Linguistic Problems with Lordship Salvation in James 2:14–26

Fides ergo, sola est quæ iustificet: fides tamen quæ iustificat, non est sola.
"Faith, therefore, alone is what justifies; however, the faith which justifies is not alone."

John Calvin penned this statement in 1547[a] and this errant doctrine has been looking for a proof text ever since. One passage that theologians appeal to is James 2:14–26.

Lordship Salvationists are quick to quote from this passage: "Can such faith save them?" (James 2:14b NIV), "Even the demons believe" (James 2:19b), "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24b). But is "such faith" justified from the Greek? Did James appeal to demons or did his opponents? Does the Greek say "not by faith alone" or "not only justified by faith?"

Much ink has been spilled and trees have been killed to print volumes dedicated to James 2:14–26. I have explained elsewhere why James is not making works a criterion for salvation,[b] but in this paper, I will provide a Greek text and apparatus with an English translation and a commentary that focuses on relevant issues in the Greek text.

Introduction to the Translation

The Greek text comes from the Robinson/Pierpont Majority Text. The apparatus is a combination of Hodges/Farstad with SBL. The Hodges/Farstad apparatus has the strength of comparing the majority text to the handful of Alexandrian text-type manuscripts that often overrule the majority (the critical manuscripts relevant to this passage are ℵ, A, B, and C; where three or four agree, the Ҽ siglum is used). The SBL apparatus has the strength of showing which influential versions of the GNT choose which variants. There were a few places where the Hodges/Farstad apparatus did not include a variation (James 2:14, 26), so I reconstructed the apparatus in these locations by following van Soden and looking up the text in Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus.

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[a] Ioannes Calvinus, *Acta Synodi Tridentinae. Cum Antidoto Per Joannem Calvinum.* (1547), 232.

[b] Paul Miles, "Does James Make Works a Criterion for Eternal Life?" in *Current Issues in Soteriology* (Kyiv: ISBH, 2021), 86–109.

Preliminary notes on πίστις

In English, we have two words, *faith* and *belief*, but in Greek, there is only πίστις. The distinction between faith and belief is a rarity among languages and it turns out that the English word *faith* has been overwhelmingly preferred for the translation of the Greek word πίστις: The NKJV has *faith* 391 times (304 times in the New Testament), but *belief* only once (2 Thess. 2:13).

We in the GES community understand that *faith* and *belief* are synonymous, others are trying to redefine faith. Some atheists would say that faith is superstition while some confessing Christians would redefine faith to include works. Salvation through faith is a myth to the former and a work to the latter.[c] Perhaps because the noun *belief* is closer to the verb *believe*, *belief* does not have the loaded connotations that come with *faith* and so *belief* is the better word choice.

As a principle, it seems that Greek nominals often have passive connotations related to their verbal cognates. Take, for example, the verb λέγω "to speak." The related noun λόγος is typically translated "word," because a λόγος is a thing that is spoken. In contrast to the passive noun, there is an active participle, ὁ λέγων, "he who says" (e.g. Matt. 7:21; Rom. 2:22; 1 John 2:4, 6, 9). This same concept can be applied to πίστις and πιστεύω. The verb πιστεύω means "to believe" so the noun πίστις is "a thing that is believed" while the participle ὁ πιστεύων means "he who believes." Of course, this treatment is somewhat simplistic—the participle can be used adjectively and there are legitimate uses of more abstract treatments of the nouns.

Preliminary notes on the article with πίστις

Articular faith has been badly mistreated in James 2. The NIV poses the question, "Can such faith save them?" from μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; in James 2:14. The implications in the translation are foreign to the original Greek. The translation implies that faith goes

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[c] For responses to other myths about faith, see Robert Wilkin, *The Ten Most Misunderstood Words in the Bible* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2012), 1–22.

beyond belief and includes works, so that if someone does not have works then he has a different kind of faith than what is necessary for salvation.

This translation treats articular and anarthrous belief consistently throughout: with the article, it is "the belief" and without the article, it is "a belief." This brings about an awkwardness when possessive pronouns come into play. To maintain the article, verse 18 could have "show me the belief of you by the works of you," but this English would be insufferable. Instead, I have followed the English grammar standard of allowing the possessive pronoun to override the article. Except for the vocative ἀδελφοί μου in verse 14, every occurrence of possessive pronouns in this text accompanies an article for the object that is possessed.

