

**From:** email@endmin.org <email@endmin.org>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 30, 2015 5:06 PM  
**To:** Isaac  
**Cc:** Jon Swanson  
**Subject:** Re: J Checking In ...

Hello Isaac,

Year-End greetings in Christ to you.

I have completed an *introductory* response before our next face-to-face fellowship together, a time which will include the addressing of your questions below. I've included what I sent Christmas Day to keep things in context. I've also attached some past handouts that I've shared with you. The NEW email material below is colored in **purple**.

-----Original Message-----

From: "Jon Swanson" <JonSWANSON@msn.com>  
Sent: Friday, December 25, 2015 9:52am  
To: Isaac  
Subject: Re: J Checking In ...

**CHRISTmas** Day Greetings Dear Isaac!

It continues to snow - even as I prepare to send this email. What a picture of what God's GIFT in Christ did for us - make us white as snow before Him. Psalms 32 & 103 and Isaiah 1:18 ... Lord, we praise You!

Anyway, I've responded to your good comments below **in green** so as to make it easier to see where I bring feedback.

JOY dear Brother and Saint in Christ,

Jon

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**From:** Isaac  
**Sent:** Saturday, December 19, 2015 3:17 PM  
**To:** Jon Swanson  
**Subject:** Re: J Checking In ...

Jon,  
Thank you for the encouragement and accountability. I did read the nkjv verse and it does have that extra part that my esv doesn't include.

I have to say it: "I love you dear Brother." I say this because I sincerely do thank the Lord for your example as you abide in Him. Isaac, it is rare for a young man to take Him seriously these days. I thank Him for His mercy and grace in your life as you truly seek Him as He calls His people to do ( New Covenant application of Jer. 29:11-13 ; Luke 9:23-36 ; Romans 12:1,2 ; I Cor. 15:58 and many other passages).

It is interesting to note that the same phrase (“who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit”) is found in verse 4 (of Rom. 8) of the versions so the phrase is not foreign to the context. Pretty cool! The footnote in my ESV (of Rom.8:1) is interesting. I’d like to talk about this with you, too, but this will be a long enough email without this textual discussion so I’ll wait to share about this another day – that is, if you’re interested in doing so.

On another note I attached a picture of part of Jonathan Edwards’ book the religious affections. He talks about what part works plays in our faith. He uses scripture. He says that works are evidences of a saving faith. He says works justify their faith to the world and their consciences. He does not take the stance that works justify us before God. I am not saying Jonathan Edwards has the final authority but he makes a case from scripture.

RE: Jonathan Edwards’ “Evidence of saving faith”: My response, like yours, Isaac: “AMEN!” As you state later in your email, the question is not about evidence of faith (works) [which we say *amen* to] but the pressing question is this: Do post-conversion “works” bring some aspect of justification before God? This inquiry could be considered an “either/or ... both/and” matter in that we’re considering the realm of the Bible’s definition of “justification.” I’ll explain this shortly. For now ...

Let’s PRACTICE the hermeneutical principles as we look into this matter further!

In review of the principles we’ve discussed this academic year to date:

1. We pray, asking God to help us rightly divide His Word – Ps. 119:18
2. We consider the data of the text we’re looking at – what it actually says.  
Observation of the text is a crucial early step of interpreting the text.  
This includes the consideration of word meaning (definition), grammar, syntax, etc.
3. We then consider the passage in its context. In this case, correct me if I’m wrong, the immediate context is the paragraph of James 2:14-26.
4. We also consider “genre.” James is a letter so it is considered to be epistolary genre. Epistolary literature brings a very literal quality of interpretation unless the data in the letters would say differently – e.g., see Paul’s use of analogy and simile in Galatians 4:21-31. In the New Testament letters, literal interpretation of the material is standard so we look at our passage in that light.
5. Analogy of Scripture is also important, for it seeks to address the issue of the full teaching of the Word of God on a topic ... in our case, the topic is “justification.”

Also, in light of your comments above, please recall the handout tied to our Truth Foundation, the Word of God. Do you recall it? **I’ve attached it above** – titled “Theological Integration.” Quoting Jonathan Edwards’ view on this is fine but we need to affirm this source as what it is – a view of a godly Brother in Jesus Christ. Other Brothers (in the past) in Jesus Christ hold different views. This is part of “Historical Theology” and it sure has a place in our discussion BUT the foundation (of historical theology) is not the most authoritative Truth Foundation. It’s the Word of God – what it actually says – that is our ultimate authority for faith and practice.

