvation through faith, baptism, and the observance of the Commandments.

Capital "C." Attain salvation through faith, baptism, that is, baptism in the Roman Catholic Church, and "the observance of the Commandments." For a Roman Catholic to argue that there's some bifurcation—and this is the capital "L" (the Mosaic Law)—and yes, "we can't be justified by that, but by some new law we can be justified," and yet, at the same time, appeal to the 10 commandments as a means for salvation, is really double-speak.

They do have what they refer to as the new law, which is required for justification. What is this new law? Canon I of the Council of Trent (quoting):

If anyone saith that the sacraments of the new law were not all instituted by Jesus Christ, our Lord, or that there are more or less than seven, to wit, Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony, or even that any of these seven is not truly and properly a sacrament, let him be anathema.

Now the new law, not according to the Bible, but according to Rome, consists of these seven things: Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Order, and Matrimony. Are keeping these laws required for salvation? In other words, is the sinner obligated to keep these in

order to be justified? Does his, or her, very salvation, heaven or hell, hang on his, or her, doing them? Canon IV:

If anyone saith that the sacraments of the new law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous, and that without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain from God through faith alone the grace of justification, let him be accursed.

What's the answer? The law is required. Works are required. The fact that Paul can write to Gentiles and use the general term "works" or "deeds" (εργον) demonstrates that there's no difference. Good deeds, as a basis to merit salvation, are works any way you slice it, however you want to define it. So when Paul writes to a Gentile, Titus, who is in charge of a Gentile church on the Greek island of Crete and says that, "God saved us, not on the basis of deeds, which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit"—when he says that, we can be quite sure that some narrow category of Jewish works of the Mosaic Law were the furthest thing from his readers' minds.

Now, back to Romans 4. In his book, Francis Beckwith claims that this chapter [Romans 4] makes no definitive statement that Abraham's justification was a once-for-all definitive act. In other words, he's arguing against the idea that the elect, those whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world, will in time, believe the Gospel; that the moment that they believe, they'll be justified (a once-for-all declarative act by God). We would say that there is no double jeopardy in God's courtroom. We're not going to be tried and acquitted of the same crime over and over and over again. When He acquits you, He declares you not guilty. That's justification, and He does that once. [H]owever, Beckwith, in Roman Catholic fashion, argues that justification is progressive. That's, again, what he refers to as "the journey of justification." You can be justified today, lose it tomorrow, be justified Tuesday and Wednesday, fall from grace on Thursday, get justified again on Friday, and on and on it goes. Now, he has proof. In his book, and he's not alone in this—he's following other Roman Catholic apologists, he cites James 2:21-24 as demonstrating that Abraham was justified later, that is, after his Genesis 15:6 experience that Paul uses as an example in Romans 4. And then he uses Hebrews 11:8 to try to prove that he was justified earlier. So you'd follow it this way, here's the progression: 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.

When did that happen? At what point in Abraham's life? Well, when he was a pagan living in Ur. That's Genesis, chapter 12. So the contention is, here, Genesis, chapter 12, Abraham is justified.

Then you have Romans 4:6:

. . . he believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

Well, this occurred *later* in Abraham's life. That's recorded in Genesis, chapter 15. Genesis 12 he was justified; Genesis 15 he was justified. Now we throw James 2:21 in the mix:

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

Well, *that's even later* in Abraham's life. That's recorded in Genesis, chapter 22. So, here, they would contend, "How are you going to answer this? You believe in a once-for-all justification, that you're saved and that's sealed? Well, no, look at Abraham, he was justified as he left Ur. We see that in Genesis 12. But, then, he was justified again, three chapters later, Genesis 15. And then we see he was justified again, Genesis 22. It proves the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as against your novel reformational ideas that were just brought upon you by the reformers, something new and novel."