Preliminary notes on salvation and justification.

The words *save* and *justify* have an array of applications, but some Bible readers try to restrict these terms to the doctrine of salvation from hell. In this translation, I have used the less loaded synonyms, *rescue* and *consider righteous*.

Preliminary notes on grammatical terminology

This paper deals much with Greek articles, so two pairs of terms are worth defining. The first is articular and anarthrous; the second is anaphoric and generic.

Articular means in the presence of an article and anarthrous means without an article.

The second pair of terms deals with classifications of articles. An anaphoric article refers to something that has already been mentioned. Take, for example, the English joke, "A mushroom walks into a bar. The bartender says to the mushroom, 'Hey, we don't serve mushrooms here,' so the mushroom says, 'Why not? I'm a fun guy.'" The first occurrence of *mushroom* was anarthrous, being the first mention of him, then every time after that, *mushroom* was articular in an anaphoric sense as the article referred back to the mushroom that was already introduced.[d]

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[d] It also happens that *bartender* is also articular, but for different reasons. The audience is aware that a bar has a bartender, so he can be introduced with an articular form.

A generic article distinguishes classes from other classes. By way of comparison in English, if one was to say, "The lion and the tiger share a common ancestor on Noah's ark," the meaning is not that there is one particular lion and one particular tiger with a common ancestor, but rather that everything in the lion class and everything in the tiger class are related.

The Greek Text

¹⁴ Τί[e] τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγῃ τις ἔχειν, ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχῃ; Μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν; ¹⁵ Ἐὰν δὲ[f] ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι ὦσιν[g] τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, ¹⁶ εἴπῃ δέ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν, Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος;[h] ¹⁷ Οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔργα ἔχῃ,[i] νεκρά ἐστιν καθ' ἑαυτήν. ¹⁸ Ἀλλ' ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω· δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου ἐκ[j] τῶν ἔργων σου,[k] κἀγώ δείξω σοι[l] ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν μου.[m] ¹⁹ Σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι ὁ θεός εἷς ἐστιν·[n] καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν, καὶ φρίσσουσιν. ²⁰ Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων νεκρά[o] ἐστιν; ²¹ Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; ²² Βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη; ²³ Καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφὴ ἡ λέγουσα, Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη. ²⁴ Ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν[p] ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. ²⁵ Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους, καὶ ἑτέρᾳ ὁδῷ ἐκβαλοῦσα; ²⁶ Ὥσπερ γὰρ[q] τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρόν ἐστιν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων[r] νεκρά ἐστιν.

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e 2:14 Τί τὸ ὄφελος 𝔐ℵA; Τί - ὄφελος B, WH, SBL; - Τὸ ὄφελος C*
f 2:15 Ἐὰν δὲ ἀδελφὸς MAC; ἐὰν - ἀδελφὸς ℵB, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
g 2:15 λειπόμενοι ὦσιν 𝔐ℵA; λειπόμενοι - B, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
h 2:16 τί τὸ ὄφελος 𝔐ℵA; Treg NIV; τί - ὄφελος BC*, WH, SBL
i 2:17 ἔργα ἔχῃ 𝔐; ἔχῃ ἔργα, Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
j 2:18 ἐκ 𝔐; χωρὶς Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
k 2:18 τῶν ἔργων σου 𝔐C; τῶν ἔργων - Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
l 2:18 δείξω σοι 𝔐AC; σοι δείξω ℵb, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL

m 2:18 πίστιν μου 𝔐A; πίστιν - Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
n 2:19 ὁ θεὸς εἷς ἐστιν M; εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός ℵA, Treg, NIV, SBL; εἷς - θεός ἐστιν B, WH
o 2:20 νεκρά 𝔐ℵA; ἀργή BC, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
p 2:24 Ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν 𝔐; ὁρᾶτε - Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL
q 2:26 Ὥσπερ γὰρ 𝔐Ϲ, Treg, NIV, SBL; ὥσπερ – B, WH
r 2:26 χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων 𝔐AC, Treg; χωρὶς - ἔργων ℵB, WH, NIV, SBL

An English Translation

¹⁴ What is the profit, my brothers, if someone says he has a belief, but does not have works? Can the belief rescue him? ¹⁵ But if a brother or sister is present—being naked and destitute of a day's food—¹⁶ but any of you say to him or her, "Go away in peace, warm yourself and be filled," yet does not give them the requisites for the body, what is the profit? ¹⁷ Likewise the belief, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

¹⁸ But someone will say:

> You have a belief and I have works; show me your belief by your works and I will show you my belief by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that *ʾădônây ʾechâd*; you do well. The demons both believe and tremble.

