

Romans 4:5 **But** [δέ (*dé*): the antithesis of v. 4 is grace] **to him who does not work** [negative conjunction μή (*mē*): “does not,” plus the present active participle ἐργάζομαι (*ergázomai*): “to exert energy”], **but** [(*dé*): conjunction of contrast] **instantaneously believes** [aoristic present active participle of πιστεύω (*pisteúō*): “faith alone”] **in Him who perpetually justifies** [static present active participle of δικαιόω (*dikaióō*)] **the ungodly** [ἀσεβής (*asebēs*): unbeliever], **his faith** [πίστις (*pístis*): absence of works] **is credited** [present passive indicative of λογίζομαι (*logízomai*): “credited to his account”] **for righteousness** [δικαιοσύνη (*dikaíosúnē*): “the imputation of divine righteousness”]. (EXT)

14. The passages in Romans and Hebrews confirm the stark differences between Abraham’s faith in Messiah for salvation, Genesis 15:6, and his faith in Messiah to accomplish divine-good production, the five paragraphs of the Abrahamic Covenant and his works on Mount Moriah.
15. It is the latter that is the subject in James’s reference in James 2:21. We have spent an extensive amount of time confirming the difference between these two working objects in the life of Abraham.
16. We have studied these subjects beginning with JAS2-35, page 341, and concluding with JAS2-46, page 455, a total of 115 pages of research.
17. From this exhaustive study we have developed enough background information to construct an expanded translation. Let’s start out with the NASB and go from there:

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

1. This verse begins with the proper noun Abraham who is identified by James as “our father.” James is the writer. He is a Jew. His parents were Joseph and Mary, each recorded in the chart pedigree of Messiah going back to Solomon and Nathan respectively.

2. The chart pedigree is traced further back in history from David to Judah who was assigned the honor of leadership over the Jewish people. It is from the tribe of Judah that Israelite kings would emerge.
3. Judah's father was Jacob whose name was changed to Israel and was a son of Isaac, the first full-blooded, natural-born son of Abraham, the progenitor of the Jewish race.
4. Those gathered in the synagogue in Jerusalem were also Jews, their lineages traced back on one of the twelve sons of Israel, each found in the chart pedigree of Abraham.
5. Having identified Abraham as the subject, James then poses a question, "Was he not justified," the aorist passive indicative of the verb **δικαίωω** (*dikaiōō*): "vindicated."
6. The culminative aorist indicates it is the main verb while the passive voice means Abraham received vindication. The indicative mood verifies this as a historical reality.
7. This culminative aorist looks back to the summum bonum³ of Abraham's life, the point when he applied maximum doctrine to the situation God assigned him.
8. The Book of Hebrews commands believers "to not forsake our own assembling together" (Hebrews 10:25) which refers to consistent inculcation of divine viewpoint by means of Bible study.
9. However, even the most consistent students of the Word have not obtained the objective if, although hearers, they are not also doers. The divinely desired sequence of events occurs when doctrine is the working object in the soul which under the Law of Freedom produces divine good.
10. We have studied the result of both options in two passages:

1 Corinthians 3:11 For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid which is Jesus Christ.

v. 12 Now if anyone keeps on building on this foundation: **gold silver, precious stones, wood hay, straw,**

³ The supreme good from which all others are derived (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (2003), 11th ed., s.v. "summum bonum.")