Well, what do we say to this ingenious line of argumentation? Well, it's quite simple. First, Hebrews 11:8 is *not* talking about justification. To argue that is just sleight of hand. It's talking about faith and it gives examples of men and women in the Old Testament who trusted God at various times in their lives. That all these men and women were ultimately elect, ultimately went to heaven, I don't doubt, but the acts of the faith that Hebrews chronicles are not moments of justification. These snippets of faith were exercised at various times and for the writer to Hebrews, the point is that they had *not yet received the promises*, that is, the fullness of Christ had not come. So, look at it this way: Abraham's answering God's call to follow Him that the writer to the Hebrews talks about in Hebrews, chapter 11 (that we read about in Genesis, chapter 12) is much like what the disciples did some 2,000 years later when they were called by Jesus to follow Him. That would be a very good parallel. Jesus called a tax gatherer named Levi. He left his office and followed Him. That doesn't mean he was justified at that point. Simon and Andrew were fishing when Jesus said to them, "Follow Me, I will make you fishers of men." They dropped their nets and did so. It doesn't mean that they were justified at that point. Was it an act of faith, or trust? Sure it was. But was that about their justification? No. Justification requires saving faith; saving faith requires an object. The object of that faith in the Old Testament was Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God, who would provide forgiveness of sin by faith. The object in the New Testament is that provision in the person and work of Jesus Christ. When Abraham left Ur, he did not have an object of faith. God had not made any covenant promises to him at that point. He was under no covenant. The disciples, when they left their occupations to follow Christ, did not yet have an object of faith. They weren't exactly sure who He was and what He had come to do. So, trying to make Hebrews 11 parrot justification is making it speak a language that it does not know. The same thing goes for James, chapter 2. We'll look at that in a moment. But let me say this. Attempts to make these passages say otherwise is really an attempt to make the Bible contradict itself. As James White observes:

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 13 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 4.⁹

Now, I could add, the entire problem of trying to read Old Testament experiences into New Testament doctrine, there are areas that we really should not go unless Scripture has gone there before. An example of this is arguing against perseverance of the saints by the life of Solomon. This was something I heard several times in college and seminary—"Oh, we can't believe in the perseverance of the saints that people will finish and their faith will always be vibrant and growing, will finish believing. Just look at Solomon. Solomon died a pagan, sacrificing on pagan altars." That proves nothing. We can't read Old Testament experiences into New Testament doctrine and New Testament doctrine into Old Testament experiences unless we've got warrant to do so, such as in Romans, chapter 4. After all, we're under the new covenant, not the old. There are some different dynamics with the new covenant with the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Things have changed.

Now, what about James, chapter 2 (and we're going to finish with James 2 and also comparing 1 John, if you'll hold on). I've still got quite a bit to cover. James, chapter 2, so turn there. Here's a novel one that you'll hear. In fact, a whole book was written on this with this title, by a Roman Catholic apologist not that long ago. They'll say, "Well, you believe in justification by faith alone. Do you realize the only place that that phrase is used in the Bible is in James 2:24 where it says, that a man is not justified by faith alone?" That's a typical argument. Now, I want to work our way through the text beginning in verse 14, James, chapter 2. But the first thing I want you to note is there's a parallel to chapter 1, verses 22-27. Look at the emphasis here, chapter 1, verse 22:

Prove yourselves doers of the word, not merely hearers, who delude themselves.

In other words, *I want to see action in your life, not just a profession, but action.*

For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he's like a man who looks at his natural face in the mirror, and once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (1:23-24)

James is warning against spiritual laxity, of having a profession of faith that is devoid of a possession of it. If we're hearers and not doers, we're deluded, 1:22. And to do so is like looking in a mirror only to walk away forgetting what you just saw, verses 23 and 24, and it is ultimately (chapter 1, verse 26) to possess a worthless religion. So, James is not at odds with the apostle Paul. They're talking about different things. Paul was teaching justification by faith; James is talking about

⁹James R. White, *The God Who Justifies*, 222-23.

something altogether different. So, to argue that James 2:24, or James 2 in general, somehow refutes sola fide, is classic eisegesis, reading something into a text that isn't there. It's a misrepresentation. It's a false assumption to argue that James is using the same terms in the same way as Paul. James is addressing the validity of genuine saving faith; that saving faith goes beyond a mere profession. That he believes, with Paul, that salvation is grounded in the person and work of Christ and is based on God's sovereignty, and attained by grace through faith, I think that's evident from what James writes in chapter 1, verse 18, when he says:

. . . in the exercise of His will . . .

That is, God's will.

. . . He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures.

"Exercise of His will" is taken from the Greek word βουλομαι. It means purpose. It could be translated decree. This is God's sovereignty in calling forth the believer to Himself. Now, additionally, note chapter 2, verse 10, James writes that:

Whoever keeps the whole law, yet stumbles on one point, he has become guilty of all.

So, again, God is not grading salvation on some sort of sliding scale. It's not some mortal, venial sin sort of thing, a single transgression brings manifold guilt, utter condemnation. So James is not talking about justification in the same sense as Paul.

Now, if you go to chapter 2, verse 14, James says:

What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he does not have works?