²⁰ But do you want to know, oh vain man, that the belief without works is dead?

²¹ Was not Abraham our father considered righteous by works, having offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²² You see that the belief cooperated with his works, and by the works the belief was matured. ²³ Both the Scripture was fulfilled (the one saying, "Abraham believed God and it was itemized to him unto righteousness) and he was called, "a friend of God." ²⁴ You see then that a man [also] is considered righteous by works and not only [considered righteous] by a belief.

²⁵ Yet furthermore, was Rahab the prostitute also considered righteous by works, having received the messengers and having sent them out to a different way? ²⁶ So just as the body without a spirit is dead, likewise the belief without the works is dead.

James 2:14
¹⁴ Τί τὸ ὄφελος, ἀδελφοί μου, ἐὰν πίστιν λέγῃ τις ἔχειν, ἔργα δὲ μὴ ἔχῃ; Μὴ δύναται ἡ πίστις σῶσαι αὐτόν;

¹⁴ What is the profit, my brothers, if someone says he has a belief, but does not have works? Can the belief rescue him?

This opening statement introduces "a belief" and then immediately refers back to it as "the belief." This is a second mention or anaphoric use of the article. Translations which use "that belief" can be confusing as they could mean "that [quality of] belief" or "that [particular] belief [which was just mentioned]." If the article is translated as "that," then the reader is left seeking answers to questions that would not occur in the Greek. Zane Hodges wrote well that the "attempt to single out 2:14 for specialized treatment carries its own refutation on its face. It must be classed as a *truly desperate* effort to support an insupportable interpretation."[s] When the article is translated with the English definite article *the*, the confusion is relieved. As one specialist in Koine Greek articles puts it, "Rather than say the article particularizes an abstract noun, it is more accurate to say it characterizes the noun as concrete, as pertaining to a particular instance of faith."[t]

So what is the belief in James 2:14b? It is the same belief as the one that is mentioned in James 2:14a. This is not a specific doctrine, but rather James is speaking of any doctrine. James' point is that if someone has a belief—any belief regardless of what he believes—but does not have works, then that thing which he believes is unable to rescue him.

This rhetorical question, "Can the belief rescue him?" anticipates a negative response. Zane Hodges paraphrases the question as "Faith can't save him, can it?"[u] The usual assumption is that salvation in James 2:14 is salvation from hell, but this assumption is a leap with no contextual basis. This incorrect assumption is often followed by a bit of correct Greek exegesis that ends in disaster. For example, Thorwald Lorenzen begins with an incorrect assumption about what James is developing: "Is it enough if someone *says* or *confesses* that he has faith? Can a faith which is not accompanied by deeds 'profit' *before God*? Can it save

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[s] Zane Hodges, *The Epistle of James: Proven Character through Testing* (Irving, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 1994), 60.

[t] Ronald D. Peters, *The Greek Article: A Functional Grammar of ὁ-Items in the Greek New Testament with Special Emphasis on the Greek Article* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 228.

[u] Ibid.

man in the last judgment?"[v] These are good questions, but they are answered elsewhere in Scripture, not here in James. Lorenzen follows up, "The original Greek makes it clear (by the use of μή rather than οὐ) that the rhetorical question calls for a negative answer: No!"[w] Lorenzen is correct that the rhetorical answer demands a negative response, but in his miscontextualized question about the last judgment, the answer leads to a works-based salvation from hell. About salvation in James, Bob Wilkin has written well that "James uses the word *save* five times (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15, 20). All five refer to salvation *from physical death and from temporal judgment.*"[x]

