

A CATHOLIC REBUTTAL OF THE



NeedGod.net Justification Doctrine

Background

The following exchange is a written conversation and friendly debate I recently had with NeedGod.net. The discussion focuses on the online arguments presented by Ryan, in which he seeks to defend a Protestant, specifically Evangelical/Baptist, understanding of justification as biblical, while presenting the Catholic doctrine of justification as unbiblical.

In my view, Ryan's interpretation of justification is problematic because he reads Paul, James, and the teachings of Jesus through a distinctly Evangelical/Baptist theological framework. As a result, he misinterprets key biblical passages concerning faith, works, grace, justification, and salvation. In addition, this same framework leads him to misrepresent Catholic teaching on justification, particularly by portraying it as a form of "*salvation by human effort*", rather than as salvation entirely rooted in the grace of Christ.

The debate examines these claims in detail and identifies why the NeedGod.net interpretation of justification is biblically inadequate. More importantly, it seeks to show why the Catholic understanding of justification is not only faithful to Scripture but also represents the fullness of biblical Christian salvation.

While the conversation addresses several of Ryan's online videos, it also addresses arguments made by another member of the NeedGod.net team who attempted to defend Ryan's interpretation. Taken as a whole, I believe the resulting written debate is very illuminating and valuable for both Catholics and (especially) Protestants who wish to understand biblical justification more clearly. – Paul Newcombe (Catholic apologist).

Debate

The following discussion and debate arose from my response to an online video by Ryan of NeedGod.net, in which he explains why he believes in the doctrine of eternal security, commonly known as “once saved, always saved.”

Please see Ryan’s video here: <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/18XSscRueB/>



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

WHY RYAN IS WRONG...

God sovereignly initiates salvation and offers grace to all, but He never overrides human choice.

Scripture repeatedly presents people (including believers) as responsible agents who can choose to accept, continue in, or reject God’s offer of life.

Salvation does not erase the human capacity to choose. Christians are repeatedly told to keep choosing faithfulness, to remain, to continue, and to be vigilant.

Likewise, salvation does not place the believer on *Holy-Spirit-Auto-Pilot* where faith AUTOMATICALLY manifests holiness quite apart from man’s free-will to choose, or not to choose.

Free will remains fully intact throughout the Christian life. This is the heart of any genuine relationship.

John 15:1-6 (Jesus’ vine-and-branches metaphor) – *“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; but if you do not remain, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned”* (v. 6).

The branches start “in” the vine (i.e., in Christ) but can choose not to remain.

Romans 11:20-22 – *“They were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but tremble... provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.”*

This warning is written to Gentile Christians who are already “standing by faith.”

1 Corinthians 10:12 – *“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!”*

Philippians 2:12 – *“Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.”*

The New Testament is filled with commands to believers to “keep on,” “remain,” “persevere,” and “make every effort.” These imperatives presuppose ongoing choice.

In **Luke 15:11-32**, Jesus Himself tells the story of the **PRODIGAL SON**. The parable directly pictures salvation as a relationship that can be entered, left, and re-entered by the free choice of the person involved. It stands as one of the clearest biblical rebuttals to the doctrine of “once saved, always saved” (OSAS).

The son begins inside the father’s house, fully a son, with full rights and inheritance (v. 12). This mirrors a person who has entered a genuine saving relationship with God—accepted, provided for, and called “son.”

When the son leaves, the father does not say, *“He’s still my son in the same way—he just wandered off.”* Instead, the father later declares, *“This son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found”* (v. 24, repeated in v. 32).

The son’s departure moves him from *“alive”* (saved) to *“dead”* (lost). His return restores him to *“alive again.”*

The entire drama turns on the son’s repeated exercise of free will. Salvation is not portrayed as a one-time irreversible event that locks the person in regardless of later choices; it is a living relationship sustained by ongoing choice.

This matches the warnings Jesus and the apostles give elsewhere:

“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers” (John 15:6).

“You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace” (Galatians 5:4).

“If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left” (Hebrews 10:26).



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Hey, I appreciate you laying all that out—there’s a lot there, and I can see you’re taking Scripture seriously, which I respect.

I think where we differ isn’t whether obedience and perseverance matter—we both agree they do. The question is what role they play in salvation.

I’d say the Bible presents two truths that we have to hold together:

First, salvation is a free gift, received by faith—not something we maintain by our works. Passages like Ephesians 2:8–9 and Romans 5:1 speak of salvation as something we already have through faith, not something we’re trying to keep by our effort.

Second, those who are truly saved will persevere and bear fruit—but that’s the evidence of genuine faith, not the condition that keeps them saved.

So when we come to warning passages (like John 15:6 or Hebrews 10:26), I wouldn’t see them as teaching that a truly saved person loses salvation, but as real warnings that expose false or superficial faith and call people to continue trusting Christ.

Even with the prodigal son in Luke 15:11–32, the focus of the parable isn’t about losing and regaining justification—it’s about repentance and the Father’s readiness to restore. The son is still called “son” even when he returns, and the emphasis is on the Father’s grace, not the son re-earning his place.

I think the key issue is this:

If salvation depends—even partly—on our ongoing faithfulness, then how would anyone ever have assurance? How would we know we’ve done enough or remained faithful enough?

The gospel gives a different foundation: our confidence is in Christ’s finished work, not in the consistency of our performance. And from that security, a real, living faith produces obedience over time.

So I wouldn't say obedience is optional—it's essential as fruit. But it's not what keeps us saved—Christ does.

Out of curiosity, would you say your assurance ultimately rests on what Jesus has done, or on how well you continue to live it out?



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

You just gave me the standard Protestant position...

I'm going to reply by giving you the comments I gave to other Protestants who were defending your criticism of Trent Horn today...

I'll just give you two from today's discussion in your comments section ... hang on... I'll paste them below...

This is so simple...

Ephesians 2 is referring to **UNAIDED HUMAN EFFORT** which has nothing to do with salvation.

Trent points out that the bible also speaks about **GRACE WORKS** which *define* a living saving faith.

For example:

Galatians 5:6 — "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only **faith working through love**."

Paul rejects justification by works of the Mosaic Law (or any purely human effort), but affirms that what "avails" or "counts" is **faith DEFINED by works of charity (love)**

Unlike Ryan (who lumps all "works" into a single category of "unaided human effort"), Paul identifies three different categories of "works":

❶ Works of the Jewish ceremonial law.

❷ Unaided human effort.

❸ Grace-works.

Grace-works are preceded by grace, energized by grace, and (in heaven) rewarded by grace. Without 100% grace, grace-works would not exist.

Grace-works are not a mere automatic bi-product of faith (placed neatly into a non-salvific category called "sanctification"). No, **grace-works DEFINE a living saving faith**.

Thus Paul excludes justification by "works of the law" (Mosaic observances or self-reliant human effort) (e.g., Romans 3:28; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 2:8–9)... and at the same time insists that we are justified by grace through a living faith that is defined by grace-works... This is the all important "**OBEDIENCE OF FAITH**":

Galatians 5:6 — "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only **faith working through love**."

Romans 1:5 — “through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **OBEDIENCE OF FAITH** for the sake of his name among all the nations,”

Romans 16:26 — “... but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the **OBEDIENCE OF FAITH**”

James, of course, agrees with Paul when he tells us that **faith must be DEFINED by grace-works**:

James 2:17 — “So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

James 2:20 — “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”

James 2:24 — “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

Of course Paul and James are in complete agreement and together are describing Catholic justification — **that we are justified 100% by grace through a living faith that works in love... and the grace-works that DEFINE a living saving faith are PRECEDED by grace, ENERGIZED by grace, and (in heaven) REWARDED by grace.**

Please stop the old Protestant misrepresentation that — “*Catholicism is salvation by unaided human effort*”.

This is an absurd position that does not actually reflect Catholic doctrine.

A must-have book which explains all of this in far greater detail is:

GRACE & JUSTIFICATION (by Steve Wood)

Steve Wood is a Catholic convert who was originally a conservative Presbyterian Calvinist Minister. His book is excellent.

You can get the Kindle version here:

<https://www.amazon.com/Grace-Justification-Evangelicals-Catholic-Beliefs-ebook/dp/B0753NVB2J>

What I gave you is the actual Catholic formula regarding justification... not the incorrect “*salvation by unaided human effort*” misrepresentation that Ryan always provides.

Catholicism has never taught “do-it-yourself” salvation. That is the common Protestant misreading of Catholic theology which continues to confuse good Protestant people regarding Catholic justification.

Ryan is just one more person who hasn't done his homework and is now misrepresenting Catholicism to his audience.

As I mentioned... Catholic justification is purely by God's grace, and includes a living faith that is defined by grace-works:

***We are justified 100% by grace through a living faith that works in love...
and the GRACE-WORKS that DEFINE a living saving faith
are PRECEDED by grace, ENERGIZED by grace,
and (in heaven) REWARDED by grace***

This, and nothing else, is Catholic justification.

GRACE-WORKS are absolutely not the same thing as **UNDAIDED HUMAN EFFORT**.

We agree that when Paul is describing salvation, he condemns:

(1) **WORKS OF THE JEWISH LAW**,

and

(2) **UNDAIDED HUMAN EFFORT**.

But what Ryan completely misses is that Paul promotes **GRACE-WORKS** as the defining feature of a living saving faith:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to WORK OUT YOUR SALVATION with fear and trembling,*

But isn't that "*salvation by unaided human effort*"??

No.

Why?

Because Paul is here referring to **GRACE-WORKS** which are purely the action of God. Just read the next verse...

(13) for IT IS GOD WHO WORKS IN YOU TO WILL AND TO WORK in order to fulfill his good pleasure.

Notice that even the DESIRE to perform grace-works ("to will") is God's work and is thus due to His grace.

As I mentioned... when speaking about justification, Ryan consistently lumps all "*works*" into a single category of "*unaided human effort*"... however Paul identifies **three different categories of "works"**:

① Works of the Jewish ceremonial law.

② Unaided human effort.

③ Grace-works.

Grace-works are preceded by grace, energized by grace, and (in heaven) rewarded by grace. Without 100% grace, grace-works would not exist.

Not seeing this... is why Ryan's depiction of justification is fatally flawed.

It's also why Ryan constantly misrepresents Catholic justification as "*not by grace*" or "*by unaided human effort*".

He ends up misleading his audience on both points.

The bible does not separate GRACE-WORKS and faith.

The bible depicts GRACE-WORKS as DEFINING a saving faith.

Galatians 5:6 — *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."*

Notice Gal 5:6 makes no assertion that GRACE WORKS are always and only a "fruit" of faith.

The plain reading of Gal 5:6 is Catholic justification: ...that we are justified by grace through a living faith that works (i.e. grace-works) through love.

Paul describes it as the **"OBEDIENCE OF FAITH"** (Romans 1:5 and 16:26).

And Paul clarifies his teaching further, when he says:

But BY THE GRACE OF GOD I am what I am, and His grace towards me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though IT WAS NOT I, BUT THE GRACE OF GOD that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).

Again, here, Paul nowhere asserts that GRACE WORKS are always and only a "fruit" of faith. That idea simply doesn't appear in the text.

James supports Paul by describing it as:

James 2:17 — *"So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead."*

James 2:20 — *"Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?"*

James 2:24 — *"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."*

I ask you to go beyond the superficial and misleading presentation of Catholic salvation which Ryan provides. Re-read Paul and notice how he applies GRACE WORKS.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Thanks for taking the time to lay that out—I actually agree with a lot of what you said, especially that salvation is 100% by grace and that true faith works through love.

I also wouldn't say Catholics believe in 'unaided human effort'—I understand you're talking about works that are empowered by grace.

I think the real difference between us is more specific than that:

You're saying grace-enabled works are part of what defines a faith that justifies.

I'd say those works are the necessary evidence of a faith that already justifies—but not part of the basis on which God declares someone righteous.

So when I read Romans 3–4, Paul doesn't just exclude "works of the law," but contrasts faith with works altogether when it comes to justification—"to the one who does not work but believes..." (Rom 4:5). That seems broader than just ceremonial or unaided works.

And with James 2, I completely agree faith without works is dead—but I'd understand James to be addressing the kind of faith that claims to save but doesn't actually exist in a living sense. So works vindicate or demonstrate faith—they don't complete it in the sense of contributing to justification before God.

So I think we both agree:

No grace → no salvation
No real faith → no works

But the question is:

Do those works play a role in why God justifies us, or are they the result of already being justified?

That's where I still see a real difference.

Out of curiosity—when you stand before God, would you say your right standing is based solely on Christ's righteousness credited to you, or on Christ's work plus the grace-enabled transformation in your life?"



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Hi Ryan, I really do appreciate your reply. Thank you for taking the time to chat about this with me.

Christian justification is easily the most important issue between us. It's worth discussing.

My reply will require a slightly longer explanation. Even then, I won't be able to do it justice.

