

Faith Wrought with His Works
James 2:21-26

James 2:21-26 reads, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

As we have noted, James 2:14 presents the primary concept for the paragraph of James 2:14-26 – to confront those believers who claim to maintain a walk of faith and fellowship with the Lord, but who lack the accompaniment of godly works in their daily living. As we have further noted, the entire rest of the paragraph then presents three arguments in order to support the primary concept of verse 14; and each of these three arguments ends with the same concluding thought – that a walk of faith without works of obedience is a spiritually dead walk of faith. On the one hand, the first two of these arguments encompass verses 15-20 and approach the matter from the negative perspective. These two arguments reveal various realities concerning a spiritually dead walk of faith. On the other hand, the third of these arguments encompasses verses 21-26 and approaches the matter from the positive perspective. This is the argument of recognition, and it focusses our attention upon two Old Testament examples whose walk of faith was accompanied with works of obedience. Even so, this argument of recognition reveals the spiritual profit in a walk of faith that is accompanied with works of obedience. So then, in this message let us consider the truths of this positive argument.

I. Works of obedience are the requirement for an approved faith.

James 2:21 begins the presentation of the first Old Testament example, asking the question, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?” Whether Abraham is mentioned herein as the physical father of the Israelite nation or as the spiritual father of all believers (as per Romans 4:11-12, 16), he certainly serves as a superb example for a faithful walk of faith with works of obedience. The historical event unto which James makes reference is that which is recorded in **Genesis 22**. It is the event wherein the Lord God tested Abraham’s love for the Lord and faith in the Lord by commanding him to sacrifice his only begotten and beloved son, Isaac, the son of promise, as a burnt offering upon Mount Moriah. **Genesis 22:3** reveals that in obedience unto the Lord, “Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.” Furthermore, **Genesis 22:9-10** reveals that when Abraham “came to the place which God had told him of,” he “built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood,” and “stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.” Finally, **Hebrews 11:17-19** acted in such faithful obedience unto the Lord through faith, saying, “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”

Speaking concerning this event of obedient faith in Abraham's life, **James 2:21** teaches that the man of God Abraham was therein "justified by works." Yet this cannot be a reference unto Abraham's eternal justification by the judicial declaration of the Lord God unto eternal salvation, since that event had occurred and been eternally finalized approximately thirty years earlier, as recorded in **Genesis 15:6**. (See also Romans 4:1-5, 19-25) So then, in what manner was Abraham "justified by works" through his faithful obedience to sacrifice his son Isaac? Through this work of faithful obedience, Abraham's daily walk of love and faith toward the Lord was justified, that is – publicly recognized as righteous before the Lord. Indeed, in **Genesis 22:11-12** the Lord God Himself responded unto Abraham's faithful obedience, as follows – "And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me." Herein the Lord God acknowledged that Abraham walked in the fear of the Lord. He acknowledged that Abraham had indeed made the Lord his first priority of love and trust, such that he would obey the Lord no matter how much it cost because he truly loved the lord and no matter how little he understood because he truly trusted the Lord. Even so, this was Abraham's justification through his work of faithful obedience, not a divine justification unto eternal salvation, but a divine justification of his daily walk in a right relationship with the Lord. The Lord God Himself publicly expressed His approval of Abraham's love and faith toward Him; and although no other individuals were present at the time of the Lord's declaration, except Abraham and Isaac, yet the Lord's declaration of approval is recorded in the public record of Scripture for all time.

So then, works of obedience are the requirement for an approved faith, that is – for a walk of faith that is approved in the sight of the Lord our God. Indeed, **Hebrews 11:6** declares, "But without faith it is impossible to please him [to be approved in the sight of the Lord]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Yet this approved faith is not just a whole-hearted acceptance that God exists and rewards. Rather, it is also a diligent commitment to seek after Him, to pursue His daily fellowship and His divine pleasure through a walk of faithful obedience unto His will. In fact, throughout **Hebrews 11** every individual with approved faith demonstrated their faith through faithful obedience. "By faith Abel *offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice* than Cain." (**Hebrews 11:4**) "By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, *prepared an ark* to the saving of his house." (**Hebrews 11:7**) "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, *obeyed*; and he went out, not knowing whither he went." (**Hebrews 11:8**) "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, *refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season*; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward." (**Hebrews 11:24-26**) "By faith he *forsook Egypt*, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he *kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood*, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they *passed through the Red sea as by dry land*: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned." (**Hebrews 11:27-28**) By faith "others *were tortured, not accepting deliverance*; that they might obtain a better resurrection." (**Hebrews 11:35**) Such individuals confess that they are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth," desiring "a better country, that is, an heavenly." (See **Hebrews 11:13-16**) "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God." (**Hebrews 11:16**) Rather, He highly approves their living, working faith.