James 2:15–17
¹⁵ Ἐὰν δὲ ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφὴ γυμνοὶ ὑπάρχωσιν καὶ λειπόμενοι ὦσιν τῆς ἐφημέρου τροφῆς, ¹⁶ εἴπῃ δέ τις αὐτοῖς ἐξ ὑμῶν, Ὑπάγετε ἐν εἰρήνῃ, θερμαίνεσθε καὶ χορτάζεσθε, μὴ δῶτε δὲ αὐτοῖς τὰ ἐπιτήδεια τοῦ σώματος, τί τὸ ὄφελος; ¹⁷ Οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔργα ἔχῃ, νεκρά ἐστιν καθ' ἑαυτήν.
¹⁵ But if a brother or sister is present—being naked and destitute of a day's food—¹⁶ but any of you say to him or her, "Go away in peace, warm yourself and be filled," yet does not give them the requisites for the body, what is the profit? ¹⁷ Likewise the belief, if it does not have works, is dead by itself.

James gives a hypothetical example of a need and a hypothetical response. The hypothetical need is food and clothing and the hypothetical response is words that are pious but empty.

Verse 14 has the structure with Τί τὸ ὄφελος... ἐὰν... and verse 15 opens with Ἐὰν... and verse 16 closes with ...τί τὸ ὄφελος; The Alexandrian texts are divided here and this is, unfortunately, missing from the Hodges/Farstad apparatus, but can be reconstructed to show: 2:14 Τί τὸ ὄφελος 𝕸אA; Τί - ὄφελος B, WH, SBL; - Τὸ ὄφελος C* and 2:16 τί τὸ ὄφελος 𝕸אA; Treg NIV; τί - ὄφελος BC*, WH, SBL. With one noteable exception, the manuscripts are consistent to use the same wording (with or without τὸ) to introduce verse 14 and close verse 16. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus is the exception. The original text of verse 14a seems to have been Τὸ ὄφελος, which was corrected to Τί τὸ ὄφελος, followed by τί ὄφελος at the end of 16. Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus is probably the weakest testimony to the text in this passage, so these variants may be disregarded without losing much.

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[v] Thorwald Lorenzen, "Faith Without Works does not count before God! James 2¹⁴⁻²⁶" in *The Expository Times* 89 (May, 1978), 231.

[w] Ibid. See also Zane Hodges' comments in Zane Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation* second ed (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 243–245.

[x] Robert Wilkin, *A Gospel of Doubt: The Legacy of John MacArthur's The Gospel According to Jesus* (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2015), 266.
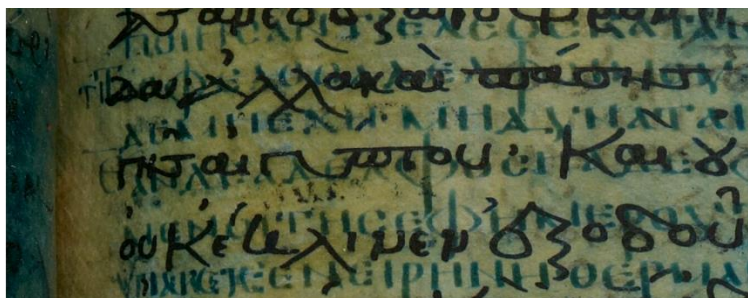
ⲦⲞⲞⲫⲈⲖⲞⲤ corrected to ⲦⲒⲦⲞⲞⲫⲈⲖⲞⲤ in James 2:14 in Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus. Available online at gallica.bnf.fr.
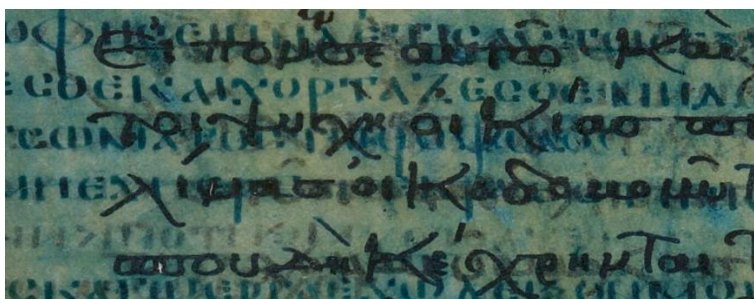
ⲦⲒⲞⲫⲈⲖⲞⲤ in James 2:16 in Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus. Available online at gallica.bnf.fr.