I know you agree with this so let’s do what you encourage: Let’s take a look at what the Scriptures do say.

Also as I read in James 2 where it mentions in v.21 (Abraham being justified by works), v.24 (a person is justified by works and not faith alone), and v.25 (Rahab justified by works). Before these listed verses doesn't the verse before them set them up v.18 where it states: "But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." So isn't the context talking about works justifying before men? The works are being proven before those who argue against James who have faith without works in v. 18?

I agree with you that verse 18 uses a test of man – as to the quality of one's faith – BUT is this the point (main emphasis) of the paragraph OR is this an appeal affirming the main point of the paragraph: faith without works is dead – vs. 17 ?

Is "justification before mankind" the point (main emphasis) of the paragraph? The context would say "no" for a number of reasons, including the helpful illustrations James uses – the lives of Abraham and Rahab.

The BIG question that we're addressing is this:

### **In whose eyes is it that we are justified – God's or man's?**

The data of the immediate context brings answer: **It is "works"** (after being justified by faith) **before God** by which one is justified. Here's why I hold this conclusion:

1. "It is God Who justifies." **Romans 8:33** (and note the data of the rest of this verse! - justification by God is in contrast to one's standing in the eyes of man. Can people "bring charge against God's elect" ? No, for it is God Who justifies.
2. The context of James 2:14-26 is **salvation** – verse 14ff. Faith is the centerpiece of our justification before God – and even faith is a gift from God (Eph. 2:8,9). God gets the rightful credit. HE is the One Who saves; not us (mankind). But when GOD moves in us, WOW, **even those good works** – e.g., Gal. 5's fruit of the Spirit (it is God Who is at work in us to produce these fruits, fruits which) – **are PLEASING before Him**. Why? Because He's the One Who's doing them. John 15 is similar only in this setting it's our abiding in the Vine – in Christ – that brings fruit pleasing to God. Back to the main point of #2:

This paragraph is talking about salvation and how an active faith (vs. a dead, deedless faith) brings justification before God. Faith, biblically speaking, includes **works of faith** that God graciously does in us.

Here are my points so far: Mankind does not "save" (God does) AND "It is God Who justifies." A Bible study on justification – which doesn't take a long time to do – is quite revealing!

3. The people James uses as illustrations (in this James 2 paragraph) are Abraham and Rahab. Question: Before Whom is Abraham justified? The Genesis 22 passage is clear. It says NOTHING about Abraham being justified in the eyes of his servants, nor in the eyes of Isaac. Abraham is justified in the LORD's eyes! Note **His** response: He repeats the Abrahamic Covenant saying because you have done this – *because you have been willing to sacrifice your own son in obedience to Me – I will bless you.* (Gen. 22:15-19) WOW!

[And NOTE: no longer “Abram” but “Abraham” here. And WHEN was his name changed? Gen. 17 ... and **note what God says to Abram** (AFTER he was, by faith, accounted righteous before God) **in verses 1 & 2 of this 17<sup>th</sup> chapter**: How can this be? Note: This (vv. 1 & 2) is a **conditional** statement – by GOD – one given AFTER Abram had been justified by faith! WOW! I LOVE Is. 55 and its tie to Rom. 11:33-36 – God’s ways are not our ways! He transcends our puny reason ... and this, too, brings Him good pleasure (and rightly so!).]

This is where I return to the “either/or ... both/and” perspectives.

The position I hold affirms BOTH (“both/and”) biblical teachings whereas the other view (“one is justified by faith alone” – which is NOT stated in scripture) does the “either/or” thing by saying it’s either by faith or by works (but cannot be both) on the basis of rational contradiction. It cannot be justification by faith AND works because then it wouldn’t be by faith in Christ alone.

But the SCRIPTURES teach differently. They teach it is by CHRIST ALONE that we are saved. They teach man is not justified by human works. The Word teaches that mankind is justified by works, and not by faith alone. Jesus teaches that one is justified by his words (Mt. 12). In all cases, this is salvation/justification before GOD (not man), for “it is GOD Who justifies.”