Please bear with me.

Again, you provided the standard Protestant position.

From a Catholic perspective, your central mistake is that you create a false choice.

You said:

"Grace-enabled works are the necessary evidence of a faith that already justifies—but not part of the basis on which God declares someone righteous."

The problem is that Scripture does not limit grace-enabled works to *"evidence only."*

The New Testament teaches that **grace-enabled obedience is:**

- (1) caused by grace,
- (2) performed in Christ,
- (3) necessary for salvation,
- (4) part of living faith itself, and
- (5) rewarded by God because God crowns His own gifts.

Ryan, in order to not misrepresent Catholicism, it's critical that you understand that Catholics do not say grace-works are the independent *"basis"* of justification as though Christ does part and man adds part.

Rather, Catholicism says:

Christ alone is the meritorious foundation of justification, but the faith that justifies is a living faith formed by love, and that love is poured into us by the Holy Spirit.

That is exactly Paul's language:

ROMANS 5:5 *"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."*

And again:

GALATIANS 5:6 *"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love."*

Paul is speaking in a justification context. The whole argument of Galatians concerns how one stands rightly before God — not by circumcision, not by the ceremonial law, but by Christ.

And when Paul defines what *"avails"* in Christ, he does not say: *"faith alone, with works merely proving it later."*

He says the thing that avails in Christ is: *"faith working through love"*.

The faith that avails is not isolated from love. It is faith animated by love.

A depiction of *"works"* as only and always a bi-product (or fruit) of saving faith – is simply not found in the text of Galatians 5.

Surely *"works restricted to fruit"* would be explained here if that were, in fact, the glowing heart of the relationship between faith and works.

Instead, what we get is: *"faith working through love"* (Gal 5:6).

You often exhort your audience to rely upon the plain reading of scripture.

That is the plain reading of scripture.

YOU APPEALED TO ROMANS 4:5:

"To the one who does not work but believes..."

You assume *"work"* means every possible category of work, including works done in grace by the Holy Spirit.

But Paul does not say that.

In Romans 4, Paul is rejecting works that would make justification a matter of **debt, boasting, or human achievement**.

The immediate context says:

ROMANS 4:4 *"Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due."*

So the *"works"* Paul excludes are **works considered as wages owed to man**.

That cannot describe grace-enabled works, because grace-enabled works are not performed as independent human achievements. They are God's own work in us.

Paul also says:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.”*

Notice Paul’s balance:

“I worked”

“Yet not I”

“But the grace of God”

That is exactly the Catholic “*grace-works*” category that you keep erasing from Christian justification.

Paul has no problem speaking of real Christian work, real obedience, real cooperation — as long as it is understood as **energized purely by grace**, and not **unaided human effort**.

So **Romans 4:5 excludes works done as a claim of debt before God**. In contrast to your view, it does not exclude grace-empowered obedience as the defining feature of a living faith.

If your interpretation of Romans 4:5 was correct, Paul should never speak of eternal life being connected to *obedience, perseverance, and good works*.

But Paul does exactly that.

Romans 2 says:

ROMANS 2:6 *“He will render to every man according to his works: (7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”*

That is not *“works merely prove eternal life was already guaranteed.”*

Paul says God gives eternal life to those who persevere in well-doing.

Again:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Notice the condition:

“If...”

And notice the source:

“by the Spirit...”

That is a reference to grace-works.

Paul is not saying, *“If by unaided human effort you put sin to death, you will live.”*

He says:

“If, by the Holy Spirit, you put [sin] to death, you will live.”

That is Catholic justification theology in Pauline language.

Both Catholic and evangelical Protestantism agree that justification is by grace alone. Neither *“Works of [Jewish] Law”* or *“unaided human effort”* can contribute (in any way) to our justification.

As a Catholic, I agree with you that the main difference between us is not: *“grace through faith”* verses *“do-it-yourself”*.

The main difference is whether grace-works DEFINE a saving faith, or, are only and always a FRUIT of saving faith.

I’ve already given you a few biblical reasons why I think Romans 5 and Galatians 5 do not support the *“fruits only”* position.

I would also ask you to pray over 1 Corinthians 13:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 *“If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

In my opinion, that verse is devastating to your framework.

Paul imagines a person with *“all faith”* — even miracle-working faith — but without love.

What is that person?

Not justified.

Not saved.

Not merely *“less fruitful.”*

Paul says:

“I am nothing.”

Therefore, saving faith cannot be separated from love.

Love is not merely later evidence. Love is what makes faith living.

IN REGARD TO JAMES, you suggested:

“Works vindicate or demonstrate faith — they don’t complete it in the sense of contributing to justification before God.”

But James explicitly says more than *“demonstrate.”*

James writes:

JAMES 2:22 *“You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works.”*

Completed.

Not merely *displayed*.

Not merely *evidenced*.

Not merely *shown to other people*.

James then says:

JAMES 2:24 “*You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*”

You might say: “*James means vindicated before men,*” but the text does not say that.

James uses Abraham offering Isaac as the example.

Did Abraham attempt to sacrifice Isaac “*before men*”?

No.

Abraham told the men to wait at the foot of the mountain.

He and Isaac went on alone.

This sacrifice was before God alone.

It was thus not a “*vindication before men*”.

It was simply Abraham obeying God.

As Paul tells us: what matters is the “*obedience of faith*” (Rom 1:5; 16:26).

Then James says:

JAMES 2:23 “*The scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’”*

I’ve seen you explain this as the first moment Abraham had genuine faith in God. This was the moment of his justification. He expressed saving faith in God and was justified by faith alone. No works anywhere to be seen.

From a Catholic perspective, **your interpretation of James’ reference to Genesis 15:6 destroys the context of Abraham’s life in Genesis.**

Why?

Because it wrenches a text out of its intended context in the most profound manner.

To see the historical context, we need to first go back and read through Genesis 12, 13 and 14. When you do this, it immediately becomes apparent that your interpretation of Genesis 15:6 is completely and utterly impossible.

In Genesis 12:1 Yahweh commands a seventy-five-year-old Abraham to leave everything he knows – his country, his relatives, his financial security and to go to an unidentified foreign land that God will show to him in the future.

I would suggest that very few people have received a direct call from God to do something as all-encompassing as this call received by Abraham. Amazingly, Abraham responds – he leaves his entire life behind and in his senior years embarks on a demanding journey into unfamiliar territory in order to follow God.

Hebrews 11 clearly identifies Abraham's FAITH to be the basis of his obedience:

HEBREWS 11:8 *It was BY FAITH that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going.*

Is Genesis 15:6 really the first time that Abraham exhibits faith in God? Not according to the book of Hebrews which depicts God as his saviour in Genesis 12.

In Genesis 12 and 13 Abraham is constantly building altars, offering sacrifice, invoking the name of Yahweh in prayer and public worship – showing forth his faith in God.

However, according to the standard Protestant interpretation, Abraham doesn't have any faith yet.

Why?

Because we haven't reached Genesis 15:6 where he purportedly receives God as his personal Lord and Saviour for the first time and "*gets saved*" by faith alone.

Abraham goes on to rescue his nephew Lot, and in a battle (which must have received divine assistance) he overcomes overwhelming opposition and conquers five pagan kings (Gen 14). He then submits to the King of Salem, the priest-King Melchisedek and swears an oath to God, and pays tithes to God's priest-King (Gen 14:20-24). He is then blessed by Melchisedek – "*blessed be Abraham by god most high*" (Gen 14:20).

Again all of this occurs before Genesis 15:6. All before Abraham has any genuine faith??

Really??

Ryan, Genesis 15:6 is not Abraham's "*altar call*". Contextually, it's referring to Abraham's earlier faith that was brought to fulfillment through later obedience.

This completely destroys the idea that justification is a one-time legal declaration in which later obedience is only external evidence.

James teaches that faith itself is perfected, completed, and fulfilled through obedience. Again, Abraham's life is the example.

So what category of "*works*" is James focused upon here?

Grace-works.

Grace-enabled obedience defines and completes living faith.

TO CONTINUE WITH JAMES

You recommend that James is talking about a faith that "*doesn't actually exist in a living sense.*"

That is partly true — but you go too far.

James does not say the person has no faith whatsoever.

He says:

JAMES 2:17 *“Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”*

Dead faith is not non-existent faith.

A dead body exists. It is just lifeless.

James even says:

James 2:19 *“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.”*

The demons have real belief. But it is not saving belief because it lacks obedient love.

So James is not contrasting “*real faith*” with “*no faith*.”

He is contrasting:

living faith

versus

dead faith

And the difference is not “*faith alone that later produces evidence*.”

The difference is whether faith is alive through obedient love.

This is the Catholic position.

You often quote:

EPHESIANS 2:8 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith... (9) not because of works, lest any man should boast.”*

Catholics fully agree.

Initial salvation is by grace. It is not earned. It is not unaided human effort. It is not a wage.

But Paul immediately adds:

EPHESIANS 2: 10 *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

So the full Pauline picture is:

not saved by works as human boasting.

but saved by grace into a life of God-prepared works.

These good works are not optional decorations. They are the path God prepared for the justified person to walk in.

Your presentations seek to separate justification from grace-enabled obedience too sharply.

Paul does not.

Paul says:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

If you were right, Paul should say:

“Do not work in any sense connected with salvation, because salvation has already been fully settled.”

But Paul says:

“Work out your salvation.”

Then Paul immediately explains the source:

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 *“For God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”*

That is the Catholic doctrine beautifully summarized.

We work because God works in us.

Our cooperation does not compete with grace. It is caused by grace.

The Protestant mistake is often to imagine that if man truly cooperates, grace is diminished.

Paul says the opposite:

The reason you can work is because God is working in you.

You ask:

“When you stand before God, would you say your right standing is based solely on Christ’s righteousness credited to you, or on Christ’s work plus the grace-enabled transformation in your life?”

A Catholic should not accept that framing.

The answer is:

My right standing before God is based entirely on the grace and merits of Jesus Christ. But Christ does not merely cover me externally while leaving me inwardly unchanged. He truly justifies me by forgiving my sins and pouring His righteousness into me through the Holy Spirit.

In other words:

Catholics do not believe in:

Christ’s work plus my independent contribution.

Catholics believe in:

Christ's work applied to me so powerfully that I am forgiven, renewed, transformed, and enabled to love God by grace.

The Protestant error is to reduce justification to an external legal credit only.

But Scripture says God actually makes us righteous.

TITUS 3:5 *"He saved us... by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit."*

And:

1 CORINTHIANS *"You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified."*

And:

ROMANS 5:5 *"God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit."*

Biblical justification is not a legal fiction. God does not merely call dung "snow-covered" and pretend not to smell it.

He actually *cleanses, renews, and transforms*.

God DOES what He declares.

When God DECLARES us RIGHTEOUS... He MAKES us RIGHTEOUS.

God's WORD never returns to Him void.

This is a rather large subject. I hope this small contribution is helpful.

Currently, in regard to justification, I believe you are misreading both Scripture and Catholic theology.

As a result, you are misrepresenting both to your audience.

I would love to see you make some small but profound changes to your reading of Scripture... and at the very least, stop presenting Catholicism as "*works righteousness*" where Jesus work isn't enough and Catholic are taught that their salvation is dependent upon adding unaided human effort to Christ's completed work upon the cross.

None of that is Catholic doctrine.

It's all about where GRACE-WORKS fit into salvation.

A defining feature of saving faith?

Or only and always a fruit of saving faith?

God bless.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

This video will help: <https://youtu.be/aZLcMNEcgKM> **WHY MOST PEOPLE WON'T MAKE IT TO HEAVEN.**

This video will help: <https://youtu.be/vsxil2-xqbl> **WHAT DOES "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD" MEAN?**

This video will help: <https://youtu.be/SsL0WICXg9k> **DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACH GOOD WORKS?**



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, thank you for sending the videos.

I appreciate the effort, but I need to say respectfully that these videos do not directly answer the specific argument I raised. They mostly repeat the same assumption I challenged: namely, that every type of "work" mentioned in Scripture must mean unaided human effort that competes with Christ.

That is the central problem.

So I'd really encourage you to spend a solid ten minutes carefully reading what I already said above. I think you will notice that I've gone a bit deeper than the video replies you provided. Because the issue of salvation is so critical, I'm being careful to reply to the exact arguments you're making. I'm doing this out of respect for you, and because I believe that God appreciates a legitimate discussion between Christian people who differ in their beliefs.

Ryan, Catholic theology does not teach that unaided human effort gets us to heaven. It does not teach that we add our independent works to Christ's work, as though Jesus did 90% and we finish the last 10%.

The Catholic position is that Jesus Christ is the entire source of salvation. But His grace does not remain outside us as a mere legal covering. His grace forgives, renews, transforms, and enables us to live by faith working through love.

That is why Paul says:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *"I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me."*

That is the category your videos keep missing.

Paul says:

"I worked."

