

HOW TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A LIVING FAITH AND A DEAD FAITH

James 2:14-26

Main Point:

In the church, there are two kinds of faith:

- (1) a real living faith that saves
- (2) a deceiving dead faith that damns

AN AUTOPSY OF DEAD FAITH (vv. 14-19)

Argument

① An Empty Profession of Faith (vv. 14-17)

¹⁴What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? ¹⁷Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself.

② A Consistent Pattern of Excuses (v. 18)

¹⁸But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

③ A Biblically Accurate Theology Without Fear (v. 19)

¹⁹You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, & shudder.

Transition (v. 20)

²⁰But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?

ESV: Do you want to be shown?

NIV: Do you want evidence?

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓
(ergon) (argos)
“faith without works doesn’t work”

PORTRAITS OF LIVING FAITH (vv. 21-26)

Argument

① Abraham (vv. 21-24)

²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²²You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

② Rahab (v. 25)

²⁵In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Concluding Statement (v. 26)

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

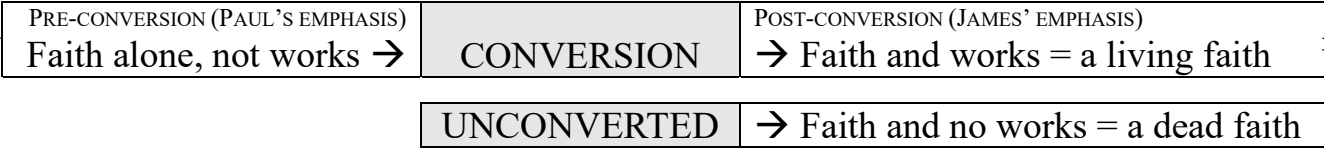
PORTRAIT #1 OF LIVING FAITH: ABRAHAM (vv. 21-24)

²¹Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar? ²²You see that faith was working with his works, and as a result of the works, faith was perfected; ²³and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,” and he was called the friend of God. ²⁴You see that **a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.**

Rom. 3:28 - **a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law**

Three approaches to resolve this apparent conflict:

- Paul & James _____ with one another (they are teaching two different doctrines)
- Paul & James are using different _____ for the word “justified”
 - “Justify” (*dikaioō*)
 - “to _____ someone to be righteous” (Paul’s usage)–
 - “to _____ someone to be righteous” (James’ usage)–
 - Paul (in Romans 3:28; 4:1-12 and Galatians 3:6-14) contrasts faith and works:
Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, not by works
 - James (in 2:14-26) contrasts a _____ faith with a _____ faith:
Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, but genuine faith is _____ alone



Peter Davids- “James does not argue for faith instead of works or works instead of faith or even works above faith, but for faith and works.”

Simon Kistemaker- “There is no actual conflict between the teaching of James and Paul. Their teaching runs parallel and do not cross. They are not antagonists facing each other with crossed swords, they stand back-to-back confronting different foes of the gospel. Paul is combatting a works-righteous legalism; James is battling easy-believism.”

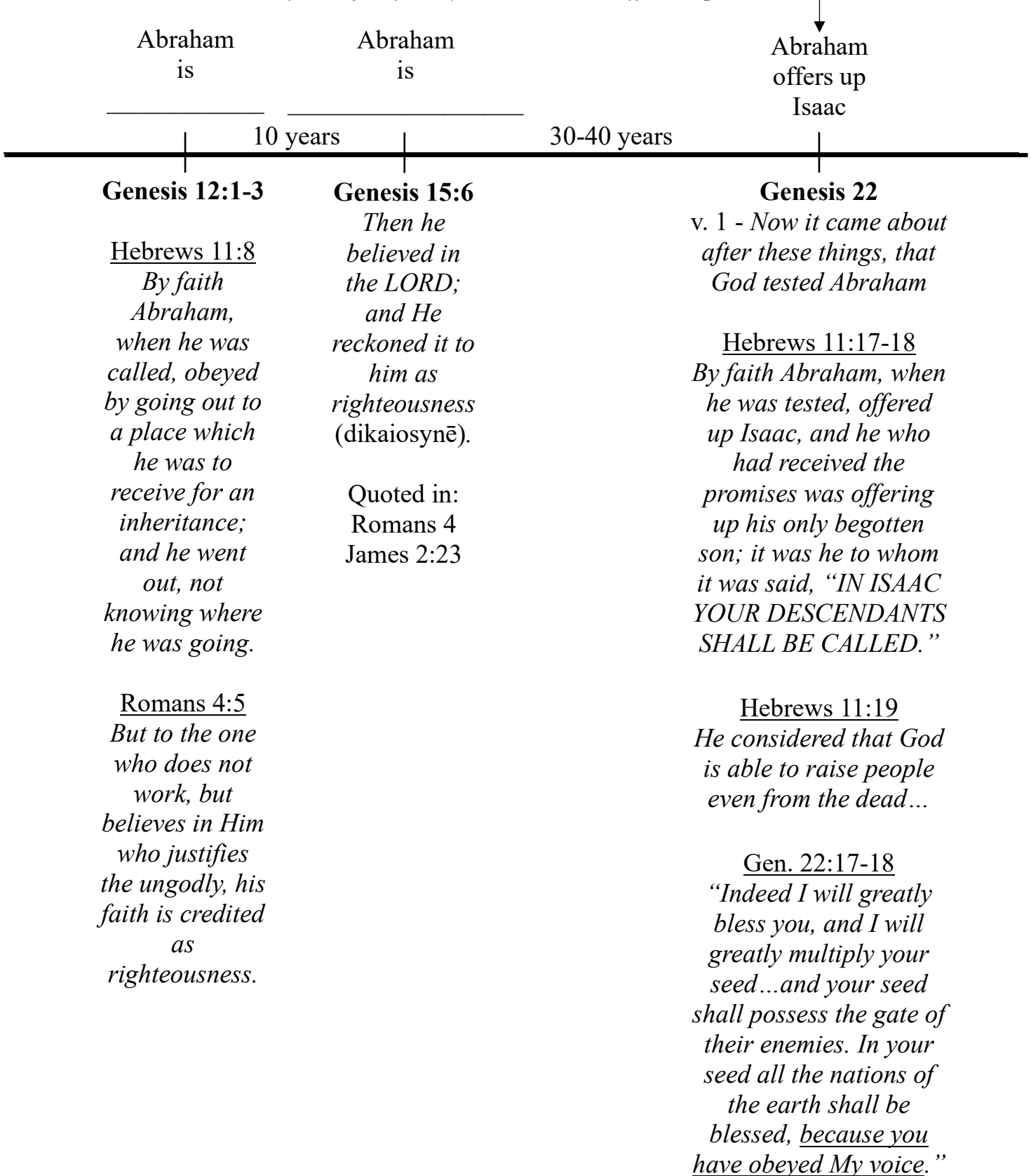
Danger #1:
 To believe that works secure your salvation