This “both/and” view affirms MANY Scriptures which some (who reside in the “either/or” camp) see as “problem passages” (unless of course, these texts are reinterpreted to fit “by faith alone” which, again, the Word never states)! I, on the other hand, don’t see these passages as “problem passages.” (see blog on “problem passages”) I don’t have to reinterpret these passages in light of the position I hold. I simply let them say what they say. In Gen. 17:1,2 ; Ecc. 12:13,14 ; Phil. 1:6 & Phil. 2:12,13 ; Mt. 25 and other passages, the instruction of these passages is what? And what’s one basis of judgment in some of these passages? **The conditional aspect of many passages** – including Romans 8 and even the *Gospel passage* of I Cor. 15:1-4 [note the many “ifs” in these two passages] AND many other passages – **is clear**. And yet, by the grace of God, I can say “having been justified” ... and can affirm, “I am (presently) saved.” – I John 5:11-13.

By the way, I ALSO (in doing the “both/and” thing) affirm the Word’s doctrine RE: justification (by God through Christ Jesus) by grace through faith as revealed in Romans 3, 4, 5 (including vv.1 & 9!), 8 ; Gal. 1, 2 & 3:24 ; I Cor.6:11 ; Titus 3:5-7 (as long as the Greek NT is translated literally in vv. 5-7 - compare the ESV with the other literal versions) & other passages. Do you recall my handouts on justification, faith and works?

Another way to state what I believe Scripture explicitly teaches could be summed up in this way:

Positional righteousness in Christ: **Absolutely and “complete” therein – Col. 2:6-10!** ;  
Progressive righteousness through Christ: **Absolutely**, as long as we affirm the Source  
of our justification: CHRIST ALONE.

Okay, I better STOP here. It may sound like I’ve gotten too preachy. But, like you, Isaac, **it’s the WORD** and the unadulterated teaching of the Word **that I’m sincerely after** ... unto His glory and praise. You see, the *works in Christ* that the Bible teaches about bring glory to HIS name because He’s the One doing them. That’s what Eph. 2:10, Titus 2 & 3 (and other passages) also teach. Gal. 2:20 states that it is no longer the old Jon Swanson who is living but it’s Christ in me. (By the way, do a study on “the Spirit of Christ” and you’ll be impressed. Some passages include Rom. 8:9 ; Phil. 1:19 ; I Pet. 1:11. Point: The Spirit of Christ and the Holy Spirit are one in the same. Pretty cool as to how this issue relates to justification by God!

On to practical theology (recall the theological integration handout once again) ...

We don't want to grieve, quench, outrage or insult the Holy Spirit (the Spirit of Christ) in us. WHY?

Because it's through HIS ministry of grace that we produce God-honoring works – the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5), the fruits of Christ, as we abide in Him – John 15.

This is WHY I affirm your conviction that **covetousness** (OT – Ex. 20:17; NT – I Cor. 6:9,10,11-20 ; Eph. 5:1-7) / **lust** (OT – Prov. 6:25 [actually, chapters 5 – 7 are tied to this one verse] ; NT – Gal. 5:16,19-21 ; I John 2:15-17 ; etc.) **is a sin that needs to be taken seriously!** And my how we so thank God for I John 1:9! May we keep confessing when we should do so.

Okay, enough practical theology for now.

It's a blessing to note one MAJOR way we do indeed show God we really do love Him: John 14 – 16.

This loving obedience is NOT a legalistic, duty-driven-ness nor is it a human effort to attain His favor as we, by His grace, already have it in Christ Jesus. Instead, it's genuine LOVE for God that impels us!

I share all of the above for our growth unto greater Christ-likeness unto God's glory and praise.

**Thank You, dear Father, for Your indescribable/inexpressible gift! II Cor. 9:15**

Isaac, I confess that I've run out of time (at this juncture) to address the rest of your email.

Please give me another few days to pray about and study the good questions you raise below.

THANK YOU dear Brother for your ministry of sharpening me. God is praised.

By Scripture alone;

By Christ alone;

By Grace alone;

By a working, Christ-endowed Faith alone ...

unto His glory and praise,

Jon

PS **Isaac, in the spirit of Romans 14:1-13** (whereby we can agree to disagree on this matter if we need to – though this is an important doctrine), **let's continue in discipleship together!** Let's continue to fellowship as the early Church did: through prayer, through the affirming of the Word and through the breaking of bread (both the Lord's Supper and fellowship meals) together. Luv ya man!

Also three questions have arisen in my mind as to works justifying us before God (ones produced by the Holy Spirit) 1) if our works justify us before God and are produced by the Holy Spirit does that mean I wasn't justified fully when I put my faith in Christ and His redeeming work on the cross? Does His sacrifice then not fully pay for my sin and fully cover me since I would need Holy Spirit produced works as well?