But then he immediately adds:

"Yet not I, but the grace of God."

So the biblical category is not merely:

faith versus works.

The biblical categories are:

grace versus unaided human effort,
grace versus works done as debt or boasting,
grace versus works of the Mosaic law,
and grace producing Spirit-enabled obedience.

Your videos keep treating all “works” as if they are unaided human effort. That is not what Catholicism teaches, and it is not how the New Testament speaks.

REPLY TO VIDEO 1: “WHY MOST PEOPLE WON’T MAKE IT TO HEAVEN”

In this video you say:

“Repent to God? Getting baptized? You can say sorry to God as much as you want but he’s still going to have to punish you for the sins you’ve done. Baptism is a good deed but it doesn’t wash away our sin.”

This is directly contrary to Scripture.

The Bible explicitly connects baptism with the forgiveness of sins.

Peter says:

ACTS 2:38 *“Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF YOUR SINS, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”*

Ananias says to Paul:

ACTS 22:16 *“Rise and be baptized, and WASH AWAY YOUR SINS, calling on his name.”*

Peter says:

1 PETER 3:21 *“Baptism... NOW SAVES YOU.”*

Paul says:

TITUS 3:5 *“HE SAVED US... by the WASHING OF REGENERATION and renewal in the Holy Spirit.”*

So when you say, *“Baptism doesn’t wash away our sin,”* you are not merely disagreeing with Catholicism. You are contradicting the plain language of the New Testament.

Now, to be clear, Catholics do not believe baptism saves because water has magical power or because man performs a good deed that earns salvation. Baptism saves because CHRIST ACTS THROUGH BAPTISM.

The power is not in human effort.

The power is in Christ.

That is why Paul says:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 *“You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.”*

Baptism is not a human work competing with Jesus. Baptism is one of the ways Jesus applies His saving work to us.

You also say:

“If somebody trusts in their own actions to get them into heaven, then Jesus doesn’t die for their sin.”

But that is not the Catholic position.

Catholics do not trust in their own actions as independent achievements. Catholics trust in Christ, who forgives us, incorporates us into Himself, pours charity into our hearts, and enables us to obey by grace.

The real issue is this:

Is salvation merely Christ legally covering us from the outside?

Or does Christ actually transform us by grace?

The Bible teaches transformation.

ROMANS 5:5 *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.”*

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Notice that: *“by the Spirit.”*

That is not unaided human effort. That is grace-enabled obedience.

REPLY TO VIDEO 2: WHAT DOES “FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD” MEAN?

In this video you say:

“James is not saying that obedience or good works saves you, but that the good works will be a fruit if you are truly saved.”

That is the Protestant *“evidence only”* explanation. But it does not fit the full text of James.

James does not merely say works demonstrate faith.

He says:

JAMES 2:22 *“Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works.”*

That word matters.

James says faith is COMPLETED by works.

He does not merely say faith is *“shown”* by works.

Then James says:

JAMES 2:24 *“You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

You compare faith and works to a vegetarian whose eating habits prove whether he is really a vegetarian. But James is saying more than that.

James is not merely saying:

“Abraham’s works proved to others that he already had faith.”

James says:

“Abraham’s faith was COMPLETED by his works.”

And:

“Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone.”

Also, Abraham offering Isaac was not merely a public demonstration to other people. It was an act of obedience before God.

So the “vegetarian” analogy is too shallow. It reduces James to “works are only and always external evidence”, when James is actually speaking about faith being brought to completion through obedience.

Catholics agree that works are the fruit of faith. But Scripture says more than that. Works are not merely fruit hanging from a tree. They are part of what makes faith living rather than dead.

A dead faith is not saving faith.

That is exactly the Catholic point.

REPLY TO VIDEO 3: “DOES THE CATHOLIC CHURCH TEACH GOOD WORKS?”

In this video you quote the Catechism:

“All men may attain salvation through faith, Baptism and the observance of the Commandments.”

Then you say:

“If they only listed faith there I would heartily agree with them, but they added two extra things there — baptism and the observance of the commandments.”

But that objection is not really against Catholicism. It is against the Bible.

Jesus Himself says:

MATTHEW 19:17 *“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”*

Jesus also says:

MATTHEW 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father.”*

Paul says:

ROMANS 2:6–7 *“He will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.”*

Paul also says:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

So when the Catholic Church says salvation involves faith, baptism, and obedience to God’s commandments, it is not inventing a new gospel. It is summarizing the New Testament.

The key issue is whether these things are done APART FROM GRACE or BY GRACE.

Catholicism says they are by grace.

You define a good work as:

“Any physical action that you’re doing for God.”

But that definition is too broad and biblically imprecise.

The New Testament does not treat every action in the same way.

For example, Paul condemns works done as **boasting** or **debt**:

ROMANS 4:4 *“Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due.”*

But Paul praises works done by grace:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God.”*

Paul commands Spirit-enabled obedience:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

Paul commands Christians to work out their salvation:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12–13 *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you.”*

So your argument only works if you flatten all works into one category (unaided human effort).

But Paul does not do that.

YOUR USE OF EPHESIANS 2:8–9 LEAVES OUT EPHESIANS 2:10

You quote:

EPHESIANS 2:8 *“By grace you have been saved through faith... (9) not of works, lest anyone should boast.”*

Catholics fully agree.

We are not saved by **works of boasting**. We are not saved by **unaided human effort**. We are not saved because God owes us heaven **as a wage**.

But Paul immediately says:

EPHESIANS 2:10 *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

So Paul’s full teaching is:

not saved by works as human boasting,
but saved by grace into a life of God-prepared good works.

Those good works do not compete with grace. They are the result of grace. But they are not optional. God prepared them so that we should walk in them.

That is Catholic theology.

YOUR USE OF ROMANS 11:6 HAS THE SAME PROBLEM

You quote:

ROMANS 11:6 *“If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”*

Again, Catholics agree.

But Paul is excluding works as a competing basis against grace.

He is not excluding grace-enabled obedience.

If Romans 11:6 meant that every human action is excluded from salvation in every possible sense, then faith itself would be excluded, because believing is something the person actually does.

Repentance would be excluded.

Confession of Christ would be excluded.

Perseverance would be excluded.

Calling on the name of the Lord would be excluded.

But the Bible commands all of these.

So Romans 11:6 cannot mean:

Human beings do nothing whatsoever in salvation.

It means:

Salvation is not earned by works that place God in our debt.

That is exactly what Catholics believe.

“JESUS DID 100%” IS TRUE — BUT YOUR CONCLUSION DOES NOT FOLLOW

You say:

“Jesus did 100% of the work needed to get you into heaven. If Jesus did 100%, how much work is left over for you to still have to do? Zero.”

This sounds pious, but it creates a false conclusion.

Yes, Jesus did 100% of the saving work that only He can do.

Only Jesus atones for sin.

Only Jesus conquers death.

Only Jesus opens heaven.

Only Jesus gives grace.

Only Jesus merits our salvation.

But that does not mean the human person is passive, disobedient, unbaptized, unrepentant, loveless, and still saved.

Jesus did 100% of the saving work, but He still commands us to respond.

He says:

MARK 1:15 *“Repent.”*

He says:

MARK 16:16 *“He who believes and is baptized will be saved.”*

He says:

JOHN 14:15 *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

He says:

MATTHEW 24:13 *“He who endures to the end will be saved.”*

None of these responses compete with Jesus.

They are how we receive, live in, and remain in His grace.

A doctor may do 100% of the surgery that saves your life. But if he says, *“Take this medicine, stop drinking poison, and come back for treatment,”* your obedience does not mean you saved yourself.

It means you cooperated with the healing he provided.

That is the Catholic view of grace. Even the desire to cooperate (and the cooperation itself) is purely the result of grace. This is not crass unaided human work, but the life of grace which true Christians enjoy.

YOUR “FREE GIFT” ARGUMENT MISUNDERSTANDS GIFTS

You say:

“A free gift is not something you got to work for. You just accept by trusting in what he’s done.”

Catholics agree that salvation is a gift.

But a gift can still require a living response.

The Promised Land was a gift, but Israel still had to enter it.

Naaman’s healing was a gift, but he still had to wash in the Jordan.

The prodigal son’s restoration was a gift, but he still had to return to the father.

Grace is not earned. But grace can be resisted, received, lived in, or abandoned.

Paul says:

GALATIANS 5:4 *“You have fallen away from grace.”*

That statement makes no sense if nothing can make a person lose the state of grace.

YOUR CLAIM THAT “NOTHING CAN MAKE YOU LOSE THAT STATE OF GRACE” IS NOT BIBLICAL

You say:

“Nothing can make you lose that state of grace, if your faith is in the Savior.”

But Scripture repeatedly warns Christians that they can fall away.

Paul says:

GALATIANS 5:4 *“You have fallen away from grace.”*

Jesus says:

JOHN 15:2 *“Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away.”*

Jesus also says:

JOHN 15:6 *“If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers.”*

Paul warns:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If you live according to the flesh you will die.”*

Paul warns Christians:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9 *“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived.”*

These warnings are addressed to believers. They are not imaginary warnings. They are not theatrical props.

They mean what they say.

A Christian must remain in Christ.

That does not mean salvation is by unaided human effort. It means salvation is by abiding in grace.

YOUR USE OF ROMANS 4:5 STILL ASSUMES WHAT IT NEEDS TO PROVE

You quote:

ROMANS 4:5 *"To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly..."*

Then you say:

"It doesn't say to the one who works and believes."

But again, Paul has already defined the kind of "work" he is excluding:

ROMANS 4:4 *"Now to one who works, his wages are not reckoned as a gift but as his due."*

So Romans 4 is excluding works treated as wages or debt.

Catholics agree with that.

But Romans 4:5 does not say:

"To the one who does not perform any grace-enabled obedience whatsoever."

It does not say:

"To the one whose faith is not formed by love."

It does not say:

"To the one who does not repent, is not baptized, does not obey, does not persevere, and does not work by grace."

You are inserting that meaning into the text.

Paul is not condemning grace-enabled obedience in Romans 4. He is condemning works that would make justification something owed to man.

That is why your interpretation creates contradictions with Paul's other statements:

GALATIANS 5:6 *"Faith working through love."*

ROMANS 8:13 *"If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."*

ROMANS 2:6 *"God will render to every man according to his works."*

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 *"Work out your own salvation... for God is at work in you."*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *"I worked... yet not I, but the grace of God."*

A correct interpretation of Romans 4 must harmonise with these passages, not erase them.

YOUR CLAIM THAT CATHOLICS PUT "SOME FAITH IN JESUS AND SOME FAITH IN THEIR OWN ACTIONS" IS FALSE

You say:

"If someone does think it's faith and works that save, they don't make it into heaven, because they've now put some faith in Jesus and some faith in their own actions."

This misrepresents Catholic theology.

Catholics do not put faith in their own actions.

Catholics put faith in Christ, whose grace makes our actions pleasing to God.

There is a massive difference.

If I say:

"By God's grace I repented,"

I am not trusting in myself.

If I say:

"By God's grace I was baptized into Christ,"

I am not trusting in myself.

If I say:

"By God's grace I obeyed Christ,"

I am not trusting in myself.

If I say:

"By God's grace I persevered,"

I am not trusting in myself.

I am trusting in God's grace at work in me.

As Paul says:

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 *"It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

That is not self-salvation. That is grace.

THE REAL ISSUE: YOU ARE USING PROTESTANT CATEGORIES AND FORCING THEM ONTO SCRIPTURE

Your videos assume this framework:

- If works are necessary, then salvation is not by grace.
- If obedience is required, then Christ did not do enough.
- If baptism saves, then baptism must be a human work.
- If commandments matter, then we are trusting in ourselves.
- If James says works justify, then he must only mean works “*show*” faith.

But those are Protestant assumptions. They are not the natural meaning of the biblical texts.

The biblical framework is different:

- Christ saves by grace.
- Grace creates living faith.
- Living faith works through love.
- Love is poured into us by the Holy Spirit.
- By the Spirit we obey.
- By grace we persevere.
- Without love, faith is dead.
- Dead faith does not save.

That is why Paul can say both:

EPHESIANS 2:9 *“Not of works, lest anyone should boast”*

and:

ROMANS 2:7 *“God will give eternal life to those who persevere in well-doing”*

There is no contradiction once we distinguish between WORKS OF BOASTING and WORKS OF GRACE.

THE QUESTIONS I WOULD LIKE YOU TO ANSWER DIRECTLY

Ryan, instead of sending more general videos, could you please answer these specific questions in writing?

(1) When Paul says, *“I worked... yet not I, but the grace of God,”* do you agree that Paul identifies a category of grace-enabled works?