James is proposing a hypothetical situation. Someone comes along and they profess to be a believer. They say, "I have saving faith." However, he has no works or deeds. In other words, his life in no way matches his lips. Or we could put it this way: he claims to have Ephesians 2:8 and 9—"Yes, I've been saved by grace through faith"—but he doesn't have Ephesians 2:10, those good deeds that God prepared beforehand. He's not walking in those things. He doesn't really look like a Christian. He doesn't talk like a Christian other than the fact that he has a Christian testimony. Now, what Paul says is a *fruit* of saving faith, a changed life, is *absent* from James' hypothetical professor. And since the fruit is absent, the profession is worthless.

So he asks the question, Can that faith save him? The Greek word μή with the interrogative, with a question, is an implied answer of "no." It cannot. That faith (one that demonstrates nothing, it's empty) is a non-saving faith. There are many examples in Scripture of a faith that does not believe, of people that had an orthodox profession, but were nonetheless hell-bound. That's why I say that a profession of faith saves no one. Your profession is like your baptism; it's a declaration. Whether

the declaration is real or not is another matter. Your profession doesn't save you; only union with Christ can save you, so you're either in Him or you're not.

Now he gives an example in verses 15 and 16. It says:

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, yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

That's a highly relevant illustration to James' readers. They were poor; they were disadvantaged; they were persecuted; they were needy. It would not have been uncommon for any number of them to be lacking in food and clothing. And to be in such dire straits and have a professed Christian say, "Be warmed"—what does that mean? "Have clothing." Be filled—"what does that mean?" "Have food." And yet to say those words, which are words that require action, and not act upon them, is useless. To be warmed and filled requires more than words; it requires actions. Again, this is James' point. So he says:

Even so, faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

Verse 18, another hypothetical:

Someone may well say, You have faith, I have works. Show me your faith without the works and I will show you my faith by my works.

This is a problematic verse, because the Greek was not written with any punctuation and so we're not exactly sure who's speaking and whatnot and the translations sometimes differ, but the point is—and I think we can take the New American Standard at face value here; it certainly doesn't pervert the point at all—the point is somebody can come along and say, "Well, you have faith, I have works; show me your faith without your works. Show me that you're a Christian *without doing anything*. Do it! While I will show you my faith by my changed life." You have to understand James' point, the direction in which he's moving throughout his letter. We might say it this way to use something from today's lingo: "Talk is cheap. Put your money where your mouth is." After all, how can we have any assurance that someone who professes to be a Christian really is a Christian. Somebody comes along, they're a new attender in the church and they start getting involved. Of course, whenever you have somebody who attends for the first couple of times, you're looking for those tell-tale signs: Are they carrying a Bible with them? Do they sing during the songs? It's kind of like what single people do, looking at hands to see if there's a wedding ring. You know, we Christians do that. We look at tell-tale signs like Bibles and lips moving during song or are they sleeping during the sermon, you know? That's a good one, isn't it? Well, talk is cheap. How do you know somebody's a Christian? How can I show you that? How do we know when somebody comes into the assembly and they're around a while, well, you can tell, you talk to them and they have a profession of faith and they seem orthodox, but how do they show the reality of that? What if they have really—in fact, they don't come to church. I mean they came once, but you go to visit them and they say, "I can take

or leave that. I'm saved; I believe in salvation by grace through faith. I have saving faith." [You ask them] "Do you read your Bible?" *No.* "Like to worship the Lord?" *No.* "I get the feeling just looking around here your life isn't much different than any other pagan's out there." *Yeah, I guess not . . .*

How do you know somebody is regenerate? It's a profession, but it's also a life that in some way reflects the reality of that profession. Listen, we're not *creedalists*. This is a problem with the ecumenical movement. This is a problem with the New Perspective on Paul. This is something I see in Beckwith's book, this idea is that if somehow we can boil Christianity down to the lowest common denominator, and generally it's the creeds of the first couple of centuries, and we can say, "Yes, I believe those creeds," then we're in. We're Christians, we mouth the words. *This is what James is arguing against.* Our profession is *προς θεος*. Our profession is *before God*. Yes, I mean, we make it before men, but God knows what's in our heart. Our deeds are *προς ανθρωπου*. Our deeds are *before men*. If you don't understand that, you will miss the entire point and be lost as to how James and Paul complement one another.

Verses 19-20 really drive this home. You want to be a creedalist? Remember, James writes to Jews:

You believe that God is one; you do well. The demons also believe and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless.

