

## **A LIVING FAITH WORKS**

James 2:21 references Abraham offering up his son Isaac on the altar and then 2:23 says, **“And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.’**” This is a quote from Gen. 15:6. The FAITH of Abraham is emphasized in Genesis 15:6, but an example of it being “fulfilled” is then seen in Genesis 22 when Abraham offered up Isaac on the altar.

The sense is that the nature of a true faith is a living faith that will see a fulfillment in the life in the form of works. We have the statement of faith in Genesis 15:6 and then we see the reality that it was indeed a justifying faith as seen in the action of Gen. 22.

Again, we see that the relationship of faith in Genesis 15 and works of faith in Genesis 22 go together. Latent in Abraham’s faith in Genesis 15 is the lively reality that works its way out in the life. The fulfillment of a true living faith is works in the life.

James shows that there is no such thing as just believing and that is the end of the story. Rather a true faith is a living/active reality that will manifest itself in the life.

This is the error of Easy Believism. It claims that faith can just stand by itself and never has to have any fruit or evidence in the life. That flies in the face of James and contradicts everything he is saying here in chapter 2.

The way it works is when we put our faith in Christ God counts us to be righteous on the basis of that faith. Our faith is counted to us for righteousness.

Of course, the ultimate basis is the grace work of Christ for us on the cross; but from the human angle we appropriate it by faith. It is our faith that is accounted to us for righteousness – just as in the case of Abraham (cf. Rom. 4:24-25; Phil. 3:8-9).

This is God’s method. He accounts people as righteous based purely on their faith! That is the human response that God demands. It is not meritorious. It is a matter of responding to God’s work in the heart. Faith is in keeping with grace – not contrary to it!

**Romans 4:16 (NKJV)**

**16** Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all

By grace are we saved through faith (Eph. 2:8-9). Grace is God's work and faith simply responds to it. And of course, even the response of faith is based on grace and yet there is human responsibility to respond involved as well.

What we are really talking about is the doctrine of imputation. Imputation means to put to one's account (cf. Rom. 4). On the basis of faith God imputes to our account the righteousness of Christ. Christ took all our sin (grace) and by faith we now have His righteousness imputed to our account. But the nature of saving faith is the same kind of faith that Abraham had.

Again, the angle that James is coming from really zeroes in on the NATURE of the kind of faith that Abraham had. It was a living/working kind of faith that became evident in his life. It had a FULFILLMENT as seen in his works and so James says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up Isaac his son on the altar?" (Ja. 2:21).

Yes, we are saved by faith ALONE, but it must be the RIGHT KIND of faith – the same kind faith that Abraham had. And when we have this kind of faith we will "walk in the steps of faith" which Abraham had. This is the point James is making.

After saying "**Abraham believed God**" it then says, "**And he was called the friend of God.**" (Ja. 2:23) **Friend** in the Bible (Gk. philos) is the idea of one who is close to you. It involves the idea of loyalty in combination with affection. Jesus spoke of His friends in this way.

### **John 15:13–14 (NKJV)**

**13** Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

**14** You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

Christ's friends are those who obey Him. Abraham had a faith that obeyed, proving his faith was the kind that is a true friend of God. True faith brings you into a "friendship" relationship with God whereas prior to faith Romans 5:10 says we were the "enemies" of God.

The fruit of true faith is friendship with God. We no longer have a hostile attitude towards Him. We now love and appreciate Him and that is demonstrated in the life. This is the example of Abraham the great model of true faith (cf. Gen. 18:17-19; 2 Chron. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jn. 15:15).

**James 2:20–24 (NKJV)**

**20** But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

**21** Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?

**22** Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?

**23** And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.

**24** You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only.

As the Reformers were prone to say: *We are saved by faith ALONE but the faith that saves does not remain alone.* If there is not a fulfillment of faith in the life it is because one has a dead faith and a dead faith is not a saving faith. A saving faith is the kind of faith as exhibited in the life of Abraham!