- (2) Does Romans 4:5 explicitly say Paul is excluding grace-enabled works, or are you assuming that?
- (3) If “works” in Romans 4:5 means every human action of every kind, why does Paul say, “*If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live*”?
- (4) Why does Paul say “*faith working through love*” is what avails in Christ, rather than “*faith alone*”?
- (5) If faith without love still justifies, why does Paul say, “*If I have all faith... but have not love, I am nothing*”?
- (6) Why does James say faith is “*completed by works*” if works merely demonstrate faith externally?
- (7) Why does James say “*a man is justified by works and not by faith alone*” if the doctrine of faith alone is true?
- (8) Why does Peter say “*baptism now saves you*” if baptism does not save in any sense?
- (9) Why does Acts 2:38 say baptism is “*for the forgiveness of sins*” if baptism does not wash away sin?
- (10) Why does Jesus say, “*If you would enter life, keep the commandments,*” if commandment-keeping has no role whatsoever in salvation?

Those are the questions my original argument raised. Your videos do not answer them.

OUR DIFFERENCES

So here is the core difference.

You are arguing:

Jesus did everything, therefore nothing we do can be involved in salvation in any real sense.

Catholicism says:

Jesus did everything, therefore everything saving in us is His grace at work.

You are arguing:

If works are necessary, then we are trusting in ourselves.

Catholicism says:

If grace-enabled obedience is necessary, then we are trusting in Christ who works in us.

You are arguing:

Faith saves, and works merely prove faith.

Catholicism says:

Living faith saves, and living faith is faith working through love.

That is why Catholicism is not salvation by unaided human effort.

It is salvation by grace — grace that forgives, heals, transforms, and brings faith to life through love.

So I am more than happy to continue the discussion, but I would ask that you reply directly to the actual biblical points above rather than sending general videos. The question is not whether works of boasting save. They do not. The question is whether Scripture teaches that grace-enabled obedience belongs to living saving faith.

And the New Testament answer is yes.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Let's slow down a bit, you are sending me a 5000 word essay for me to read. Are you able to address one point at a time.



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, I understand. We can definitely slow down and take one point at a time.

Just to clarify, I wrote a longer reply because I was trying to answer all the points you raised — both in your written reply and in the videos you sent. I also consider biblical justification to be a very serious issue because it touches directly on human salvation.

I'm an extremely busy guy too, but out of respect for you, and out of respect for the importance of the subject, I tried to give more than a quick soundbite.

That said, I'm not sure whether you've had a chance to carefully read what I wrote. Could I encourage you to take 15 minutes, read through it properly, and then choose the single most important point you think we should discuss first?

Then we can focus on that one issue and hopefully have a more fruitful conversation.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Yeah ok thanks for your understanding, I appreciate that you want to go point by point — that's completely fair.

I did read what you wrote, and I think the key issue really comes down to this:

Does God justify us because of Christ alone received by faith alone, or does our obedience become part of the basis on which we remain justified?

Because while Catholics say the obedience is "grace-enabled," the Reformers would still say that once obedience becomes necessary for justification itself, justification is no longer resting on Christ's finished work alone.

For example, Romans 4:5 says God "*justifies the ungodly*" through faith apart from works, and Romans 11:6 says if it is by grace, it can no longer be based on works.

So my question would simply be:

Where does Scripture ever say that our Spirit-enabled obedience is part of the ground or instrument of justification, rather than the fruit and evidence of true faith?



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, thanks for narrowing the discussion.

I agree this is the key question:

“Does God justify us because of Christ alone, received through faith, or does our obedience become part of the basis on which we remain justified?”

My answer is:

God justifies us because of Christ alone.

Our obedience is not an independent basis competing with Christ.

But Scripture does teach that the faith through which we are justified is a living faith working through love, and that Spirit-enabled obedience is necessary for remaining in Christ.

So I think your question contains an assumption I do not accept:

“If obedience is necessary, then it must become a rival basis to Christ.”

That does not follow biblically.

The Bible repeatedly teaches that something can be necessary without being the meritorious ground of salvation.

Faith is necessary, but faith does not replace Christ.

Repentance is necessary, but repentance does not replace Christ.

Baptism is necessary, but baptism does not replace Christ.

Obedience is necessary, but obedience does not replace Christ.

All of these are saving only because they are caused by grace and united to Christ.

CATHOLICS DO NOT SAY OBEDIENCE IS THE “GROUND” OF JUSTIFICATION

First, I want to be clear.

If by “ground” you mean the meritorious cause of justification, then no — our obedience is not the ground of justification.

Christ alone is the ground.

Christ alone merits salvation.

Christ alone atones for sin.

Christ alone reconciles us to the Father.

So I am not arguing:

Christ plus my independent obedience equals justification.

I am arguing:

Christ justifies us by grace, and the faith that receives this grace is not dead faith, but living faith formed by love.

Paul says:

GALATIANS 5:6 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.”*

That is a key text.

Paul does not say:

faith alone, with love merely proving it later.

He says:

faith working through love.

That is the faith that avails in Christ.

ROMANS 4:5 EXCLUDES WORKS AS DEBT, NOT GRACE-ENABLED OBEDIENCE

You cite Romans 4:5:

“To the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly...”

I agree with the verse completely.

But the question is: what kind of “work” is Paul excluding?

The immediate context tells us:

ROMANS 4:4 *“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”*

So Paul is excluding works understood as **wages, debt, or boasting**.

That is not what Catholics mean by **Spirit-enabled obedience**.

Spirit-enabled obedience does not put God in our debt.

It is God’s own grace working in us.

Paul himself gives this category:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.”*

That is the distinction I am asking you to recognise.

Paul can say:

"I worked."

And:

"It was not I, but grace."

So Romans 4:5 does not exclude every possible kind of work in every possible sense. It excludes works as wage-earning, debt-creating, boast-producing human achievement.

ROMANS 11:6 EXCLUDES WORKS OPPOSED TO GRACE, NOT WORKS PRODUCED BY GRACE

You also cite **Romans 11:6**:

"If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace."

Again, I agree.

But Paul is contrasting grace with **works that compete with grace**.

He is not denying **works produced by grace**.

Otherwise, Paul would contradict himself when he says:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-13 *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

That is not **works versus grace**.

That is **works because of grace**.

Paul says we work precisely because God is working in us.

So Romans 11:6 cannot mean:

Grace excludes all human cooperation.

It means:

Grace excludes works as an independent basis of boasting.

SCRIPTURE SAYS FINAL SALVATION IS CONNECTED TO SPIRIT-ENABLED OBEDIENCE

You ask where Scripture says Spirit-enabled obedience is more than fruit and evidence.

Romans 8:13 is one answer:

"If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Notice three things.

First, Paul is speaking **to Christians**.

Second, the obedience is explicitly **Spirit-enabled**:

“by the Spirit.”

Third, the result is **life**:

“you will live.”

Paul does not say:

“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will merely prove that you were already saved.”

He says:

“you will live.”

That is **grace-enabled obedience** connected to life.

Not **unaided human effort**.

Not **works as boasting**.

But real **Spirit-enabled obedience**.

ANOTHER ANSWER IS: Romans 2, which says:

ROMANS 2:6–7 *“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.”*

This is not Catholicism talking. This is Paul.

Paul says eternal life is given to those who persevere in well-doing.

That does not mean they earned eternal life apart from Christ.

It means final salvation is not separated from persevering obedience.

So again, the biblical position is not:

works as independent merit.

The biblical position is:

grace producing persevering obedience unto eternal life.

ANOTHER ANSWER IS: James 2, which says:

JAMES 2:22 *“Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.”*

James does not merely say works **display** faith.

He says works **complete** faith.

Then he says:

JAMES 2:24 *"You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone."*

Now, I know the Protestant response is usually:

James means justified before men.

But the text does not say that.

James is discussing Abraham's obedience before God. Abraham offered Isaac to God alone (not before men). So, "*before men*" is nowhere in the root context.

James says that Abraham's obedient sacrifice of Isaac completed his faith and fulfilled the earlier statement that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

We've already discussed the biblical confirmation that Genesis 15:6 is not the first time Abraham had faith in God, and is not the moment of his initial justification (I directed you to read Abraham's faith-filled life in Genesis 12, 13 and 14 to confirm this). Therefore, this cannot be used to support a one-time "*faith alone*" moment.

James (in quoting Genesis 15:6) is contextually referring to Abraham's faith – a faith which Hebrews 11:8 tells us he had from Genesis 12 onward.

Thus, James is using Abraham's life as an example of **faith which is perfected, completed, and fulfilled through obedience**.

Moreover, where does James tell us that works are merely external evidence?

He doesn't. Not anywhere.

Again, James is using the life of Abraham to confirm that **living faith is defined by grace-enabled obedience**.

This is the Catholic position.

PAUL SAYS FAITH WITHOUT LOVE IS NOTHING

Your view says faith alone justifies, and love/obedience follows as evidence.

But Paul says:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 *"If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."*

This is crucial.

Paul imagines someone with "*all faith*" — even miracle-working faith — but without love.

What is that person?

Paul says:

"I am nothing."

So **faith without love does not justify**.

That means **love is not merely optional evidence** after justification. **Saving faith must be living faith, animated by charity.**

That is exactly why Paul says:

GALATIANS 5:6 *“faith working through love.”*

JESUS HIMSELF CONNECTS ENTERING LIFE WITH OBEDIENCE

Jesus says:

MATTHEW 19:17 *“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”*

He also says:

MATTHEW 7:21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father.”*

That is not salvation by unaided human effort.

But it is also not *“obedience is merely evidence and has no real connection to entering life.”*

Jesus connects entering the kingdom with **doing the will of the Father**.

So the Catholic position is simply taking Jesus seriously.

SCRIPTURE TEACHES THAT WE MUST REMAIN IN CHRIST

Jesus says:

JOHN 15:2 *“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.”*

And:

JOHN 15:6 *“If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.”*

Notice, these are branches *“in me.”*

Jesus is not talking about atheists pretending to be Christians. He is warning His own disciples that **they must abide in Him**.

Fruit is not merely decorative evidence. **Fruitlessness leads to being cut off**.

That is why Catholic theology says we must remain in grace.

Again, not because our obedience is a rival saviour, but because Christ Himself says we must abide in Him.

YOUR “FRUIT AND EVIDENCE ONLY” CATEGORY IS TOO NARROW

I agree that good works are fruit.

I agree that good works are evidence.

But Scripture says they are **more than only evidence**.

They are also:

- the working of faith through love — **Galatians 5:6**
- the completion of faith — **James 2:22**
- the condition of living faith, if done by the Spirit — **Romans 8:13**
- the path to eternal life, by perseverance in well-doing — **Romans 2:6–7**
- necessary for entering life — **Matthew 19:17**
- necessary for abiding fruitfully in Christ — **John 15:2–6**

Catholicism doesn't deny that works are evidence.

Catholicism denies that Scripture reduces them to evidence only.

THE KEY DISTINCTION: “BASIS” VERSUS “LIVING PARTICIPATION”

So to answer your question directly:

Where does Scripture say Spirit-enabled obedience is part of the ground or instrument of justification?

I would answer this way:

If by “*ground*” you mean the meritorious basis, then it does not. Christ alone is the ground.

If by “*instrument*” you mean the living faith by which we receive justification, then Scripture defines that faith as faith working through love.

So the Catholic position is not:

obedience is the ground of justification.

The Catholic position is:

living faith is the instrument of justification, and living faith is never faith alone, but faith working through love.

That is why James can say:

“justified by works and not by faith alone.”

And Paul can say:

“faith working through love.”

And Jesus can say:

“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”

There is no contradiction once we stop treating **grace-enabled obedience** as if it were **unaided human effort**.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Thanks for the thoughtful response. I agree that true faith produces obedience, love, and perseverance through God's grace. But I still think the key issue is whether obedience plays any role in justification itself, or whether it is the result of already being justified by faith alone.

From the bible perspective, passages like Romans 4:5 and Romans 11:6 clearly contrast faith and works in justification, without distinguishing between *“grace-enabled”* works and other works. Paul says justification is for the one who *“does not work but believes.”*

I also agree that faith works through love (Galatians 5:6), but I see love and obedience as the fruit of saving faith, not part of the instrument of justification. Likewise, James 2 shows that genuine faith is demonstrated and completed in action, not that works become part of the basis for being declared righteous before God.

So while obedience is necessary as evidence of true faith and the result of the Spirit's work, I still don't see Scripture teaching that our obedience contributes to obtaining or maintaining justification. Rather, we are justified by faith apart from works, and that justification then produces a transformed life.



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, thank you for the thoughtful tone. I appreciate it.

But I need to point out something important: your latest reply mostly restates your theological conclusions rather than demonstrating them from the biblical texts we're discussing.

You say things like:

“I still think...”

“I see love and obedience as the fruit...”

“I don't see Scripture teaching...”

But the issue is not simply what you or I “see.” The issue is whether the text itself supports your interpretations.

I have tried to show why the relevant passages support the Catholic view by looking at the words, the context, and the surrounding biblical teaching. But your reply has not really interacted with those arguments. It repeats the Protestant conclusions, but it does not demonstrate them.