The structure of Τί τὸ ὄφελος... ἐὰν... / Ἐὰν... τί τὸ ὄφελος leads to the conclusion, "Likewise the belief, if it does not have works, is dead by itself" (2:17). Here is the articular belief again and it follows the suit of articular belief in verse 14b, which refers to an undefined belief in 14a.

James has not yet mentioned any particular belief; rather, he has been speaking of any belief as they are all equally inadequate to do anything on their own.

James 2:18–19
[18] Ἀλλ᾽ ἐρεῖ τις, Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις, κἀγὼ ἔργα ἔχω· δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου ἐκ τῶν ἔργων σου, κἀγώ δείξω σοι ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν μου. **[19]** Σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι ὁ θεός εἷς ἐστιν· καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ τὰ δαιμόνια πιστεύουσιν, καὶ φρίσσουσιν.
[18] But someone will say:
You have a belief and I have works; show me your belief by your works and I will show you my belief by my works. **[19]** You believe that ʾădônây ʾechâd; you do well. The demons both believe and tremble.

In the translation, I have taken advantage of the English convention of the block quote to set apart the hypothetical objection. Everyone agrees that the quote begins after "but someone will say," but there is disagreement about where the quote ends and whether or not there is only one objection. A similar construction is evident elsewhere in the Bible and

extrabiblical literature[y] that would indicate that the diatribe ends with the *ad hominem* response, "But do you want to know, oh vain man…" While the beginning and end of the block quote are significant, it is possible to disagree on the nature of the objection and still reject works-assisted merit or condition.[z]

In this quote, the objector introduces an argument, so the first mention of "a belief" is anarthrous before a switch to the articular forms which, as noted above, are swallowed in English by the possessive pronoun.

The belief begins as undefined, then the objector gives an example of a belief in the phrases Σὺ πίστιν ἔχεις… Σὺ πιστεύεις ὅτι "You have a belief… You believe that…" The particular doctrine that is being believed is apparently from the *shema* in the Majority Text (ὁ θεός εἷς ἐστιν M; εἷς ἐστιν ὁ θεός אA,[aa] Treg, NIV, SBL; εἷς ὁ θεὸς ἐστιν C;[bb] following Deut. 6:4 שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד׃; LXX Ἄκουε, Ισραηλ· κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστιν·). The translation here follows liturgical Hebrew *ʾădônây ʾechâd*. Some manuscripts contain a statement of monotheism "there is one God" (εἷς - θεός ἐστιν B,[cc] WH), which, being another fundamental doctrine, is a variant that has no real effect on James' point.

The hypothetical objector is trying to draw up a most basic belief that even the demons have in common with the congregation and show that the resulting works are different. The demon both believes and trembles, while the congregant believes but does not tremble. The foolish argument that he is making is that one cannot look at the resulting works to determine the belief behind the work since the work itself varies from party to party.[dd] This is a foolish objection, but it is faced by advocates of faith alone in Christ alone soteriology.

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[y] Cf. 1 Cor. 15:35–36; Rom. 9:19–20; 4 Macc. 2:24–3:1; Shep. 3.8–9.

[z] For example, see Moses Onwubiko, *James: Faith Without Works is Dead an Urgent Call to Practical Christianity* (Nashville, TN: Grace Evangelistic Ministries, 2011), 207–218.

[aa] Also 𝔓[74], 2464, vg, syr[p], cop[sa].

[bb] Also δ48, α162, syr[h].

[cc] ALso α364, α461, α70, 2412, 2495.

[dd] A significant textual variant to this point occurs in James 2:18, δεῖξόν μοι τὴν πίστιν σου ἐκ τῶν ἔργων σου, κἀγώ δείξω σοι ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν μου. The first ἐκ has been replaced by χωρὶς in Є and is the choice of WH, Treg, NIV, and SBL. Many translations prior to 1588 use ἐκ rather than χωρὶς, so perhaps a footnote in Theodore Beza's *Testamentum Novum* (Geneva: Hebru Estienne, 1588) is beneficial. It seems that Beza had an interpretation that was recommitted to χωρὶς as is evident in his note: Absque, χωρις. Recepta & vsitats scriprura est ἐκ τῶν ἔργων σου, quae sententiam gignit admodum frigida & ieiunam, nisi ἀλλά interpretemur pro σου, igitur. Itaque sequutus & Syri interpretis & Latinae Vulatae versionis auctoritatem, & Parisiensem Colinei editionem Graecam, pro ἐκ reposui χωρις, vt sit haec huius loci sententia, Tu fidem nullis operibus probatam iactas. Ego opera profero. Tu igitur ostende mihi quibus argumentis probari possit illa tua fides operum testimonio carens. Nam quod ad me attinet, facile mihi fuerit fide meam ex operibus meis ostendere.

