

A Completed Faith

November 15, 2006

James 2:21-26

Was 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” (Genesis 15:6), 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? ²⁶As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Faith that believes in God is faith that behaves according to God’s word. It isn’t a perfect belief, and it isn’t perfect behavior—but neither is it so lacking as to be absent from the daily experience of living. Faith works...

- That’s translatable two ways, and they’re both accurate.
 - Faith works in the sense that it does for us what we expect—it brings us forgiveness of sin, grants us a righteous standing in the eyes of God, and secures our eternal salvation through the work of Christ on the cross.
 - Faith works in the sense that as God’s gift to us, resident within us through the person and presence of the Holy Spirit, it adds to our lives a new dimension that both enables us to live and insists that we live a new kind of life—God’s own life (1 John 3:1-9).
- The reverse, then, is also true.
 - Faith that doesn’t result in us being enabled to live God’s life is a non-working faith—a faith where we do not do what faith expects of us.
 - It only stands to reason, therefore, that a non-working faith, a faith where we do not do what it expects of us cannot do for us what we expect of it—provide for the forgiveness of our sins and eternal salvation.

Abraham

Consider the life of Abraham. He was a moon-worshipping, Mesopotamian pagan who *believed* God—and who then *became* the patriarch of the Jewish nation by virtue of what he *did*.

He was *pronounced* as righteous 40 years before he was *proven* righteous so his good deeds didn’t *provide* his justification...his good deeds *proved* his justification.

Rahab

What about Rahab? A working woman of the oldest sort. She's not the kind of woman we expect to find listed favorably or prominently in the Bible...but here she is. How? Why? It was her faith.

Her faith caused her to *do* what God wanted done. She took a chance with her very life, she believed God, and acted in accordance with the truth. Her *belief* was verified by her *behavior*.

That's how it always is when faith is real. When it's authentic, faith is always alive and active.

How big is faith? How much does it weigh? Is it tall or is it short? What color is it? The questions themselves point out how absurd it is to consider that faith can even exist apart from activity.

- To be physically fit we have to *do* aerobics.
- To be spiritually fit we have to *do* faith.

There's something that we who possess faith must *do* in order for our faith to be complete—we add appropriate works! Don't be alarmed at that statement. Your or my adding of godly deeds in no way indicates that we are earning our redemption, simply that we are expressing the reality of it.

In one sense faith and works don't mix—we are saved purely by God's grace (Ephesians 2:8-9). But in second sense they do mix—once we are saved by God's grace our faith is activated through obedience (Ephesians 2:10). Our works don't *save us*—they *unveil us*.

What we do proves what we are.

Who we are proves whose we are.

Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel **offered** a better sacrifice....

Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah...was **moved** with fear...

Hebrews 11:8

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as an inheritance, **obeyed and went**.

Hebrews 11:30

By faith the walls of Jericho fell, after the people had **marched** around them for seven days.

What's the common link? All of these people, Able, Noah, Abraham, Joshua's soldiers, had to **do** something in order to complete their faith.

DISCUSSION

In your own words describe how you understand the concept of a completed faith, one with appropriate good works attached, as opposed to an incomplete faith, one without the addition or inclusion of appropriate good works?

When Did Abraham Complete His Faith?

Let's dig into this a bit by examining the story of Abraham and his son, Isaac, and a most incredible test of faith...

Genesis 22:2-12

God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about."

³Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two of his servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering, he set out for the place God had told him about. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance. ⁵He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."

⁶Abraham took the wood for the burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went on together,

⁷Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, "Father?"

"Yes, my son?" Abraham replied.

"The fire and wood are here," Isaac said, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

⁸Abraham answered, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son." And the two of them went on together.

⁹When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven,

"Abraham! Abraham!"

"Here I am," he replied.

¹²"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son."