Here's the central confession of Israel's faith, the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4:

Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one.

And James says, "You believe that God is one; you're no polytheist. You profess faith in the one true God. Well, guess what? The demons in hell also believe that." Demons are orthodox. They know the truth. Remember, demons were among the first to recognize who Jesus really was. Mark 5:7, they called Him Son of the Most High God. You can have an orthodox profession and still be unregenerate. Creedalism doesn't save; it only makes [more] creedalists. The focus, time and time again, has to be on the person of Christ, but also on the work of Christ. It has to be asking the basic question, "What is the Gospel?" And so often we see that groups, especially ecumenical groups, have no theology of regeneration. "Let's just agree on some basic things." If we mouth the words and say, "Yes, I believe that; I can recite the Apostles' Creed or the Nicene Creed," we're in. That'll just qualify you to be a demon. That's about it, if that's all there is.

Now, this is where it gets interesting, verse 21,

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

This sounds like it's just an in-your-face refutation by James of Paul. You wonder here, you know, "James, were you talking to Paul and had some big disagreement here? And now you're going to make this public in Holy Writ?" After all, in Romans 4, Paul writes that Abraham was justified by

faith apart from works. It was even before he received the sign of the covenant. Here James says that Abraham was justified by works at a later time when he offered up Isaac on the altar. Some sort of a contradiction? Is it proof of multiple justifications, as Beckwith contends? Well, think about it. If it's multiple justifications, then we have to assume that between Genesis 15, when Abraham believed God and it was credited him as righteousness, and Genesis 22, when he offered up Isaac on the altar, *he needed* a multiple justification. In other words, he had fallen out of grace and fallen back in. Well, that's not in the text. You see, one of the issues we have here is one of translation. We can't assume that the same word means the same thing everywhere it's used. Words do not convey monolithic meanings. Words depend on context, syntax, grammar. All you have to do is turn to a common English dictionary to discover that. You can't say because a word means this here, it must mean the exact thing over here and over here and over here and over here. That's just a universal fact of how languages work. So when James says, "Was not Abraham, our father, justified by works," he uses, not an English word, obviously. He's writing in Greek and he uses a Greek word δικαιοω. And it's a word that carries a variety of meanings. It's not just to declare righteous, or to be acquitted, but also to show justice, to be made pure, to be freed, to be vindicated. And, in fact, the New International Version, if you're using the NIV, is very helpful here. They translate it:

Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did?

And that really captures the intent of James, and really captures one of the nuances of the word. The word could be translated "proven righteous" or "shown to be righteous."¹⁰

Luke Timothy Johnson is a New Testament scholar. He's also a Roman Catholic and former priest. In his commentary, he contends that this is exactly how James should be understood. In his commentary on James, which I have, he translates this "shown to be righteous on the basis of deeds." And he writes:

Shown to be righteous on the basis of deeds: The hardest term to translate here is *dikaioun*, primarily because of its frequent use by Paul in contexts opposing righteousness by faith and "works of the law" (Rom 2:13; 3:3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28 30; 4:2; 5; 5:1, 9; 8:30, 33; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8, 11, 24) and the complex use of the verb and its cognates in the O.T. (e.g., LXX Gen 38:26; Exod 23:7; Deut 25:1; Pss 50:6; 81:3; 142:2; Sir 1:22). The precise meaning in each case must be determined by context, not some general theological concept. Given the previous statement demanded the *demonstration* of faith, the translation here as "shown to be righteous" seems appropriate (see Hort, 63, "appear righteous in God's sight," and Marty, 104, "God sanctions his righteousness"). This would be similar to such New Testament passages as Matthew 11:19; 12:37; 1 Corinthians 4:4.¹¹

¹⁰Cf. *Strong's Enhanced Lexicon* and *Bauer Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, s.v. δικαιοω.

¹¹Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Anchor Bible Commentary: The Letter of James*, 242.

By the way, Matthew 11:19 that he cites as an example says this:

Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

You might write that in the margin of your Bible by James, chapter 2. Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds. It's the exact same word. Wisdom is justified by her deeds. How do I know if somebody has true wisdom? They say they have it. How do I know? How they act. Wisdom is justified, vindicated by her deeds. In the same way, genuine faith is vindicated or proven to be genuine saving faith by deeds. And so, verse 22:

You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected.

If you look at verse 22 of James, chapter 2, those first two words jump right out at you: *You see?* He said earlier. "Show me your faith." How do you show it? *You see?* Faith was working with his works. That was the demonstration. If there's no life to see, there's no living faith. There's no regenerative faith, only a shell, or corpse, masquerading as such.