So let me narrow this again.

ROMANS 4:5 DOES NOT SAY WHAT YOU KEEP CLAIMING IT SAYS

You keep quoting:

“To the one who does not work but believes...”

But you are assuming that “*work*” means every possible kind of work, including works done by grace, through the Spirit, in Christ.

Ryan, the text does not say that.

The immediate context says:

ROMANS 4:4 *“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”*

So Paul is talking about works understood as **wages, debt, or boasting**.

That is not Catholic **grace-enabled obedience**.

Catholicism is not saying:

God owes me justification because I performed independent works.

Catholicism is saying:

God justifies by grace, and that grace creates living faith working through love.

So the question you still need to answer is this:

Where does Romans 4:5 say Paul is excluding Spirit-enabled obedience done by grace?

It does not.

That is something you are bringing to the text.

ROMANS 11:6 ALSO DOES NOT PROVE YOUR CONCLUSION

You quote:

ROMANS 11:6 *“If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”*

Again, Catholics agree.

But Paul is contrasting **grace** with **works that compete with grace**.

He is not denying **works produced by grace**.

If Romans 11:6 means all human cooperation is excluded, then faith itself would be excluded, because believing is something the person actually does.

Repentance would be excluded.

Confessing Christ would be excluded.

Perseverance would be excluded.

Calling on the name of the Lord would be excluded.

But Scripture commands all of these.

So Romans 11:6 cannot mean:

grace excludes every human response or cooperation.

It means:

grace excludes works as an independent basis of boasting.

That is exactly the Catholic position.

Notice, I'm not just restating Catholic conclusions. I'm providing you with a biblical framework which demonstrates those conclusions.

YOU ARE NOT DEALING WITH PAUL'S CATEGORY OF GRACE-ENABLED WORKS

This is the key passage you still have not really answered:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *"I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me."*

Paul says two things at once:

"I worked."

"Yet not I, but grace."

That is the exact category I am asking you to acknowledge.

You keep treating "*works*" as though they must always mean man's effort competing with Christ. But Paul himself speaks of works that are truly his actions and yet truly the work of grace in him.

So I am asking again:

Do you agree that Scripture contains the category of **grace-enabled works**?

If yes, then Romans 4:5 cannot simply be waved around as if it automatically excludes every kind of work in every sense.

You must show that Romans 4:5 excludes this Pauline category of **grace-enabled works**.

So far, you have not shown that.

You have only asserted it.

“FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE” IS NOT THE SAME AS “FAITH ALONE PLUS LATER EVIDENCE”

You said:

“I see love and obedience as the fruit of saving faith, not part of the instrument of justification.”

But Galatians 5:6 says:

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love.”

Paul is describing what “counts” or “avails” in Christ.

He does not say:

“faith alone, followed later by love as evidence.”

The absence of that assertion in Scripture is a major problem for your position.

Instead, Paul says:

“faith working through love.”

So the faith that avails is not faith isolated from love. It is faith active in love.

Ryan, that is the plain reading of Scripture here.

This matters enormously because Paul also says:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 *“If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

This is another major problem for your position.

If faith alone justifies, then how can Paul say someone with “all faith” but without love is “nothing”?

That means loveless faith does not justify.

So love cannot be reduced to optional evidence after justification. **Saving faith must be living faith formed by grace-enabled charity.**

Remember, in the New Testament, “*grace-works*” are not the same thing as “*unaided human effort*”.

JAMES 2 SAYS MORE THAN “DEMONSTRATED”

You say James means genuine faith is “*demonstrated and completed in action*.”

But that does not solve the problem.

James says:

JAMES 2:22 *“Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works.”*

And then:

JAMES 2:24 *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

You are interpreting *“justified by works”* to mean *“shown to be already justified.”*

But James does not say that.

Nor does James say:

“You see that a person is justified by faith alone, and works merely prove it.”

He says the opposite:

“not by faith alone.”

Your interpretation has to soften James until he says almost the opposite of what he actually wrote.

And again, Abraham’s offering of Isaac was not merely a demonstration to other people. It was an act of obedience before God – it was grace-works in action.

So I am asking you directly:

Where does James say *“justified by works”* means *“works merely demonstrate justification to others”*?

The text says faith is completed by works. The text says justified by works and not by faith alone.

That needs to be dealt with directly.

YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED ROMANS 8:13

Paul says:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

This is not works-righteousness.

Paul says:

“by the Spirit.”

That is grace-enabled obedience.

And the result is:

“you will live.”

Paul does not say:

“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will merely prove you were already justified.”

He says:

“you will live.”

So my question is:

Does Spirit-enabled mortification of sin play a real role in whether we live, according to Paul?

Romans 8:13 says yes.

Your theology says it is only evidence.

But Paul's wording is much stronger than that.

YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED ROMANS 2:6–7

Paul says:

ROMANS 2:6–7 *"He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life."*

This is not James.

This is Paul.

Paul says God gives eternal life to those who persevere in well-doing.

Again, this does not mean unaided human effort earns heaven. But it does mean **final salvation is connected to persevering obedience (i.e. grace-works)**.

Your *"fruit and evidence only"* framework does not adequately account for this passage.

So again, the question is:

Why does Paul say eternal life is given to those who persevere in well-doing, if obedience has no role except proving prior justification?

YOU HAVE NOT ADDRESSED JESUS' OWN WORDS

Jesus says:

MATTHEW 19:17 *"If you would enter life, keep the commandments."*

And:

MATTHEW 7:21 *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father."*

And:

JOHN 15:2 *"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away."*

And:

JOHN 15:6 *"If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers."*

These are not minor verses.

Jesus connects entering life, entering the kingdom, abiding in Him, and avoiding being cut off with obedience and fruitfulness.

Again, not unaided human effort.

But real obedience by grace.

Your reply did not address these texts.

“NECESSARY” DOES NOT MEAN “RIVAL BASIS”

I think the core mistake in your argument is this:

You assume that if obedience is necessary for salvation, then obedience must become a rival basis to Christ.

But that does not follow.

Faith is necessary, but faith is not a rival basis to Christ.

Repentance is necessary, but repentance is not a rival basis to Christ.

Perseverance is necessary, but perseverance is not a rival basis to Christ.

Obedience is necessary, but obedience is not a rival basis to Christ.

The question is not:

Is obedience an independent basis of salvation?

Catholics say no.

The question is:

Does Christ's grace produce a living faith that must work through love and persevere in obedience?

Scripture says yes.

That is the distinction your response still does not address.

THE ISSUE IS NOT “CHRIST ALONE” VERSUS “CHRIST PLUS ME”

You frame the issue as:

Christ alone received by faith alone
versus

Christ plus obedience as the basis of justification

But that is not the Catholic position.

The Catholic position is:

Christ alone is the source and meritorious ground of justification.

But Christ does not justify us by a dead or loveless faith.

He justifies us by grace through a living faith, and a living faith works through love.

So the real contrast is not:

Christ alone versus Christ plus human effort.

The real contrast is:

Christ justifies by a faith that remains alone
versus

Christ justifies by a faith that is defined by grace-works (i.e. a faith living through love).

Paul answers this directly:

GALATIANS 5:6 *“faith working through love.”*

James answers directly:

JAMES 2:24 *“not by faith alone.”*

YOUR REPLY NEEDS TO DO MORE THAN REPEAT THE CONCLUSION

Respectfully, saying:

“I see obedience as fruit and evidence”

does not answer the passages where Scripture speaks of obedience as more than evidence.

You need to show why:

- *“faith working through love”* means faith alone.
- *“faith was completed by works”* means works merely demonstrate faith.
- *“justified by works and not by faith alone”* means justified by faith alone.
- *“if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live”* means obedience only proves prior justification.
- *“God gives eternal life to those who persevere in well-doing”* means works are only evidence.
- *“if you would enter life, keep the commandments”* means commandment-keeping has no role in entering life.
- *“every branch in me that bears no fruit he takes away”* means fruitlessness has no real bearing on remaining in Christ

That is the exegetical work that still needs to be done.

At the moment, your answer appears to **assume the Protestant framework** and then **read every passage through that framework**.

But I am asking whether the framework itself is biblical.

CAN WE MOVE BEYOND RESTATING CONCLUSIONS?

Ryan, in order for us to have a “*fruitful*” (pun intended) conversation... I would ask you to please answer the specific biblical arguments rather than restating your conclusions that works are “*fruit and evidence only*.” I agree they are fruit and evidence. The question is whether Scripture reduces them to that only.

As per the biblical evidence I supplied above... I do not believe it does.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Thanks for the detailed response Paul — I genuinely appreciate the time and care you’ve put into this discussion. I agree with a number of things you’ve said, especially that Scripture teaches Spirit-enabled obedience, perseverance, and a living faith that works through love. I also agree that true saving faith is never barren or loveless.

But I still think the central issue is being missed: the Reformers did not deny grace-enabled works. The question is whether those works play any part in the ground or instrument of justification before God.

When Paul excludes works in Romans 4 and Romans 11, I don’t think the contrast is merely between “*self-powered works*” and “*grace-powered works*.” The contrast is between faith and works as the basis of justification. Romans 4:5 says God justifies “*the ungodly*” who believe, not those who first become inherently righteous through obedience. Paul’s entire argument is that justification is not according to works at all, because otherwise it would be wages rather than grace.

You asked where Romans 4 excludes grace-enabled works specifically. I would say the reason is because Paul excludes works categorically in the context of justification, while later affirming works as the fruit of salvation. Ephesians 2 is a good example: verses 8–9 exclude works from salvation’s basis, while verse 10 immediately teaches that believers are created for good works. So Protestants absolutely affirm grace-enabled obedience — we just place it after justification rather than inside it.

I also don’t think Romans 11:6 can be limited only to works done apart from grace. Paul’s point is that grace and works are mutually exclusive categories with respect to justification. As soon as works become part of the reason God justifies us, grace is no longer grace in the sense Paul is arguing.

Regarding 1 Corinthians 15:10, I fully agree Paul describes grace-enabled labor. Protestants affirm that category completely. The issue is that Paul is speaking there about sanctification and ministry, not the means by which a sinner is declared righteous before God. So yes, believers truly cooperate with grace in the Christian life — but that is different from saying those works contribute to justification itself.

On James 2, I agree the passage says more than mere outward demonstration before men. But James is addressing the nature of genuine faith, not contradicting Paul’s teaching on justification apart from works. Abraham was already counted righteous in Genesis 15 before Isaac was offered in Genesis 22. James says Abraham’s faith was “completed” by works — meaning brought to maturity or shown to be living and real. That fits perfectly with the Protestant understanding that works vindicate living faith rather than form part of the basis upon which God justifies.

As for Galatians 5:6, I completely agree that saving faith works through love. But Paul is describing the character of true faith, not redefining justification as faith plus love. Otherwise we would have to reconcile that with Romans 4, where Paul explicitly contrasts faith and works in justification.

I also agree with you that obedience is necessary in the Christian life. Where we differ is why it is necessary. I would say obedience is necessary because everyone who is truly united to Christ will be transformed by the Spirit. The necessity is evidential and consequential, not meritorious or instrumental in justification.

So when Romans 8:13 says, “*if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live,*” I absolutely affirm that believers must mortify sin. But I see this as describing the necessary path of those who belong to Christ, not teaching that our Spirit-enabled obedience becomes part of the legal basis on which God declares us righteous.

Likewise, Romans 2:6–7 describes the reality that final judgment will accord with works, because works reveal the reality of faith and union with Christ. Protestants have historically affirmed that good works are the evidence publicly vindicating true faith at the final judgment, even though justification itself is grounded entirely in Christ’s righteousness received through faith.

And regarding Jesus’ words about keeping the commandments, doing the Father’s will, and abiding in Him — I agree these warnings are real and serious. But again, I don’t think they teach that obedience becomes part of the basis of justification. Rather, they teach that those who truly belong to Christ persevere in faith and bear fruit through the Spirit.

So I don’t deny grace-enabled works at all. I simply believe Scripture consistently distinguishes between:

- justification by faith apart from works, and
- the transformed life of obedience that necessarily follows justification.

That’s why I still believe the biblical order is:
we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone.



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, thank you. This is a much more substantial reply, and I really appreciate the clearer explanation.

I agree that the central issue is this:

Are grace-enabled works merely the fruit/evidence of justification already possessed, or does Scripture present them as belonging to the living faith by which we are justified and remain in Christ?

I also agree with you that Christ alone is the meritorious ground of justification. I am not arguing that our obedience is an independent basis next to Christ. That would be false.

But I still think your reply has the same underlying weakness: when a biblical passage connects obedience, love, perseverance, or works with justification, life, judgment, or entering the kingdom, you place it into the category of “evidence only.” **But you do not show from the text itself why that is what the passage means.**

In several places, the text says more than “*evidence.*”

ROMANS 4:5 — YOU ARE STILL ASSUMING “WORKS” MEANS ALL WORKS CATEGORICALLY

You wrote:

“Paul excludes works categorically in the context of justification.”