II. Works of obedience are the means of an effective faith.

As the example of Abraham's approved faith continues, the opening line of **James 2:22** asks the question, "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works?" The opening two words of this question, "Seest thou," along with the opening three words of verse 24, "Ye see then," lead us to understand that the argument of verses 21-26 is an argument of recognition through example. Yet what is meant by the truth that Abraham's faith "wrought with his works"? The verb "wrought" means "to work, to accomplish, to form, to fashion." As such, Abraham's faith was not a dead, empty faith, but was a working, effective faith specifically by means of his obedient, godly works. This was true not only in relation to the sacrifice of Isaac only, but also in relation to his entire walk of obedience. Indeed, this was a characteristic of Abraham's entire walk of faith. His faith accomplished something of spiritual value through his works of obedience. Apart from those works of obedience, his faith would have been completely ineffective and would have brought forth nothing that was spiritually pleasing in the Lord's sight. Even so, truly effective faith is not simply a matter of thoughts or a matter of emotions. Rather, truly effective faith is a matter of actions, a matter of obedient, godly, righteous, holy works. It is not a dead faith, but a doing faith, wherein obedient action flows naturally out of godly faith. Godly faith and obedient works are not the same element; however, they exist in coordination and cooperation with one another. Godly faith is the root of which obedient works are the fruit.

III. Works of obedience are the pathway for a maturing faith.

Furthermore, the closing line of **James 2:22** adds to the question, "Seest thou how . . . by works was faith made perfect?" Herein the phrase "made perfect" means "to make full, to complete, to fulfill the objective, to bring unto maturity." Godly faith always has an objective, and that objective is obedience unto God. Even so, the works of obedience bring godly faith unto its complete fullness and fulfilled purpose. This does not mean that obedient works perfect a defective faith. Rather, this means that godly faith finds its fulfilled purpose in obedient works; just as a living seed finds its fulfilled purpose in healthy fruit. Yea, just as the glory of the seed is observed by its fruit; even so the glory of godly faith is observed by its obedient works. Yet there is more; for as the obedient works of godly faith are performed, they grow and mature that godly faith for greater works of obedience in the future. Indeed, as godly faith is exercised through obedient works, it is strengthened in its character. As Abraham exercised his faith by leaving his homeland and kindred, he strengthened his faith to sojourn in the land of promise. As he exercised his faith by trusting the Lord's care while he sojourned in the land, he strengthened his faith to deliver Lot and his family from captivity. As he exercised his faith to deliver Lot from captivity, he strengthened his faith to intercede for Lot and his family concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. As he exercised his faith to intercede for Lot and his family, he strengthened his faith to trust the Lord's faithfulness in providing the son of promise, Isaac. As he exercised his faith concerning the provision of Isaac, he strengthened his faith to sacrifice Isaac at the Lord's command. Indeed, as he exercised his faith through obedient works at each step of his walk with the Lord, Abraham strengthened his faith for each next step throughout his entire life. In like manner, the exercise of our faith through obedience is the pathway for a maturing faith. The trying of our faith "worketh patience," when we allow patience to have its "perfect work" in our hearts. This we do through the obedient works of godly faith, and thereby our character is perfected in spiritual maturity and our faith shall be found "unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (See James 1:3-4 & 1 Peter 1:7)

IV. Works of obedience are the objective of a fulfilled faith.

As we have noted, godly faith always possesses the objective of faithful obedience. In like manner, when the Lord our God grants us the gift of eternal regeneration, justification, and salvation, that gift always contains an objective for our living. Even so, concerning Abraham's eternal justification and salvation (See Romans 4:1-5, 19-25), the opening portion of **James 2:23** states, "And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness." From the contextual flow of thought in **verses 21-22**, we understand that Abraham's obedience concerning the sacrifice of his son Isaac as recorded in Genesis 22 is that which is presented as fulfilling the Scriptural declaration of his eternal justification as recorded in Genesis 15:6. Now, the language of "fulfillment" is usually employed in relation to a prophecy or promise concerning the future. However, the Scriptural declaration that Abraham's faith "was imputed unto him for righteousness" is not a prophecy or promise concerning the future at all. Rather, it is a statement of spiritual fact that was applied and established at the very time wherein it was declared.

So then, in what way would such a spiritual fact need to be "fulfilled"? The answer can be discerned when we understand that eternal regeneration, justification, and salvation includes a purpose and objective from God for our living, the purpose and objective that we should walk in obedience before Him. **Ephesians 2:10** proclaims, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Again **Ephesians 5:8** instructs, "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light." Yet again **Romans 6:4** declares, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." Finally, **Titus 2:14** states concerning our Savior Jesus Christ, "Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." Even so, Abraham's eternal justification included a purpose and objective from God that he might walk in godly faith unto faithful obedience. Even so also, Abraham's obedience concerning the sacrifice of Isaac was a fulfilling of that purpose and objective. In like manner, works of obedience are also included in our eternal salvation as the purpose and objective from the Lord our God for our living. Indeed, such works of obedience are the objective of a fulfilled faith.