Remember the dynamic of "life" (in **both** physical **and** spiritual domains): Birth must first happen – born of water (physical) and spirit (spiritual) – John 3. At this time of new spiritual birth, those who have truly been born anew are new creatures in Christ due to being justified freely by grace through faith by His blood. The forgiveness of sins is personally applied at the time of regeneration – new birth. This new **birth** brings new **life**. To answer one of your great questions above, His (Christ's) sacrifice fully pays for our sin and those who are truly born anew are righteous before God because they are now *in Christ*. But new birth in Christ is not

the *whole* story of life in Christ – and I’m not only talking about sanctification and glorification but justification, too, in light of the full Counsel of God’s authoritative Truth Foundation. In other words, to put it in another way: We don’t remain newborns. God has, in His justifying grace, more for us as we grow in Him unto further Christlikeness!

2) Also if the first was true how does this not belittle Christ's sacrifice to put away my sin once and for all? Is it because the works are produced by Him anyway so He still gets the glory?

Those of us who affirm the justification of (as opposed to what some suggest: the sanctification of) James 2:14-26 in no way belittle Christ’s sacrifice – sincerely, we in no way whatsoever take away from His atonement! His sacrifice for our sins – for all (Jn. 3:16 ; I Jn. 2:2) – forgives, COMPLETELY, sin. But justification before God is more than securing forgiveness. See Romans 4:25 which also includes [“both/and”] Christ’s resurrection – and that for our justification! The whole of justification is more broad , in light of God’s explicit revelation. Yes, the whole picture of biblical justification is even more than atonement and resurrection, for James 2 addresses a non-atonement, non-resurrection part of justification before God.

These justifying deeds before God are post-conversion acts which have nothing whatsoever to do with atonement for sin. These works, though, are tied to new life in God through Christ alone and, as Scripture outlines, are demonstrations of a genuine eternal-life faith. Again, it’s a “both/and” application of the justification passages which I’m after. I don’t want to say “no” to Scripture based upon a subordinate truth foundation (e.g., theological system or tradition) of man. I’m simply trying to affirm the full Counsel of the Word of God ... and that for good reason – for example, to deal with the imbalance of manifestations of *the cult of unbiblical grace*. (recall blogs on this contemporary concern)

3) Also if works produced by the Holy Spirit justify me. Wouldn't they have to come in order after regeneration? I am sincerely trying find where it says works justify us before God in scripture, and are more than just the evidences of saving faith. I have found many many verses saying that by grace through faith are we justified. I am not trying to belittle works and I know you are patient in explaining this from scripture. Maybe if you could list the specific places where this is addressed in scripture I could go there. I don't have the handout you gave a while back with me. I have been reading through the whole New Testament to find this. I see a mention in Hebrews 11:4 I think if this is what it is referring to.

I think we agree on this point: God’s works *in Christ* follow regeneration though (I also go on to believe) justification is more than simply forgiveness of sin.

Here's an illustration toward one of the things I’m getting at:

As 1) it would be inaccurate to say, “God’s foreknowledge is not present in His election” ;

As 2) no one separates the Godhead as He (God – singular) / They (plural in Triune Persons or expressions) are one (so, in application, the fruit of the Spirit – Gal. 5 – is the fruit of our abiding in the Vine – the Spirit of Christ – John 15 ... they are aspects of the same – God’s ongoing work of grace in our lives) ;

As in like manner to the above, we also don’t deny God’s justification by faith, a faith which lives itself out (expresses itself) through *life in Christ* as Mt. 12, Heb. 11 and James 2 teach. Like I state on one of our blogs, even the thief on the cross manifested his faith – his God-given change of heart – through words, for that’s how he demonstrated his faith in Christ alone.

I hope this illustration helps, though analogies are never pure.

Okay, enough for now. Again: Isaac, I really think we're both seeking to rightly divide the full Counsel of the Word of Truth. I believe we are on the same page on most of what we believe AND that the views we hold which are different from one another are clearly within the liberal parameter of God's Word – as long as we reject the potential heresies of the extremes (e.g., a work's salvation; cheap grace; etc.).

Joining with you to proclaim His glorious salvation to whosoever believes,

Brother Jon

I must confess I am reluctant to believe works justify me before God (ones produced by the Holy Spirit) but if I can see it in scripture I will believe. I want to believe everything His word says and I don't want to be deceived by any wind of doctrine. Forgive me if I am to blind and slow to see it.

Lords blessings, Isaac

“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.” John 10:16