But this is still the point under dispute.

Romans 4:4 says:

“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

So Paul clearly defines the KIND of works he is excluding: works considered as **wages, debt, or boasting**.

Catholics agree completely that those works do not justify.

But Romans 4:5 does not say:

“God excludes every Spirit-enabled act of obedience from the life of justifying faith.”

That is your theological inference. However, it is not stated in the passage.

You say Paul excludes works “*categorically*,” but the context itself clearly qualifies the category: **works that would make justification a wage rather than a gift**.

That does not describe grace-enabled obedience, because **grace-enabled obedience is not a wage-claim against God**.

This is why your interpretation of Romans 4:5 is manifestly incorrect. You ignore the “*wages*” context that Paul himself provides, and thus you end up mangling his message altogether.

Again, Paul is not addressing **grace-works**. Contextually, he is only addressing works considered as **wages, debt, or boasting**. That is the plain reading of Romans 4:4-5.

ROMANS 4:5 SAYS GOD JUSTIFIES THE UNGODLY — BUT NOT THAT HE LEAVES THEM UNGODLY

You wrote:

“Romans 4:5 says God justifies the ungodly who believe, not those who first become inherently righteous through obedience.”

Catholics agree that God justifies the ungodly. Initial justification is not earned by prior obedience.

But your conclusion does not follow.

The Catholic claim is not:

We first become righteous by our own obedience, and then God justifies us.

The Catholic claim is:

God justifies the ungodly by grace, and that grace actually makes them righteous in Christ.

Paul says:

1 CORINTHIANS 6:11 “You were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified.”

And:

ROMANS 5:5 “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.”

So justification is not a legal fiction where God merely calls the ungodly righteous while leaving them inwardly unchanged. God justifies the ungodly by forgiving and transforming them.

The real disagreement is not whether God justifies the ungodly. He does.

The disagreement is whether justification is merely **external imputation** or whether it includes **real interior renewal by grace**.

Notice the order in 1 Corinthians 6:11

- (1) “Washed”
- (2) “Sanctified”
- (3) “Justified”

Your theology separates justification and sanctification — justification comes FIRST and sanctification occurs LATER throughout the course of life.

However, Paul places sanctification BEFORE justification which re-enforces the Catholic belief that man is sanctified when he is justified and then this state is deepened during the course of the Christian life.

God instils faith, hope and love into our souls and, by His grace, these attributes (received in our initial justification – 1 Cor 6:11) continue to grow and mature as our relationship with God grows and matures.

Isn’t this how any true relationship operates?

Since when are true relationships built upon a legal courtroom scenario?

Yet this is what you have reduced our relationship with our heavenly Father to – a legal proceeding which merely labels us righteous while we remain (as Martin Luther described it) a pile of dung covered over by snow.

A good Father shares EVERYTHING he has with his children.

Our heavenly Father has done exactly that – he has justified us by pouring His Holy Spirit into our hearts. In doing so He has shared His own righteousness with us in our justification.

- (1) “Washed”
- (2) “Sanctified”
- (3) “Justified”

EPHESIANS 2:8-10 DOES NOT PROVE “FAITH ALONE”

You wrote:

“Ephesians 2 is a good example: verses 8–9 exclude works from salvation’s basis, while verse 10 immediately teaches that believers are created for good works.”

Catholics agree that Ephesians 2:8–9 excludes **works of boasting**.

Notice what Paul actually says:

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith... not a result of works, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST.”*

The excluded works are **boast-producing works**.

Are these **grace-works**? Clearly not.

Grace-works are exclusively due to God and thus give us **no foundation for boasting**.

Next, as soon as Paul finishes condemning unaided human effort, he contrasts it with Spirit-produced grace-works:

EPHESIANS 2:10 *“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”*

So yes, good works flow from grace.

Who prepared these “good works”?

Man?

No. “*God prepared*” these works. They are grace-works which give no foundation for boasting.

You truly can’t see these two categories of “works” being contrasted here?

Your theology depends upon “*not a result of works, so that no one may boast*” (Eph 2:9) being a blanket reference to EVERY category of “works”.

Yet Paul immediately contrasts **verse 9 “works”** with the **grace-works** he refers to in verse 10. This proves that “*not a result of works*” is not indeed a reference to every category. It is a narrow reference to **unaided human effort** that leads to **boasting**.

I would also point out that Paul does not state anywhere that the good works he refers to (in verse 10) are merely evidence. He nowhere makes the point that good works are only and always a “*fruit*” of justification.

He simply says that God prepared them so that we should walk in them.

To maintain your position, you have spliced in an entire “*fruits only*” doctrine that doesn’t actually appear in the text.

Ephesians 2 does not support salvation by unaided works. But neither does it teach justification by faith alone. As always, the phrase “*faith alone*” is not there.

The passage teaches salvation by grace, through faith, unto a life of God-prepared good works.

Catholics affirm all of that.

ROMANS 11:6 EXCLUDES WORKS OPPOSED TO GRACE, NOT WORKS CAUSED BY GRACE

You wrote:

“Paul’s point is that grace and works are mutually exclusive categories with respect to justification.”

But this needs qualification.

GRACE and **WORKS OPPOSED TO GRACE** are mutually exclusive.

GRACE and **WORKS CAUSED BY GRACE** are not mutually exclusive.

Paul himself says:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.”*

That one verse proves that Paul does not see grace and all works as mutually exclusive in every sense.

He sees grace as the cause of certain works.

So the question remains:

In Romans 11:6, is Paul excluding **works that compete with grace**, or **works that are produced by grace**?

The context of Romans 11 concerns election by grace, **not human boasting**. It does not say **Spirit-enabled obedience is excluded** from living faith.

Again, you are importing the Protestant conclusion into the text.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 CANNOT BE DISMISSED AS “ONLY SANCTIFICATION”

You wrote:

“Paul is speaking there about sanctification and ministry, not the means by which a sinner is declared righteous.”

But I cited 1 Corinthians 15:10 to establish a category, not to claim that this verse alone defines justification.

The category is:

real human action that is truly caused by grace.

That matters because your reading of Romans 4 and Romans 11 depends on treating “works” as if they always compete with grace.

But 1 Corinthians 15:10 proves they do not.

So once Scripture itself gives us the category of **grace-enabled works**, you cannot simply quote Romans 4:5 and say, “Paul excludes works categorically,” unless you prove that he includes grace-enabled works in that exclusion.

That is the step you still have not demonstrated.

JAMES 2 — “COMPLETED” DOES NOT MEAN MERELY “SHOWN”

You wrote:

“James says Abraham’s faith was completed by works — meaning brought to maturity or shown to be living and real.”

But “*brought to maturity*” is already stronger than “*evidence only*.”

James says:

JAMES 2:22 *“Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.”*

This means the works **did something** to Abraham’s faith. They brought it to completion.

That is not merely external demonstration.

Then James says:

JAMES 2:24 *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

Your interpretation requires James to mean:

“A person is shown to be justified by works, but is actually justified by faith alone.”

But James does not say that.

He says:

“justified by works and not by faith alone.”

If the Protestant doctrine were correct, James chose the most confusing possible way to say it.

Also, as I’ve already noted in previous replies, Abraham’s offering of Isaac was not a public demonstration to human observers. Abraham told the men to wait at the foot of the mountain. He and Isaac went on alone. It was strictly obedience before God.

So the question remains:

Where does James say “*justified by works*” means “*shown to be already justified before men*”?

The text says faith was completed by works. The text says justified by works. The text says not by faith alone.

That should be allowed to speak.

GENESIS 15 AND GENESIS 22 ACTUALLY SUPPORT THE CATHOLIC VIEW

You wrote:

“Abraham was already counted righteous in Genesis 15 before Isaac was offered in Genesis 22.”

Yes. Exactly.

That supports the Catholic view that justification is not merely one isolated legal moment.

Abraham believed God in Genesis 15 and was counted righteous.

Then, in Genesis 22, his faith was tested, obeyed, and was completed.

James says this later act fulfilled the earlier declaration:

JAMES 2:23 *“The Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.’”*

So Abraham’s justification is not treated as a one-time legal transaction sealed off from later obedience.

His faith is living, tested, obedient, and completed.

That is much closer to the Catholic view than the Protestant view.

GALATIANS 5:6 — PAUL DOES NOT SAY “FAITH ALONE PLUS EVIDENCE”

You wrote:

“Paul is describing the character of true faith, not redefining justification as faith plus love.”

But again, that is your theological framing.

Paul says:

GALATIANS 5:6 *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love.”*

The context is **justification** versus **circumcision and the law**. Paul says what counts in Christ is **not circumcision**, but **faith working through love**.

He does not say:

faith alone, with love later proving it.

He says:

faith working through love.

That is why Catholics say justifying faith is faith formed by charity.

This is not *“faith plus love”* as two separate competing causes. It is one living reality: **faith alive through love**.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 STILL REMAINS UNANSWERED

This is one of the passages you have not dealt with directly:

1 CORINTHIANS 13:2 *“If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.”*

If faith alone justifies, then why is a person with “*all faith*” but without love “*nothing*”?

This passage shows that **faith without love** is not **saving faith**.

Therefore, love is not merely external evidence after justification. **Love is what makes faith living rather than dead.**

So again, Paul’s doctrine is not faith alone.

It is faith working through love.

ROMANS 8:13 — PAUL SAYS “YOU WILL LIVE,” NOT MERELY “YOU WILL SHOW YOU ARE ALIVE”

You wrote:

“Romans 8:13 describes the necessary path of those who belong to Christ.”

I agree.

But that means Spirit-enabled obedience is not merely optional evidence.

Paul says:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

The condition is:

if by the Spirit you put sin to death

The result is:

you will live

Paul does not say:

you will merely show that you were already justified.

He says:

you will live.

So your interpretation again adds “*evidence only*” to the text. The text itself speaks of **Spirit-enabled mortification** as necessary for life.

That is Catholic doctrine.

ROMANS 2:6–7 — FINAL JUDGMENT ACCORDING TO WORKS IS NOT MERELY PUBLIC EVIDENCE

You wrote:

“Romans 2:6–7 describes the reality that final judgment will accord with works, because works reveal the reality of faith.”

But Paul says:

ROMANS 2:6–7 *“He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, he will give eternal life.”*

Paul does not say:

God will give eternal life according to faith alone, and works will merely reveal who had it.

He says God will render according to works, and to those who persevere in well-doing, He will give eternal life.

Again, this does not mean unaided human effort earns heaven.

It means final salvation is not separated from grace-enabled perseverance in good.

Your *“evidence only”* interpretation is not stated by the text. It is imposed on the text to protect faith alone.

MATTHEW 19:17 — JESUS CONNECTS ENTERING LIFE WITH COMMANDMENT-KEEPING

Jesus says:

MATTHEW 19:17 *“If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”*

You say this means those who truly belong to Christ will obey.

But Jesus’ words are stronger than that.

He says:

“If you would enter life...”

That is the question of salvation.

Then He says:

“keep the commandments.”

Again, not unaided human effort. Not Pelagianism. Not earning heaven apart from grace.

But Jesus clearly connects entering life with obedience.

Your explanation reduces Jesus’ words to:

“If you are already saved, obedience will show it.”

But that is not what He says.

JOHN 15 — BRANCHES “IN CHRIST” CAN BE CUT OFF

Jesus says:

JOHN 15:2 *“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.”*

And:

JOHN 15:6 *“If anyone does not abide in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers.”*

This is not merely evidence language.

Jesus speaks of branches IN HIM that must abide and bear fruit, or they are cut off.

If fruit were merely evidence of an already irreversible justification, this warning loses its force.

Catholic theology takes the warning seriously:

We must remain in Christ.

We must abide in grace.

We must bear fruit through Him.

Again, that is not self-salvation. Jesus says:

JOHN 15:5 *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”*

So the fruit is entirely dependent on Christ. But the warning is still real because man’s free will is always active and thus can be used to walk away from grace. The prodigal son is the classical biblical example.

YOUR “AFTER JUSTIFICATION” CATEGORY IS TOO RIGID

You keep saying obedience comes *“after justification”* rather than *“inside it.”*

But Scripture often speaks of salvation dynamically:

MATTHEW 24:13 *“He who endures to the end will be saved.”*

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

ROMANS 8:13 *“If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”*

HEBREWS 3:14 *“We have become partakers of Christ, if we hold our first confidence firm to the end.”*

The New Testament does not reduce salvation to a single past legal declaration followed only by evidence.

It speaks of initial grace, continued abiding, perseverance, judgment, and final salvation.

Catholic theology can account for all of that.

The *“faith alone, evidence only”* model struggles with it.