The objector has a progression in articles that is worth noting: ἔργα ἔχω... δείξω σοι ἐκ τῶν ἔργων μου τὴν πίστιν μου. *Works* is anarthrous in the first mention, then articular for the anaphoric second mention as would be anticipated. Then the first mention of the objector's belief is articular. Either this is the same belief in the *shema*, or it is a belief in contradiction to the *shema*. It is not a contradictory doctrine for at least three reasons: first, such a man would not be allowed in the assembly; second, this would diminish the objector's point of comparing one belief with two works; and third, the objector recognizes the *shema* as true as even the demons believe. So, the objector shares the belief, but is trying to justify a life without works. This is an example that the Greek word for belief means *belief*; if works were necessarily a part of belief, then the objector wouldn't build his case around this word being able to exist without the works that Lordship Salvationists demand.

James 2:20
²⁰ Θέλεις δὲ γνῶναι, ὦ ἄνθρωπε κενέ, ὅτι ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων νεκρά ἐστιν;
²⁰ But do you want to know, oh vain man, that the belief without works is dead?

Next James uses articular belief, "the belief without works is dead." The article is either anaphoric referring to the *shema*, or it is generic, referring to belief in general. In this case, it is more likely generic and opens an inclusio that concludes with another generic article for belief in James 2:26; in the following verses, he will provide support using Abraham and Rahab as examples, and then he will conclude by repeating that "the belief without works is dead."

The objector is trying to justify a life without works, so now James explains why works are beneficial. There is a textual variant that is weak and unlikely to be the original wording; however, it does provide insight to the interpretation here. The variant is ἀργή "useless" and while it is only attested by BC and insufficient for Ϲ, it is the choice of WH, Treg, NIV, and SBL. This reading is a stretch for those who prefer it, but despite the unlikelihood of its origin with James, it does show a likely early interpretation that worked its way into the manuscripts. Apparently, early scribes thought that "dead" meant "useless," which is correct. Faith does not have a pulse, so it does not die in a normal biological sense, so what James is saying is that believing the *shema* or any other doctrine is useless in his readers' situation.

Faith alone is beneficial to the unbeliever if it is faith alone in Christ alone for eternal life. James' readers are not unbelievers and the belief in question is not salvific. Many have gotten derailed in James 2:20 and have turned the conversation into soteriological sufficiency of faith alone in Christ alone, but that simply is not warranted by the context.

James 2:21–22
21 Ἀβραὰμ ὁ πατὴρ ἡμῶν οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ἀνενέγκας Ἰσαὰκ τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον; **22** Βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη;
21 Was not Abraham our father considered righteous by works, having offered up Isaac his son on the altar? 22 You see that the belief cooperated with his works, and by the works the belief was matured.

As will be seen in the following verses, "considered righteous" here refers to men declaring Abraham righteous when they called him "a friend of God" after he "offered up Isaac his son on the altar." This declaration of righteousness is different from when God declared Abraham righteous through faith.

The first occurrence of works is anarthrous "Was not Abraham our father considered righteous by works..." Here, the works have not yet been defined, but the next phrase defines the works as "having offered up Isaac his son on the altar."

Both belief and works are articular in "You see that the belief cooperated with his works." Similarly to James 2:18, the English possessive "his" trumps the article in the translation of τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ. The two occurrences of articular works in vs. 22 both refer back to anarthrous works in vs. 21, so it is the works of offering up Isaac on the altar. James speaks of this event in the plural, perhaps because of several steps that occurred in the narrative of Genesis 22:1–19.

