

FAITH & WORKS

Reconciling an Apparent Contradiction

(Romans 4:1-5 & James 2:14-26)

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ²**If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.** ³What does Scripture say? “**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.**” ⁴Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. (Romans 4:1-5)

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no works? Can **such faith** save him? ¹⁵Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷In the same way, **faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.** ¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith; I have works.” **Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith** by what I do. ¹⁹You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. ²⁰You foolish man, do you want **evidence that faith without works is useless?** ²¹Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²²You see that his faith and his actions were working together, **and his faith was made complete by what he did.** ²³And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “**Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness**” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴You see that a person is **justified by what he does and not by faith alone.** ²⁵In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶**As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead.** (James 2:14-26)

Romans 4:1-5 and James 2:14-26 are different kinds of literature, deal with different topics, answer different questions, contain different subjects, and utilize different definitions of justify.

Romans 4:1-5

James 2:14-26

GENRE

Is *epistolary* literature
Focuses on doctrine, theology

Is *wisdom* literature
Focuses on how to live before God

TOPIC

Is *theological*: justification by faith before God

Is *practical*: justification of faith before men

QUESTION

Q: How can people be right with God?
A: By faith

Q: How do you test for a living faith?
A: By works

SUBJECT

People: how people are justified

Faith: how faith is justified

DEFINITION

Justify = make right before God

Justify = prove before men

They don’t CONTRADICT, they COMPLEMENT one another for a healthy, balanced theology of faith