(Note: Any use of the teaching from James 2:21-26 to indicate that some form of works are a necessary ingredient unto eternal justification would be a direct contradiction against the opening statement of James 2:23. James 2:23 declares that Genesis 15:6 was fulfilled, and Genesis 15:6 reveals that Abraham was eternally justified simply through his faith. His faith alone, apart from any works, "was imputed unto him for righteousness" by God's grace. Any understanding of this matter that would add works of obedience into this process would not be presenting a fulfillment thereof, but a denial thereof.)

V. Works of obedience are the necessity for a rewarded faith.

Finally, concerning the character of Abraham's approved faith, the closing line of **James 2:23** states, "And he was called the Friend of God." The phrase, "the Friend of God," is not given as a direct quote from the Old Testament. However, on two occasions in the Old Testament, Abraham is referenced as God's friend. First, in **2 Chronicles 20:7** King Jehoshaphat referred

to Abraham as God's friend, saying, "Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" Second, in **Isaiah 41:8** the Lord God Himself referred to Abraham as His friend, saying, "But thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham my friend." Indeed, through his works of faithful obedience, Abraham's godly faith was rewarded with the fellowship and friendship of the Lord God Himself. In like manner, our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed in **John 14:21**, "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." Again in **John 14:23** our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Yet again in **John 15:14-15** our Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." Indeed, works of obedience are the necessity for a rewarded faith, that is – a faith which is rewarded with the fellowship and friendship of the Lord our God. Oh, what a marvelous and wonderful reward! Herein we will delight ourselves in the Lord through godly faith and faithful obedience, and herein our Lord will rejoice over us to walk in fellowship with us and to do us good.

VI. Works of obedience are the evidence of a righteous faith.

In **James 2:24** we come to the conclusion of this presentation on Abraham as the first Old Testament example concerning a walk of faith that is accompanied with works of obedience. Herein James shifts his focus from the singular believer of verse 14 (who had made the claim to a walk of faith without any accompanying works of obedience) unto the entire congregation of believers, saying, "Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." In verse 22 he had employed the singular reference, "Seest thou." Herein he employs the plural reference, "Ye see then." The truth that we are brought to see and understand is "how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." Herein James is not speaking of works only, but of those obedient works that spring from godly faith. Furthermore, this statement is not speaking concerning eternal justification before God, which is indeed through faith alone, "not of works, lest any man should boast." (Ephesians 2:9) Rather, this statement is speaking concerning public justification before others, wherein our claim to a walk of faith is demonstrated to be valid and righteous. Yea, herein the truth of this context is established – that works of obedience are the evidence of a truly righteous faith and of a truly righteous walk in faith. Indeed, we are only able to show unto others the true testimony of our godly and righteous faith, and to defend ourselves against the charge of a hypocritical faith, by our works of faithful obedience.

Then with this truth in mind, James moves us with **verse 25** unto a consideration of his second Old Testament example – "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" Although this second example is intended to support the same principle of truth as the first, there is somewhat of a contrast herein. Whereas Abraham was the great patriarch of the Israelites, Rahab was just a Gentile proselyte. In addition, whereas the case of Abraham was that of a godly man who possessed a mature walk of faith with the Lord, the case of Rahab was that of a former prostitute who was a brand new believer in the Lord. With the closing line of **Joshua 2:11**, she gives testimony of her faith and conversion unto the Lord, saying, "For the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." Even so, as a brand new believer,

she demonstrated the beginnings of her walk of faith in the Lord by receiving the two Israelite spies, viewing them not just as spies, but as “messengers” of God unto her household. Then she hid them from the king of Jericho, jeopardizing her own life by working against her own king and her own people. Finally, she gave them directions on how to avoid those who were searching for them, sending them forth with an urgent concern for their safety. (See Joshua 2) All of this she did by godly faith. Indeed, she demonstrated her walk of faith, as new as it was, through her works; and thereby she was justified before the two spies, before Joshua to whom the two spies reported, and before the congregation of the Israelites, who were to save her and all those in her house alive, although all of the other inhabitants of Jericho were to be destroyed. (See Joshua 6:17, 22-23, 25) So then, we understand that works of obedience are the testimonial evidence before others that our walk of faith is that of a true and righteous faith. Furthermore, we understand that this is a spiritual truth whether the believer is a long time believer or a new born believer, whether the believer is a spiritual patriarch or a former prostitute, whether the believer is a man or a woman.

Even so, James concludes this third argument, the positive argument of recognition through Old Testament example, with the same principle of truth that he had concluded the previous two arguments. In **James 2:26** the conclusion of this argument and of the entire paragraph is given, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.” As a body without the spirit is just a dead corpse, even so a so-called walk of faith that lacks the accompanying works of obedience is a Christian walk that is just as dead as that dead corpse. The absence of the spirit indicates that the body is dead, just as the absence of obedient works indicates that the walk of faith is dead. On the other hand, a true walk of godly faith is unified as closely with works of faithful obedience as a living body is unified with its spirit. Therefore, a walk of faith that is accompanied by works of faithful obedience is a Christian walk that is indeed spiritually healthy and productive. It is indeed a godly and righteous walk of faith.