There are two instances of articular belief in James 2:22. The belief relates to the works. Since the works are established as the works of Genesis 22:1–19 and since these works are said to mature the belief, the belief must be the belief that is related to sacrificing Isaac on the altar. When Isaac asked about the sacrificial lamb, Abraham said אֱלֹהִים יִרְאֶה־לּוֹ הַשֶּׂה לְעֹלָה "God will see for Himself a lamb for the burnt offering" (Gen. 22:8) and then after the offering Abraham named the place יְהֹוָהיִרְאֶה, and a saying was instituted, בְּהַר יְהֹוָה יֵרָאֶה "on the mountain of the Lord it shall be seen" (Gen. 22:14).

God had already told Abraham, בְּיִצְחָק יִקָּרֵא לְךָ זָרַע "in Isaac your seed will be called." Abraham could conclude that since Isaac would go on to have children, then he would not be the sacrifice: a resurrected Isaac would not have children, while a resuscitated Isaac would diminish the sacrifice.

James makes two comments about the belief and the works here. First, "the belief cooperated with his works" and second "by the works the belief was matured." The articular belief is the mental ascent to this doctrine that Isaac would go on to have children. The articular works that were based on this belief were the works in Genesis 22, everything from rising early in morning to saddling the donkey, to splitting wood (Gen. 22:3), and so forth, all the way to taking the knife to slay his son (Gen. 22:10). That the belief cooperated with his works is to say that this belief served as the rationale for these works. That the belief was matured by the works indicates an improvement to the belief. This is another problem with the Lordship Salvation redefinition of faith: belief cannot be matured by works unless belief can exist in an immature state apart from works.

James 2:23–24
²³ Καὶ ἐπληρώθη ἡ γραφὴ ἡ λέγουσα, Ἐπίστευσεν δὲ Ἀβραὰμ τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη. ²⁴ Ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν[ee] ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος, καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον.
²³ Both the Scripture was fulfilled (the one saying, "Abraham believed God and it was itemized to him unto righteousness) and he was called, "a friend of God." ²⁴ You see then that a man [also] is considered righteous by works and not only [considered righteous] by a belief.

James uses a Καὶ... καὶ... construction which I have translated with "Both... and..." Two things occur in verse 23: first "the Scripture was fulfilled" and second "he was called." In verse 24, James uses the adverb μόνον, which refers back to the verb δικαιοῦται.

The New World Translation pushes Jehovah's Witness theology into James 2:24 with "You see that a man is to be declared righteous by works and not by faith alone." With this translation, *alone* modifies *faith*, so it is an assault on the Protestant doctrine of salvation through *faith alone*. However, the Greek does not allow this, for if *alone* was an adjective, it would need to be the feminine genitive adjective μόνης to modify πίστεως.

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ee 2:24 Ὁρᾶτε τοίνυν 𝔐; ὁρᾶτε - Ϲ, WH, Treg, NIV, SBL

The Lordship Salvationist is only slightly better here. One Lordship Salvation advocate writes, "James, however, is not speaking of forensic justification and the imputation of righteousness. He is not speaking about good works that are the ground of our salvation." So far, we agree! But he continues, "Rather, he is speaking about good works that are the necessary evidence of our salvation."[ff] The existence of "necessary evidence" is an invention in the minds of theologians that is void of solid biblical support and results in a similar situation as those who see works as meritorious.

The Greek has οὐκ... μόνον "not only." James draws a clear distinction between two occasions of δικαιοῦται: once when Abraham believed and once when he worked. It would have been difficult to look at Abraham's life between these two occasions and say that he was justified before God, but this is not problematic because works do not determine faith.

James 2:25
²⁵ Ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ Ῥαὰβ ἡ πόρνη οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἐδικαιώθη, ὑποδεξαμένη τοὺς ἀγγέλους, καὶ ἑτέρᾳ ὁδῷ ἐκβαλοῦσα;
²⁵ Yet furthermore, was Rahab the prostitute also considered righteous by works, having received the messengers and having sent them out to a different way?