But the Scripture was fulfilled . . .

Verse 23. And James then quotes the same passage that Paul does, Genesis 15:6:

. . . Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

It doesn't mean that Abraham wasn't justified once-for-all in Genesis 15:6. And this isn't to argue that dead faith can be supplemented by good deeds to make living faith. That would turn James' argument on its head! Luke Timothy Johnson again says:

James sees the offering of Isaac as the demonstration of his faith rather than its replacement.¹²

But Dr. Beckwith doesn't agree with his Roman Catholic counterpart Johnson. On page 105 of *Return to Rome*, Beckwith writes:

Protestant writers argue that James is addressing the public display of one's salvation by one's works in order to show evidence of one's salvation. That is, to justify it in front of others, but that's an implausible reading since James' focus is clearly on God's justification of the Christian and not on public displays of righteousness. After all, the story of Abraham and Isaac occurred in a place isolated from the general public.¹³

¹²Ibid., 243.

¹³*Return to Rome*, 105.

What! Has he really studied the text? It has everything to do with a public display of righteousness before men. And to argue that Abraham's offering Isaac was isolated from the general public and therefore has nothing to do with a visible demonstration of the reality of Abraham's faith is ludicrous. Ask Isaac, "Was Abraham alone when this happened, Isaac?" He is likely to say, "What are you, a moron?" (if you're allowed to say such things in heaven). The two attendants were there and if they didn't see what happened, they heard about it. And what about the millions that have read about it since, and the fact that it's inscribed in Holy Writ as an example? Are we supposed to say that because an act occurs in front of only one or three persons and is recorded as being true, it's not a legitimate act? That's ridiculous.

And so James concludes:

You see a man is justified [*a man is proven righteous*] by works, not by faith alone.

"And in the same way. . ." (verse 25). Here he uses Rahab, the harlot, as an illustration--vindicated by works (you can read about that in Joshua, chapter 2). And the chapter ends with:

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also, faith without works is dead. (verse 26)

So good works, a changed life, Christ-likeness, is the fruit, or evidence of genuine saving faith, not the cause of it. But if there's not Christ-likeness, if there's no hunger and thirst for God, if there are no deeds, then there's no saving faith. That's consistent with the rest of Scripture; it avoids the error of making James and Paul contradict one another, or worse, perverting the Gospel of grace. The reformers understood this, as Luther once wrote:

We do not become righteous by doing what is righteous, but having become righteous, we do what is righteous.¹⁴

How did Rome respond? The Council of Trent, in direct opposition to the reformers and Scripture, declared in Canon XXIV:

If anyone 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 accursed.

But, again, this is something we see throughout the New Testament; it's consistent with a sound understanding of how salvation works; it's consistent with the Gospels; it's consistent with the Epistles. In fact, you read James, and then you can read 1 John and you're reading much of the same thing as far as emphasis is concerned. 1 John 2:1-5:

¹⁴Cited in J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1883).

By this, we know we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. The one who says, I've come to know Him, and does not keep His commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him. Whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has been truly perfected. By this, we know we are in Him. And the one who says, I've come to know Him . . .

As James would say, *The one who says, "I have faith."*

. . . and does not keep His commandments . . .

Or, as James would say, *has no works.*

. . . is a liar, and the truth is not in him. For whoever keeps the His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this, we know we are in Him.

John and James use the same illustration. James 2:15-16 (compare 1 John, chapter 3, verses 15-17):

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer. You know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know this, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay our lives down 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?

It doesn't. So the issue is *the kind of faith* that one has. The Bible's clear that there is a kind of faith that falls short of being saving faith; it's non-saving faith. Several years ago, I did a study out of John's Gospel and I came up with three kinds of non-saving faith in the Gospel of John. Three types of non-saving faith, one type of saving faith. Faith without works is dead. He doesn't say works without faith are dead, but faith without works is dead. The issues falls on the quality, the kind of faith, not the works. This is consistent with Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7—and we'll probably pick it up there next time—that every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. And that a good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. What kind of fruit is hanging on your branches? If you're a good tree, if you're of the company of redeemed, that's going to evidence itself in your life, not just in your lips, but in how you live, the things that you love. If you have a profession that's devoid of those things, it shows itself for what it is. My prayer is that the Spirit of God would cause you to fall on your face in repentance and humility.

[Closing Prayer]