YOU STILL HAVE NOT ANSWERED THESE QUESTIONS DIRECTLY

Ryan, respectfully, several questions remain unanswered.

- (1) Where does Romans 4:5 say “works” includes Spirit-enabled obedience done by grace?
- (2) Where does James 2 say “*justified by works*” means “*shown to be justified before men*”?
- (3) Why does James say faith is “*completed by works*” if works are only evidence?
- (4) Why does James say “*not by faith alone*” if justification is by faith alone?
- (5) Why does Paul say “*faith working through love*” is what counts in Christ, instead of “*faith alone*”?
- (6) Why does Paul say a person with “*all faith*” but without love is “*nothing*”?
- (7) Why does Romans 8:13 say “*if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live,*” if obedience merely proves life rather than being necessary for life?
- (8) Why does Romans 2:6–7 say God gives eternal life to those who persevere in well-doing?
- (9) Why does Jesus say “*if you would enter life, keep the commandments*”?
- (10) Why does Jesus say branches “*in me*” that do not bear fruit are taken away?

These texts do not teach salvation by unaided human effort. But they also do not teach faith alone.

THE KEY ISSUE: “NECESSARY” DOES NOT MEAN “MERITORIOUS RIVAL”

I think your position keeps assuming this:

If obedience is necessary for justification or final salvation, then obedience becomes a rival basis to Christ.

But that does not follow.

Faith is necessary, but faith is not a rival to Christ.

Repentance is necessary, but repentance is not a rival to Christ.

Love is necessary, but love is not a rival to Christ.

Why?

Because all of these are gifts and operations of grace.

So when Catholics say Spirit-enabled obedience is necessary, we are not saying obedience is an independent ground alongside Jesus.

We are saying that Jesus saves us by a grace that actually transforms us, makes faith alive through love, and enables us to persevere.

THE PROTESTANT FORMULA STILL CONTRADICTS JAMES

You ended with:

“We are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies is never alone.”

That is a classic Protestant phrase.

But Scripture says:

JAMES 2:24 *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

So the Protestant formula says:

justified by faith alone

James says:

not by faith alone

That is a serious problem.

The Catholic position does not have to explain away James.

It simply says:

We are justified by grace through a living faith, and living faith works through love.

That harmonizes Paul and James without making either of them say the opposite of what they wrote.

I hope this is helpful.

At the very least, I’m hoping you may see that depicting Catholicism as salvation by unaided human effort (in your YouTube videos) is to grossly misrepresent Catholic doctrine to you audience.

I look forward to your reply.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Paul, thank you again for the detailed interaction. I genuinely appreciate the seriousness with which you’re engaging Scripture, and I agree with much of what you’ve written regarding grace-enabled obedience, perseverance, and the necessity of living faith.

That said, I still think the central issue remains unresolved: not whether grace transforms believers, but whether Spirit-enabled obedience becomes part of the basis or instrument of justification before God.

I agree grace and works are not always opposed absolutely. 1 Corinthians 15:10 clearly shows grace producing real obedience. Protestants fully affirm that category. But the question is whether Paul includes even grace-enabled works inside the ground or instrument of justification itself.

I still believe Romans 4 does exactly that.

Paul's argument is not merely against "self-powered works," but against works as a basis for being counted righteous. His entire contrast is between receiving righteousness by faith versus receiving wages by working. The reason Protestants say works are excluded categorically in justification is because Paul never introduces a second category of works that partly justify alongside faith. Instead, he says righteousness is "counted" to the ungodly who believe (Romans 4:5), apart from works.

You argue Romans 4 only excludes works done in a boastful or self-reliant way. But I don't think the text itself limits the exclusion that narrowly. Paul's entire point is that justification cannot operate on the principle of works at all, because then it would function as debt rather than gift. Even grace-enabled works, if they become part of the reason God counts us righteous, would still move justification away from Paul's faith-versus-works contrast.

Regarding James 2, I agree works do more than provide empty external evidence to other humans. Works complete faith in the sense that living faith necessarily expresses itself in obedience. But I still don't think James is redefining the basis of justification before God.

James and Paul are addressing different errors:

- * Paul opposes reliance on works for justification.
- * James opposes the idea that dead intellectual belief is saving faith.

That's why James can say Abraham was justified by works in Genesis 22, while Paul says he was counted righteous in Genesis 15. Abraham's later obedience vindicated and fulfilled the reality of the faith he already possessed.

You ask why James says "not by faith alone." I would say because James is rejecting a dead, barren profession of faith — not denying that justification is received through faith apart from works in the Pauline sense.

On Galatians 5:6 and 1 Corinthians 13:2, I completely agree that saving faith is inseparable from love. But inseparable does not mean identical in function. I do not deny that love must accompany saving faith; we deny that love becomes part of the instrument by which we are justified before God.

Likewise, with Romans 8:13, Romans 2:6–7, John 15, Matthew 24:13, and similar passages: I absolutely affirm perseverance and obedience are necessary. The disagreement is over why they are necessary.

I believe they are necessary because union with Christ necessarily produces transformation and perseverance through the Spirit. Those who abandon Christ show they were never truly united to Him savingly (1 John 2:19). So these warnings are real means God uses to preserve His people, not proof that justification itself rests partly upon our obedience.

I also don't think the Catholic model fully resolves the tension you see in the bible. Because if Spirit-enabled obedience truly becomes part of the basis upon which God grants final justification, then assurance necessarily shifts away from Christ's finished righteousness toward the quality of our cooperation — however grace-enabled that cooperation may be.

So I still believe the best synthesis of Paul and James is not:

"faith alone versus works,"

but rather:

We are justified by faith apart from works, yet the faith that justifies is living, active, obedient, and never alone.

I appreciate the discussion though, and I do think this has helped clarify where the real disagreement actually lies.



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, thank you again. I think we have clarified the disagreement, but I also think we are beginning to repeat ourselves.

I'll make this shorter, and I'll then take our discussion into some brand new directions.

YOU KEEP FRAMING CATHOLICISM AS “WORKS BECOMING THE GROUND OF JUSTIFICATION”

Again, that is not the Catholic position.

Catholicism does not teach:

Christ is the ground of justification, plus my works are another ground.

Catholicism teaches:

Christ alone is the meritorious ground of justification, but the faith by which we are justified is a living faith formed by love, and that love is poured into us by grace.

So when you keep asking whether obedience becomes the “*basis*” of justification, you are pushing Catholicism into a category it rejects.

The Catholic issue is not:

Is obedience a rival basis to Christ?

The Catholic issue is:

Does Christ justify us through a dead faith alone, or through a living faith working through love?

Paul answers:

“Faith working through love.”

Galatians 5:6

James answers:

“A person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”

James 2:24

YOU KEEP IGNORING THE DEBT/WAGE CONTEXT OF ROMANS 4

You keep saying Romans 4 excludes works “*categorically*.”

But Romans 4 defines the excluded works as **works that make justification a wage**:

ROMANS 4:4 *“Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”*

Catholicism agrees: no work places God in our debt.

But grace-enabled obedience does not place God in our debt. It is God’s own gift working in us.

Again, Paul himself says:

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me.”*

So Romans 4 excludes **works-as-debt**. It does not prove that **Spirit-enabled obedience** has no role in living faith or final salvation.

YOU SEPARATE PAUL AND JAMES TOO SHARPLY

You say Paul and James are addressing totally different errors.

There is some truth in that, but it cannot be pushed too far.

Paul says Abraham was counted righteous by faith (a faith that was active from Genesis 12-15 and later defined by his actions in Genesis 22).

James refers to the same Abraham and says:

JAMES 2:22 *“Faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.”*

You say James is addressing a different issue – that *“dead intellectual belief is not saving”*. Ryan, **that entire idea is nowhere in James’ references to Abraham**.

Instead, James continues referring to the **SAVING FAITH of Abraham** when he says:

JAMES 2:24 *“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.”*

James is not merely saying:

“Works prove to other people that faith already exists.”

He says faith is COMPLETED by works.

He does not say:

“Faith is already complete without works...”

He does not say:

“Grace-works will always appear later on as evidence.”

And, again, James (when he refers to Abraham as his example) is not speaking about *“dead intellectual belief.”*

That means works are not merely external evidence. They bring faith to its living maturity.

Paul and James are not contradicting each other. Paul rejects works-as-debt. James rejects faith-without-obedience. Catholic theology can affirm both without rewriting either.

“FAITH AUTOMATICALLY PRODUCES WORKS” IS NOT BIBLICAL

This is one of the deepest problems in your position.

You seem to treat saving faith as if it automatically and inevitably produces perseverance. But Scripture repeatedly warns real believers not to fall away.

That only makes sense if Christians retain free will and can resist grace.

Paul warns Christians:

ROMANS 8:13 *“If you live according to the flesh you will die.”*

Jesus says to Christians:

JOHN 15:2 *“Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away.”*

Paul says to Christians:

GALATIANS 5:4 *“You have fallen away from grace.”*

Hebrews says to Christians:

HEBREWS 3:14 *“We have become partakers of Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”*

Peter warns Christians:

2 PETER 2:21 *“It would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back.”*

These passages do not fit the idea that real faith simply and automatically produces holiness.

They show that **grace truly enables us**, but **does not destroy our freedom**.

THE PRODIGAL SON SHOWS THE CATHOLIC PICTURE BETTER THAN THE PROTESTANT ONE

The prodigal son was truly a son.

He belonged to the father’s house.

Then he freely left.

He squandered his inheritance.

He became spiritually dead.

The father says:

LUKE 15:24 *"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."*

Notice: he was not a fake son. He was a real son who left and later returned.

That is the Catholic picture.

God is not merely a courtroom judge making an external declaration. He is a Father dealing with sons in a family.

A good father does not say:

"Once legally declared my son, nothing you do matters."

Nor does a good father say:

"Earn my love by unaided effort."

Rather, the father gives life, love, grace, inheritance, discipline, warning, forgiveness, and restoration. The son must remain in the house. He can also freely walk away.

That is biblical covenant family theology, not courtroom-only theology.

GRACE DOES NOT "MUSCLE" US INTO HEAVEN

Your model seems to imply that if someone is truly justified, grace will infallibly produce perseverance.

But then the Christian life becomes strangely mechanical. And free-will is compromised.

Scripture presents something more relational.

God gives grace.

God empowers obedience.

God warns.

God disciplines.

God calls.

God forgives.

But man can still resist.

Stephen says:

ACTS 7:51 *"You always resist the Holy Spirit."*

Paul says:

1 THESSALONIANS 5:19 *"Do not quench the Spirit."*

Paul also says:

EPHESIANS 4:30 *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.”*

Those warnings are meaningless if grace is simply irresistible and compels the elect into perseverance.

Ryan, real love, real relationship – requires real freedom.

CATHOLIC ASSURANCE RESTS ON CHRIST, NOT THE “QUALITY OF OUR WORKS”

You wrote that Catholicism shifts assurance away from Christ’s finished righteousness toward the quality of our cooperation.

But that misrepresents Catholic theology.

Catholic trust is not:

“My works are good enough.”

Catholic trust is:

“Christ is faithful, His grace is sufficient, and my free-will remains fully intact.”

Jesus says:

JOHN 15:4 *“Abide in me.”*

That is not insecurity. That is how every relationship works.

A son has confidence in his father’s love, but he must not leave the father’s house.

So Catholicism does not replace Christ with works. It refuses to separate Christ from the grace He actually works in His children.

THE BIBLICAL PICTURE HAS TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN

The Bible gives both sides together.

One side is grace:

JOHN 15:5 *“Apart from me you can do nothing.”*

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 *“It is God who works in you, both to will and to work.”*

1 CORINTHIANS 15:10 *“By the grace of God I am what I am.”*

The other side is real human free-will and warning:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 *“Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”*

ROMANS 8:13 *“If you live according to the flesh you will die.”*

MATTHEW 24:13 *“He who endures to the end will be saved.”*

JOHN 15:4 “Abide in me.”

Catholic theology holds both sides in perfect harmony.

God gives the grace.

Man must not reject it (using free will).

God empowers holiness.

Man must freely cooperate (by grace).

God is Father.

Man must remain a faithful son (by grace).

SO I THINK YOUR POSITION STILL HAS SEVERAL PROBLEMS:

(1) You keep treating Catholic grace-enabled obedience as though it were a rival ground to Christ. It is not.

(2) You keep reading Romans 4 as excluding every kind of work, while the context specifically discusses works as wages or debt.

(3) You reduce James 2 to evidence, even though James says faith is completed by works and that we are not justified by faith alone.

(4) You say true faith necessarily produces obedience, but Scripture repeatedly warns real believers that they can fall away.

(5) You frame justification almost entirely as a courtroom declaration, while Scripture also presents salvation as adoption, family, covenant, abiding, inheritance, discipline, and sonship.

Christ alone saves, but Christ saves us by making us truly alive in Him. That life must be lived, guarded, nourished, and not freely abandoned.