How could he do that? I can't begin to imagine... Let's be very, very careful at this point. He was able to *do* what he did by faith...because he *believed* God would do what he said he would do:

Genesis 17:19

God said, "...your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his *descendants* after him."

God had told Abraham that Isaac was going to *grow up, find a wife, get married, and have a family*—and he couldn't very well do that if he were dead—Abraham knew this...

Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead...

CAVEAT

There are lots of people who do lots of crazy things and blame it on God—but God really was behind this—and he never intended that Isaac be harmed. It must be God's truth that we obey, and the only safeguard for us is sticking to the truth as it is revealed in the Bible.

So...when did Abraham complete his faith? When he *obeyed* the voice of God:

James 2:21

Was 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*.

ABRAHAM COMPLETED HIS FAITH WHEN HIS BEHAVIOR COLLABORATED WITH HIS BELIEF.

When faith is joined by action and we do what God's word has prescribed we complete our faith.

DISCUSSION

What are some examples of "activities" that you believe people of faith are required to "do" that would provide a meaningful proof of their faith?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

How Did Abraham Complete His Faith?

I mentioned earlier that the men and women listed in Hebrews 11 had to **do** something in order to complete their faith...and that's true...but not just anything. They had to do something specific. For instance:

James 2:15-17

Suppose 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.

Let's pose a scenario where I happen to know that winter is on the way and you don't have a coat. Not only that, you're hungry, too. I don't want to you be cold when the storm hits and I can't stand the thought of you being hungry so, as an act of faith to help keep you warm when the temperature plunges and to get you seated before a fine meal I start memorizing the 119th Psalm.

Why in the world would you do that? Because "faith without works is dead" and memorizing Bible verses is a good work. So, in order to complete my faith, which I do by adding good works (James 2:22), I start memorizing a bunch of Bible verses to keep you warm and fed.

I could memorize the entire Bible as a work of faith on your behalf and you'd be cold and hungry till the day you die—or until someone a little more up on things comes your way.

Unless I do something to clothe and feed you my faith will be an incomplete faith.

ABRAHAM COMPLETED HIS FAITH WHEN HIS BEHAVIOR CORRESPONDED TO HIS BELIEF.

- The works that complete faith must not only collaborate with what we believe, they must correspond to it.
 - There was only one way for Abraham to complete his faith—he had to give up Isaac.
 - Nothing else would do.
 - Why?
 - Because that was specifically what God required of him.
 - And how did he know that?
 - He knew that because God had spoken to him.

But God doesn't speak to me. Well, yes he does—not the way he spoke to Abraham because Abraham didn't have the Bible. For you and me it's a little easier than

it was for Abraham—we do have the Bible. And that’s how God speaks to us, through the Bible. When properly studied and rightly understood you and I can experience God speaking to us, not through his spoken word but through his written word, the Bible.

DISCUSSION

1. Is it possible therefore, that personal spiritual dissatisfaction could be connected with areas of personal disobedience in a person’s life?
Yes__ No __ No clue __

2. Can you think of some specific act of faith that you, personally, might need to “do” that would both collaborate with and correspond to an area of conviction in your life? Yes__ No __

3. Care to make a list?
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
 - d. _____

“The Bible recognizes no faith that does not lead to obedience.... ..the two are...opposite sides of the same coin.” (Citation: A.W. Tozer, *Leadership*, Vol. 12. no. 14).

QUOTE

In *Pilgrim’s Progress* Bunyan writes of “Talkative” ...
“Religion hath no place in his heart, or house, or conversation; all he hath lieth in his tongue, and his religion is to make a noise therewith...
“...at the day of doom men shall be judged according to their fruits.... It will not be said then, ‘Did you believe?’ but, ‘Were you doers, or talkers only?’ and accordingly shall they be judged.... Not that anything can be accepted that is not of faith; but I speak this to show you how insignificant the profession of TALKATIVE will be on that day.”

I want to encourage you to respond with immediate obedience to what you believe God is requiring of you.