That James mentions Rahab's former profession is either redundant or significant. It could be that James invokes her former prostitution and then uses a pair of verbs that draw a parallel to the work of a prostitute, but applies them to repentance from prostitution: she received men (ὑποδέχομαι), then sent them out (ἐκβάλλω). James uses the verb ὑποδέχομαι, which usually means to receive by extending hospitality, but it could be a convenient word choice since there is an alternate application that is used "of a woman, *to conceive.*"[gg] Without the prefix, the verb δέχομαι can also carry the hospitality connotation (Luke 9:5, 48, 53; 10:8, 10; 16:4, 9; 18:17), but James chose to use ὑποδέχομαι, perhaps as a play on words with the conception definition. The word choice for "having sent them out" (ἐκβαλοῦσα) is also interesting, as ἐκβάλλω essentially means "to throw out." Then there is the prefix pair ὑπο- followed by ἐκ- "under" followed by "out." These are actions that would have been

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[ff] John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systemic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, Il: Crossway, 2017), 622.
[gg] Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1889), ὑποδέχομαι. Available online at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=u%28pode%2Fxomai&fromdoc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0058 (Accessed December 14, 2022).

similar to her work as a prostitute—receiving men under her then tossing them out—but instead of continuing in her life of prostitution, she turned to good works.

James supposes that his audience knows the narrative of Joshua 2, so he does not need to state the belief that was the basis of Rahab's deed here. She said, "I know that Jehovah has given you the land" (יָדַעְתִּי כִּי־נָתַן יְהוָה לָכֶם אֶת־הָאָרֶץ Josh. 2:9b). This is a statement of belief. There is information, "that Jehovah has given you the land," and she subscribes to this as true, saying, "I know." Then she goes on to describe that she knows this because they had heard about the Red Sea, the exodus from Egypt, and what happened to the kings of the Amorites (Josh. 2:10). Rahab summarized her doctrine "Jehovah your God, He is the God in the heaven from above and on the earth from below" (יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הוּא אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־ הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת Josh. 2:11b). This doctrinal statement implies an acceptance as true whatever Jehovah says, which would include everything He said about Messiah, assuming Rahab heard it. God would consider her righteous because of this belief, but men consider her righteous because of her works.

Works in this verse is anarthrous, but immediately defined as receiving and sending the messengers.

James 2:26
²⁶ Ὥσπερ γὰρ[hh] τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρόν ἐστιν, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων[ii] νεκρά ἐστιν.
²⁶ **So just as the body without a spirit is dead, likewise the belief without the works is dead.**

The use of the article with the body should give insight into the use of the article with the belief. There was not a body that has previously been introduced, so James is probably using a generic article here rather than anaphoric. Assuming James wants to use articular belief in the same fashion, "the belief" in James 2:26 would be the class of beliefs in general, not a particular doctrine.

There is a shift from an anarthrous and singular spirit to the articular and plural works. Perhaps an easier reading is χωρὶς - ἔργων which is found in the minority of אB, but still preferred by WH, NIV, SBL; however, the easy reading is not preferred by eclectic criticism, much less should it overthrow the majority of manuscripts. This shift seems to be James'

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hh 2:26 Ὥσπερ γὰρ 𝔐Є, Treg, NIV, SBL; ὥσπερ – B, WH   ii 2:26 χωρὶς τῶν ἔργων 𝔐AC, Treg; χωρὶς - ἔργων אB, WH, NIV, SBL

intention as both spirit and works are connected to an articular noun by the preposition χωρὶς.

This would imply that bodies have a different relationship to their spirits than beliefs have to their works. When someone is born, he has a body and a spirit that are intact but eventually, he will die and the two will separate. As seen in Abraham's example, works did not come about at the birth of belief; instead, belief is the basis for works. This relationship is expressed with the articular works. The works are those works which develop as a result of the belief as contrasted to a spirit which exists because the body exists.

The separation of belief from works is evident in Greek, which is another problem for those who want to redefine saving faith to include works.

Conclusion

This is not the final word on James 2:14–26, but hopefully, it is a contribution to the conversation. Upon a closer examination of the Greek text, it is apparent that there are serious linguistic problems with the Lordship Salvationist proposal that James is describing a saving faith that is different from a nonsaving faith.

There is still work to be done along these lines. Further research is needed to see what would happen if we purge English Bibles of the word *faith* altogether and replace it with *belief*. My points about Rahab need further scrutiny; the Liddel Scott reference cites Xenophon, but without any specific locations. Finally, a more exhaustive study of articles related to belief and works throughout the New Testament would be beneficial to supporting the New Testament definition of belief.