1 Corinthians 3:13 each man's production will become obvious for the day [**evaluation tribunal of Christ**] shall declare it, because it shall be revealed with fire. The fire itself shall test every man's work [**divine good vis à vis human good**] of what quality it is.

v. 14 If any man's work [**divine-good production**] endures which he has built in time, he will receive a reward.

v. 15 If any man's work [**energy of the flesh**] is burned up, he will suffer loss [**of reward**]; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire. (EXT)

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the evaluation tribunal of Christ for the purpose that each one may receive back the things done through his body, according to what he has done in time whether **good of intrinsic value or worthless**. (EXT)

11. The events at the Evaluation Tribunal of Christ are the final exam which results in believers being vindicated by the acknowledgement of divine-good production in time.
12. The best word to translate “justification,” is “vindication” because it best defines the Greek verb, **δικαίωω (dikaiōō)**. Let's first consult a Greek lexicon and then an English dictionary:

Dikaiōō (2) to render a favorable verdict, vindicate; by or on the basis of works, by what one does; cp. James 2:21; by oneself as a result of one's own accomplishments.⁴

Vindicate. To clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof. Vindication. 1. The act of vindicating or condition of being vindicated. 2. Something that provides evidence or support for a claim or argument.⁵

13. These references describe the relationship the believer has with the Word of God. In the case of Abraham, he was issued five paragraphs referred to as the Abrahamic Covenant.

⁴ Walter Bauer, “δικαίωω,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., rev. & ed. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 249.

⁵ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016), s.vv. “vindicate, vindication.”



14. The Hebrew word, “covenant,” is the noun **בְּרִית** (*berith*) and is defined in this excerpt:

Covenant. The term applied to various transactions between God and man. As man is not in the position of an independent covenanting party, such a covenant is not strictly a mutual compact but a promise on the part of God to arrange His providences for the welfare of those who should render Him obedience.

The Covenant with Abraham. The condition of this covenant was that Abraham was to leave his country, kindred, and father’s house, and follow the Lord into the land that He would show him. The promise was a fourfold blessing: (1) increase into a numerous people; (2) material and spiritual prosperity—“I will bless you”; (3) the exaltation of Abraham’s name—“make your name great”; (4) Abraham was not only to be blessed by God, but to be a blessing to others, implicitly by the coming of the Messiah through his descendants (Genesis 12:1–3). Later this covenant was renewed, and Abraham was promised a son and numerous posterity (chapter 15).⁶

15. This covenant was dictated orally to him by the Lord in five paragraphs. In these five, Abraham was promised numerous advantages that were revealed over the course of about 45 years.
16. The covenant contained promises that he would be the progenitor of a race of people: **(1)** “All the land you see I will give to you and to your descendants” (Genesis 13:15), **(2)** “I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth” (13:16), **(3)** “Count the stars. So shall your descendants be” (15:5), **(4)** “Your descendants I will give the land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates” 15:18, **(5)** “I will give to you and your descendants the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession” (17:8).
17. At first, these “descendants” presented a problem since Abraham had become sterile and his wife, Sarah, was barren. Added to the developing mystery was the proclamation by the Lord that Abraham would have an heir (Genesis 15:4) and the promise that he and Sarah would have a son to be named Isaac (17:19a).
18. The birth of Isaac introduced into the earth’s Homo sapiens genetics the first full-blooded, natural-born Jew. This event enabled Abraham to trust in the veracity of multiple divine promises of descendants who would establish the chart pedigree of the Messiah beginning with Isaac.

⁶ Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, rev. 3d ed., ed. R. K. Harrison (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, 1988), 259.



19. These repeated references of a posterity that would include innumerable descendants became the working objects of Abraham's faith. He was convinced that if Isaac was the guaranteed bloodline for these people, then Isaac most certainly would have to procreate to fulfill these promises.
20. When Isaac grew to adulthood, indicated by the conclusion he was 20 years of age, the Lord instructed Abraham to take him to Mount Moriah, slit his throat on an altar topped by splintered wood and then set him aflame.
21. This is exactly what Abraham did down to the moment before he applied the knife. This is when the Lord commanded Abraham to spare Isaac's life.
22. What Abraham did is described by James as **δικαιόω (dikaiōō)**: "vindication," followed by the phrase, "by works." Vindication refers to, "a favorable verdict on the basis of works," and "to clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof."
23. "Vindication" is defined above on page 457 and we repeat them again here:

[Dikaiōō \(2\) to render a favorable verdict, vindicate; by or on the basis of works, by what one does; cp. James 2:21; by oneself as a result of one's own accomplishments.](#)⁷

[Vindicate. To clear of accusation, blame, suspicion, or doubt with supporting arguments or proof. Vindication. 1. The act of vindicating or condition of being vindicated. 2. Something that provides evidence or support for a claim or argument.](#)⁸
23. The accurate analysis of the phrase, "Justified by works," is more precisely translated, "vindicated by works." These definitions coordinate perfectly with the principle of the Law of Freedom.
24. Abraham was given information by the Lord regarding the paterfamilias's personal future. The specifics are systematically revealed to him, but the method of accomplishing them is delayed.
25. The Lord issued promises to Abram over several decades. The first was in Ur in Genesis 12:2, "I will make you a great nation." In Genesis 13:16 the Lord tells Abram his descendants will be innumerable. In Genesis 15:4, Abram learns he will have a son and in verse 5 from him will emerge innumerable descendants. In Genesis 17:19, Abraham is told his wife Sarah will have a son to be named Isaac. In that same verse he informs Abraham that Isaac's progeny will exist into eternity.

⁷ Bauer, "δικαιόω," in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., 249.

⁸ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 5th ed. (2016), s.vv. "vindicate, vindication."



26. Genesis 21:5 states that Isaac was born when Abraham was 100 years old. In Genesis 22:5, 12, Isaac is referred to as a “lad,” the Hebrew noun **נָעַר** (*na‘ar*): “Used of a young person; one old enough to serve in battle (Genesis 14:24).”⁹
27. This reference refers to those soldiers who fought with Abraham’s Allied Army in the campaign against Chedorlaomer:
- Genesis 14:24** “I [Abraham] will take nothing except what the young men [נָעַר] (*na‘ar*)] have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eschol, and Mamre; let them take their share.” (NASB)
28. In the Mosaic Law, a male is considered an adult at age 20 at which point he is conscripted into the Israeli army. This reference occurred long before that standard was incorporated into Jewish culture, but gives us guidance on the Isaac’s when Abraham took him to Mount Moriah.
29. When Abraham left Beersheba, his soul had fully facilitated doctrines concerning the commandment he received in:
- Genesis 22:2** Take now your son, your only son, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you.”
30. Beginning at that moment, Abraham shifted into locked-in doctrinal orientation with focus on the mission. Genesis 22:3–13 documents the full and clear meaning of the phrase in James 2:21, “Was not Abraham our father vindicated by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?”
31. When Abraham was vindicated was “when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar.” What enabled him to make the transformation from being a hearer to being a doer?
32. His unflinching confidence in the promises given to him by the Lord in the five paragraphs of the Abrahamic Covenant. What asset did Abraham possess that enabled him to do this? His Law of Freedom!
33. His Law of Freedom chose to go proactive when he “offered up” Isaac, the aorist active participle of **ἀναφέρω** (*anaphérō*): “to offer a sacrifice by bringing it up to the altar.”¹⁰

⁹ Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, “נָעַר,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, (2003), 742.

¹⁰ Ibid., 166.



34. James introduces the final paragraph of his second chapter by reviewing a historical event that is well-known to those in his congregation. The subject he wishes to amplify is the importance of not only hearing the instruction from the Word of God but obeying it through application.
35. It is not James' fault that two thousand years later some misguided theologian distorted his illustration into a works program for salvation. Yet, this is exactly what has occurred by these sources pilfering a phrase that not only misses James's point but distorts the gospel of salvation in the process.
36. "Justified by works" is not James' polemic against other New Testament writers who profess "justification by faith." The contexts for each address completely different circumstances.
37. Justification by faith for salvation is a subject Paul addressed in Romans. Absolutely no works can be offered in that application of the phrase. Here is Paul's explanation of the term:

Romans 3:21 But now apart from the Mosaic Law, the righteousness of divine integrity has been confirmed by the law and the prophets in the Tanakh,

v. 22 this is the righteousness which belongs to the integrity of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; (for there is no distinction between the unbelieving Jew and unbelieving Gentile;

v. 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God),

v. 24 receiving justification freely by His grace through the redemption from the slave market of sin in Christ Jesus. (EXT)

38. Salvation of the unbeliever's soul is acquired when the lost person directs his faith to the working object of Jesus Christ resulting in salvation by means of grace. This volitional decision results in him being justified before the Supreme Court of Heaven by means of faith alone, not by any means of works.

Romans 3:28 Therefore we logically conclude then that man is vindicated, justified by means of nonmeritorious faith apart from works of the Law. (EXT)

39. Post salvation, the believer is instructed to:



2 Peter 3:18a Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

39. This “growth” through “grace and knowledge” describes the works a believer must perform while being trained as a good soldier for Christ. Several passages encourage the inculcation of “wisdom and knowledge”:

Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!

Ephesians 1:17 ... the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge [ἐπίγνωσις (*epígnōsis*)] of Him.

Colossians 2:2 ... attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God’s mystery, that is, Christ Himself,

v. 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

James 1:5 But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, Who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. (NASB)

40. The Greek word for “wisdom” is the noun **σοφία (*sophía*)** and is defined thusly:

In respect to divine things, insight, deep understanding, represented as a divine gift; the ability to regulate one’s relationship with God; insight imparted from God. Divine wisdom, including the ideas of infinite skill, insight, knowledge, purity. The knowledge of how to regulate one’s relationship with God.¹

41. The Greek word for “knowledge” is the noun **γνῶσις (*gnōsis*)** and defined accordingly:

Objectively spoken of what is known: religious knowledge, i.e., doctrine; a deeper Christian knowledge. The faculty of unfolding the deeper knowledge or fundamental principles of the Christian religion.²

¹ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., “σοφία,” in *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 1300–1301.

² Ibid., “γνῶσις,” 378.



42. It is the accumulation of wisdom and knowledge from serious study of the Word of God that the believer is enabled to build an inventory of divine guidance by which he can advance from being a hearer of the Word to a doer of the Word.
43. The issue in the Christian way of life is to become enabled to apply divine thought to life and circumstances. To accomplish this objective the believer must grow in grace which in time results in the accumulation of divine thought in the soul.
44. Without such an advance, the believer is handicapped in the field of application. He is a soldier for Christ, but he has no artillery of thought to deploy in the invisible war of the Angelic Conflict.
45. No military officer would deploy his troops into a hot zone without any training, without any weapons, or without a strategy. They would be systematically slaughtered on the battlefield.
46. It is not God's desire that His people suffer the similar fate in the battle of ideas in the devil's world. That's why He has made available the completed canon of Scripture, so each believer can avail himself to the teaching of Bible doctrine.
47. God provides all the logistics necessary for the advance, but the believer must resolve to learn the "wisdom and knowledge" so he can apply it in his daily walk.
48. But without an inventory of thought to apply, the believer becomes a casualty. Such a situation at best is a case of hearing the Bible taught, but not applying it to the details of life.
49. It is this process that we have been studying in James, the use of the Law of Freedom to make the decision to pursue truth rather than ignore the responsibility.
50. A high inventory of biblical wisdom and knowledge transforms a hearer believer into a doer believer. This is characterized by the phrase "vindicated by works."
51. Vindication is the result of using one's faith to consult the working objects of Bible doctrine and then applying them. Just as Abraham built up his inventory resulting in his successful performance on Mount Moriah, so also the Christian believer is also vindicated by works when he applies doctrine to his life.
52. This group of doctrines is what emerges from James 2:21, **(1)** the Law of Freedom, **(2)** utilization of working objects, **(3)** vindication by works, and **(4)** becoming a doer of the Word.