God is not merely a judge in a courtroom.

He is a Father in a family.

And the justified Christian is not merely a defendant declared righteous.

He is an adopted son who must remain in the Father's house.

AQUITTED DEFENDANT? OR FORGIVEN SON?

The Westminster Theological Seminary faculty has adopted a statement on justification that clearly describes what is distinctively Protestant and non-Catholic:

“Justification is altogether a legal, declarative act on God's part as the supreme Judge. We deny that justification is in any sense a moral transformation or inner renewal. In justification God legally declares the

sinner who in himself is still guilty and polluted to be righteous in Christ. Justification involves only the legal imputation or legal account of the perfect righteousness of Christ to the sinner.”

The Catholic Church teaches something quite different — that our justification has a juridical aspect where God acts as our judge, however, primarily God acts as our Father. His Fatherly nature does not prompt God to establish legal contracts with His children; instead, He establishes covenants which are sacred family bonds.

Thus, in the Catholic perspective, justification does not occur primarily in a court room, but in a family room in a household of faith.

Scripture does not present initial justification primarily as a courtroom scene. If that were the intended model, we would expect images of a criminal before a judge, legal defense, witnesses, verdicts, acquittal, and court records.

Scripture does use courtroom imagery, but mainly for the Final Judgment at the end of time, not for the sinner’s initial restoration to God.

While the Roman courtroom is not depicted in Scripture as the scene of our justification, the same cannot be said of the family environment.

Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son presents salvation and justification primarily as **RESTORATION TO THE FATHER’S FAMILY**, not as a cold legal transaction in a courtroom.

When the prodigal son returns in repentance, the father does not act like a judge setting up a court in front of his house, hearing a case, and issuing a legal verdict of “*not guilty*.”

Instead, he runs to meet his son, embraces him, forgives him, restores his dignity, and welcomes him back into the family home.

This shows that God’s judgment is real, but it is the judgment of a merciful Father, not merely a courtroom judge.

The son had severed the family relationship through sin, but the father’s response is to restore that broken relationship.

Therefore, the biblical picture is not merely acquittal from guilt, but forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, and full restoration into the household of God.

That is Catholic justification.

JUSTIFICATION INCLUDES DIVINE SONSHIP

If we deeply contemplate our **adoption** and **divine sonship**, the limitations of the Protestant courtroom salvation become evident.

From the Catholic perspective, because justification is a familial process our justification consequently includes much more than simply being an acquitted defendant — it includes **sonship**, that is, **becoming sons and daughters of God**.

We are not just **legally declared** to be sons of God, but we are **made** sons of God — **actually transformed** to be children of God. We are a completely “**new creation**”.

Paul explains this concept of our re-creation through two of his letters:

2 CORINTHIANS 5:17 *Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a NEW CREATION; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. (18) It is all God's work.*

GALATIANS 6:15 *Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a NEW CREATION.*

Moreover, this “new creation” is further explained by Paul as our transformation where we receive the Spirit and are truly made “children of God”.

ROMANS 8:15 *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF SONSHIP. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” (16) It is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD...*

GALATIANS 4:5 *...that we might receive ADOPTION AS SONS. (6) And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” (7) So through God YOU ARE NO LONGER A SLAVE BUT A SON, and if a son then an heir.*

John likewise omits any reference to our sonship as a mere legal declaration. Instead, he differentiates the distinction between being merely **CALLED** God's children and actually **BEING** God's children:

1 JOHN 3:1 *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and SO WE ARE. ... (2) Beloved, WE ARE GOD'S CHILDREN NOW*

The new covenant, which is the basis for God's law and judgments, is ultimately a familial reality. This means that God's “forensic” decree of justification must be understood primarily as the familial act of the divine Father.

Ryan, the “right standing” which this “forensic” decree effects is nothing less than **DIVINE SONSHIP**.

The Protestant doctrine of justification wrongly defines it as an exclusively judicial act (i.e., mere legal imputation of Christ's righteousness). As a consequence, its primary meaning (divine sonship) is overlooked or suppressed.

Thus, **the forensic character of justification ultimately rests on a covenantal-familial basis**. When Protestants deny this, it leads to a view that opposes the *forensic* to the *familial*. *Imputation* verses *adoption*.

Ryan, because justification is a family event which occurs in a household of faith, mere legal declarations become inappropriate.

Why?

Because if man is only legally declared to be children of God the very nature and action of God as our Father is reduced to that of a courtroom judge — and this contradicts the constant scriptural emphasis that God's dealings with us are **FATHERLY** by nature.

I'd like to hear your thoughts regarding this...

Good conversation my friend. Let's keep reasoning together.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Hey Paul, thanks for the thoughtful message — I appreciate the depth and respect in how you've laid this out.

I agree that salvation is not just legal language. Scripture clearly teaches we are born again, indwelt by the Spirit, made new creations, and truly adopted as God's children. Those are real and beautiful truths.

Justification is understood as God's declaration that we are righteous through faith in Christ, while adoption and transformation are the results of that grace, not the basis of that declaration.

So we don't oppose "*forensic vs familial*" — we see them as distinct but inseparably connected blessings in Christ.

Appreciate the conversation, brother.



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Ryan, this is a fascinating conversation. Thank you again for your respectful tone.

I agree with you that Scripture includes legal language, transformation language, and family/adoption language. I am not denying that justification has a juridical aspect.

But I think your latest reply introduces a serious new problem.

You wrote that justification is God's declaration that we are righteous through faith in Christ, while "*adoption and transformation are the results of that grace, not the basis of that declaration.*"

That means, in order to preserve "*faith alone*" justification, you are now placing not only **WORKS**, but even **ADOPTION**, into a kind of secondary "*result*" or "*fruit*" category.

I do not think Scripture supports that.

In fact, I would ask directly:

Where does Scripture teach that adoption is merely the fruit or result of justification, rather than part of the central saving reality into which we are brought by Christ?

Because biblically, adoption is not a minor after-effect of salvation. It is one of the **central defining realities** of man's initial justification.

Paul says:

GALATIANS 4:4 "*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, (5) to redeem those who were under the law, so that **WE MIGHT RECEIVE ADOPTION AS SONS.***"

Notice the purpose statement:

Christ came to redeem us so that we might receive adoption as sons.

Adoption is not presented as a later fruit hanging off justification. It is presented as one of the very purposes of redemption.

Paul continues:

GALATIANS 4:6 "*And because you ARE SONS, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' (7) So YOU ARE NO LONGER A SLAVE, BUT A SON, and if a son, then an heir through God.*"

This is not merely legal acquittal followed by adoption as a side-effect. Paul describes salvation as a movement from slavery into sonship, from alienation into inheritance, from distance into the Father's household.

That is central salvation language.

Romans 8 says the same thing:

ROMANS 8:15 *"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you HAVE RECEIVED the SPIRIT OF ADOPTION AS SONS, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'"*

Again, adoption is not treated as an optional blessing after justification. It is the defining mark of those who belong to Christ and live by the Spirit.

Paul then says:

ROMANS 8:16 *"The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, (17) and if children, then heirs — heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."*

So the biblical picture is not merely courtroom declaration followed by family life as a secondary result. The biblical picture is that **initial justification enacts sonship, inheritance, the Spirit, and participation in Christ.**

This is why I think the "courtroom-only" model becomes too narrow. God is certainly Judge, but He justifies us as Father. The goal is not merely that a guilty defendant receives an external legal status. The goal is that **a lost son is restored to the Father's house.**

That is exactly the picture Jesus gives in the prodigal son.

The son leaves the father's house.

The son becomes dead and lost.

The son repents and returns.

The father runs to him, embraces him, forgives him, clothes him, restores him, and receives him back into the family.

The father says:

LUKE 15:24 *"This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."*

Jesus does not portray salvation primarily as a judge issuing a courtroom verdict while the sinner remains merely legally covered. He portrays salvation as a father restoring a son to the family.

That is not a small point. That is the central message of the New Testament.

The Gospel is not merely that God declares guilty criminals righteous. It is that **God makes enemies into children, slaves into sons, strangers into heirs, and sinners into members of His household.**

John says:

JOHN 1:12 *"But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to BECOME CHILDREN OF GOD."*

Paul says:

EPHESIANS 1:4 *"In love (5) he predestined us FOR ADOPTION TO HIMSELF AS SONS through Jesus Christ."*

Paul says again:

EPHESIANS 2:18 *"Through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. (19) So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and MEMBERS OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF GOD."*

So, biblically, I do not see how adoption can be pushed into a mere "fruit" category.

Paul, Luke and John are very clear that adoption is not merely something that follows justification externally, at a later point in time.

Adoption IS the familial form of our salvation.

ADOPTION EXPLAINS WHAT JUSTIFICATION IS for: restoration to the Father, union with Christ, reception of the Spirit, and inheritance as sons.

This also matters for obedience.

In a COURTROOM-ONLY MODEL, obedience is often reduced to "evidence." But in a FAMILY MODEL, obedience is not merely evidence of a legal verdict. IT IS THE ACTUAL LIFE OF SONSHIP.

A son does not obey his father in order to replace his father's love. Nor does he obey merely to provide evidence that a legal transaction occurred. He obeys because he lives in the father's house, receives the father's life, and is called to remain in that familial relationship.

That is why Scripture can say both:

PHILIPPIANS 2:13 *"It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*

and:

PHILIPPIANS 2:12 *"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling."*

Both are true.

The Christian life has two sides:

First, everything is grace. In our initial justification, God gives life, faith, love, sonship, the Spirit, and the grace to obey.

Second, man remains free. He can cooperate with grace, or he can resist grace, grieve the Spirit, quench the Spirit, fall away, and leave the Father's house.

That is why Scripture gives real warnings to believers:

GALATIANS 5:4 *"You have fallen away from grace."*

ROMANS 8:13 *"If you live according to the flesh you will die."*

JOHN 15:2 *"Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away."*

JOHN 15:4 *"Abide in me."*

These warnings make sense in a covenant family context. A son can remain in the Father's house, or he can walk away like the prodigal son.

That is also why Catholicism cannot accept the idea that true faith automatically and inevitably produces obedience in such a way that the believer's free cooperation becomes irrelevant. Scripture never presents grace as muscling a person into holiness. Grace enables, heals, strengthens, calls, warns, and empowers — but it does not destroy love, freedom, or filial responsibility.

So, I think your model still has three problems.

First, it places justification almost entirely in a legal courtroom category, while Scripture repeatedly presents salvation as adoption, sonship, inheritance, covenant, and restoration to the Father.

Second, it now treats adoption as a result after justification, when Scripture presents adoption as one of the central purposes and realities of redemption itself.

Third, it treats obedience mainly as evidence of prior justification, while Scripture presents obedience as the lived reality of sonship, the definition of abiding, and the necessary grace-enabled response of children who remain in the Father's house.

So I would ask again:

Where does Scripture teach that adoption is merely a fruit or result of justification?

Where does Scripture say the family context is secondary to the courtroom context?

And where does Scripture teach that God justifies us only as Judge, rather than restoring us as Father?

The Catholic position is not that works replace Christ. The Catholic position is that Christ saves us so completely that He immediately brings us into the Father's family, gives us the Spirit of adoption, pours love into our hearts, and enables us to live as sons.

That is not "*Christ plus works*."

That is Christ making us children of God.

I await your reply.



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

If you would like to discuss with Ryan, he offers viewer chats on the YouTube livestreams.

Be sure to look for the streamyard link in the chat box.

Viewer chats start about mid-way through the stream.

Stream times (in your timezone) are listed here: <https://www.needgod.net/outreaches>



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Sorry, I'm not sure who posted this...

Ryan and I are in the middle of an extended conversation.

I'm positive Ryan would be the first to let you know that it's going a bit deeper than what livestreams usually result in.

If it's OK I'll just continue here, and wait for Ryan to provide his next reply.

God bless.

Paul



NeedGod.net PROTESTANT REPLY

Hey Paul, you haven't been speaking to Ryan this whole time, you have been speaking to Isaac 😊

[Isaac is apparently one of Ryan's team at NeedGod.net]



Paul Newcombe CATHOLIC REPLY

Oh... while talking to you has been excellent... really, it was polite and very constructive the entire time 👍, I was actually intending to speak to Ryan, since he's the person who is online spending a lot of time attempting to disprove Catholic justification.

I value your soul as much as anyone's so if you would like to continue our discussion, I'm more than happy to do that 👍

You and Ryan appear to be on the exact same page... and our chat is a very good example of the different interpretations of Sacred Scripture provided by Catholicism and conservative Protestantism.

So, as a final attempt to reach out to Ryan (and possibly chat with him directly in writing), I've made a well formatted pdf of our conversation. Is there an email I can use to send Ryan a copy? With an invitation obtain his thoughts?

Appreciate you brother. Paul

**Isaac suggested that I could email Ryan via the NeedGod.Net website.
He did not continue our discussion / debate.**