 Paul does not want his readers to trust in their

Danger #2:
 To believe that works do not necessarily need to follow genuine salvation

 James does not want his reader to trust in their

v. 21 - Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?



The point: Abraham's obedience did not _____ his justification, it _____ his justification, because his obedience showed that he really did believe in God.

Three conclusions from the sacrifice of Isaac:

v. 22a - *You see that faith was (continually) working with his works*

“to cooperate with” or “to work alongside”

Not faith + works = _____
but justification by faith + works = _____

Conclusion #1
Justification by
faith was already

when Abraham
offered up Isaac

v. 22b - *and as a result of the works, faith was perfected (teleioō)*

“to bring to maturity”

“to complete a task or mission”

“to reach an intended goal”

Conclusion #2
Abraham’s faith
was brought to its
intended

- James 1:2-4 - *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect (teleios) and complete, lacking in nothing.*
- Grammatical parallel
 - 1 John 4:12 - *...if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected (teleioō) in us.*

God’s love is perfected (reaches its intended goal)
when we express that love to others.

- The same thing is true with faith:
Faith reaches its intended goal when it expresses itself in obedience.

- Ephesians 2:8-10 - *⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.*

v. 23a - *and the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS”*

- C.E.B. Cranfield - *“It was by his faith that Abraham was justified. His works (his readiness to offer up Isaac in Genesis 22) did not earn his justification (about which we’ve already heard in Genesis 15); they were simply the fruit and the outward evidence of his faith.”*

Conclusion #3
Abraham’s faith
(recorded in Gen. 15:6)
was fulfilled by his obedience
(in Genesis 22)

v. 23b - ...and he was called the friend of God.

- 2 Chronicles 20:7 - *Did You not, O our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel and give it to the descendants of Abraham Your friend forever?*
- Isaiah 41:8 - *But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend*
- A friend of God is someone to whom He reveals Himself
 - John 15:15 - *No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.*
 - Genesis 18:17 - *The LORD said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?”*
 - John 8:56 - *Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.*

v. 24 - *You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.*

- Because James just quoted Genesis 15:6 (*Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness*), this cannot mean that:
 1. Abraham’s works were the _____ for his justification
 2. Faith plus works provides justification
- Remember the context of vv. 14-26: living faith vs. dead faith
 - vv. 21-23 - Abraham has a living faith (faith and works)
 - v. 24 - dead faith (faith alone, no works)
- Paraphrase: *You see that a man is justified (_____) by works and not by (a _____ of) faith alone.*

Summary: We are justified by _____, but our faith is justified by _____.

PORTRAIT #2 OF LIVING FAITH: RAHAB (v. 25)

²⁵*In the same way, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?*

Why would James choose a Gentile, Amorite, prostitute woman?

- Douglas Moo - *“Alongside the famous and celebrated ancestor of the Jewish people, a man, “the friend of God,” he places an obscure Gentile woman of low moral character. Thus he implies that anyone is capable of acting on his or her faith—whether a patriarch or a prostitute.”*
- John Calvin - *“James designedly put together two persons, so different in their character, in order to show more clearly, that no one, whatever may have been his or her condition, nation, or class in society, has ever been counted righteous without good works.”*

Why would Rahab hide the spies?

- She had _____
 - Hebrews 11:31 - *By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.*
 - Joshua 2:11b – *[Rahab said,] “for the LORD Your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”*

How did she demonstrate that faith?

- By what she _____
 - **v. 25b** - *she received the messengers and sent them out by another way*

v. 26 - *For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.*

When Martin Luther compared the letter of James with that of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, he said: *“It (James) is really an epistle of straw...for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.”* But in chapter 2, James was, in fact, defending the gospel. Luther may have gotten it wrong about James, but ironically, when he speaks about saving faith, he sounds a lot like James:

Martin Luther - *“O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works.”*