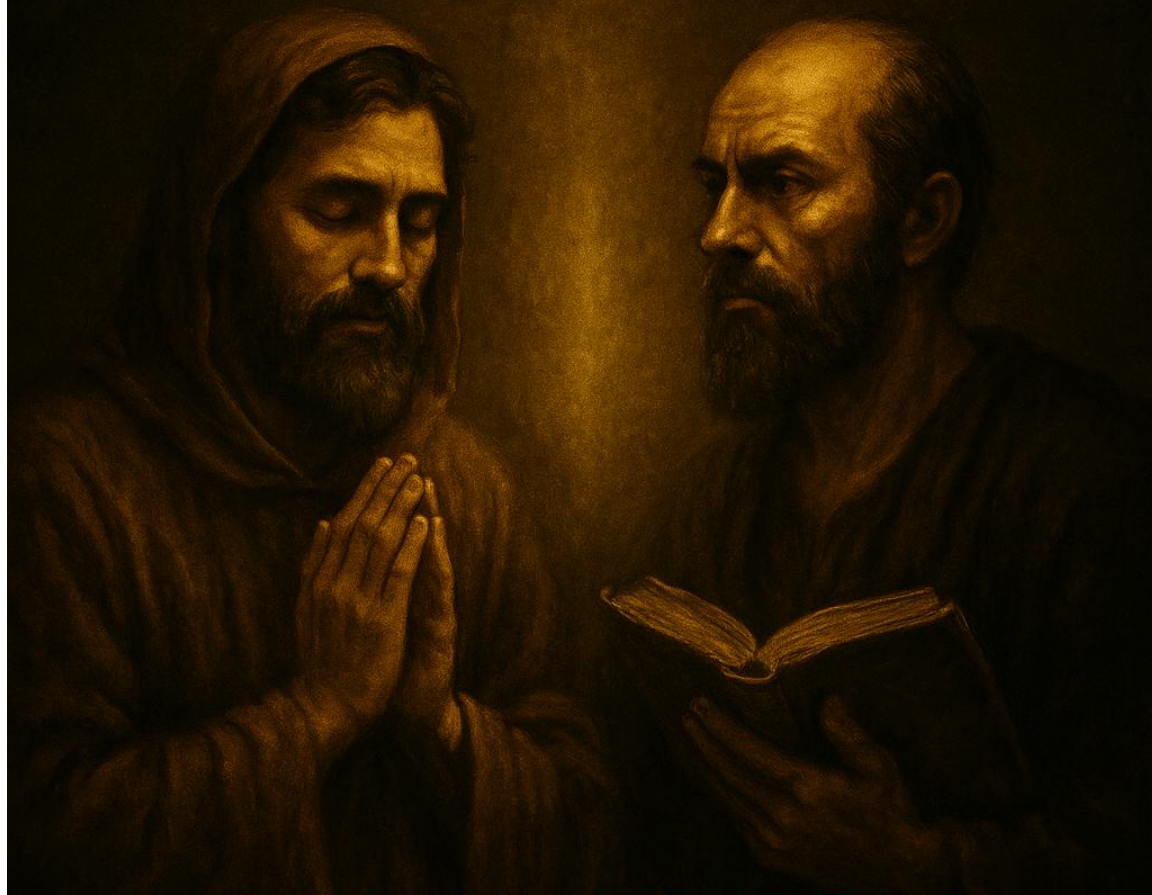


# WHEN FAITH LIVES



WHY JAMES DOES  
NOT CONTRADICT PAUL

# When Faith Lives: Why James 2 Doesn't Contradict Paul

*Faith alone justifies; yet the faith that justifies is never alone.*

## Part I: The emphasis on “show”

“Faith without works is dead.” Few verses have been more quoted - and more misunderstood, than James’s arresting statement. To many, it seems to stand squarely opposed to Paul’s teaching that “a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” Or “The man who does not work but believes.” Yet no contradiction exists.

✚ **The two Apostles speak to different questions, *not different gospels.***

James’s concern is *practical, not dogmatic*. He does not ask how faith is **obtained** before God, but how it is **observed** before men. His challenge, “Show me your faith without works, and I will show you my faith by my works,” defines the entire scope of the passage. Faith, by its very nature, is invisible; it cannot be placed upon a scale or seen beneath a microscope. It is a spiritual reality, living in the unseen heart. Therefore, the only way faith can be *shown* is through the actions that reveal it. In that sense alone, faith without works is “dead”. Not nonexistent, but inoperative, useless for the purpose of demonstration. It fails to *show* what it truly possesses.

## Part II: Keep the direction clear and quote it accurately

James then presses the matter further: “*If a man says he has faith but has no works, can such faith save him?*” The question is rhetorical. The issue is not faith with *too few* works, but faith with *none at all*—a profession utterly void of evidence.

James is not describing a struggling believer whose obedience falters, but a pretender whose confession bears no pulse of life. The absence of fruit betrays the absence of root.

No Apostle or Reformer ever taught that saving faith could exist in an *absolute* vacuum of evidence. The God who grants faith also works in His people “both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Eze. 36:24-26; Jer. 3:22; 24:7; Ps. 51:10-12; 86:11; Phil. 2:13) From David’s plea, “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” to Ezekiel’s promise

of a new heart and spirit, Scripture bears one consistent witness: *faith lives because God breathes life into it.*

Consider the tax collector in Jesus' parable. In Luke 18:14-18. He stood afar off, would not lift up his eyes to heaven, and simply cried, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." He offered no promise, performed no deed, and displayed no merit, yet Jesus declared, "*This man went down to his house justified.*" Faith alone had reached the mercy seat, and grace alone had answered.

✚ **His justification preceded every work, yet the life that followed would bear its proof in due season.**

### Part III: Abraham and Rahab

To anchor his argument, James points to two lives as different as could be imagined, Abraham the patriarch and Rahab the prostitute. Yet both stand before us as portraits of faith that *breathes*.

When James writes, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" he is not contradicting Paul's declaration that Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." He is referring to a *different moment* in Abraham's life. Paul looks to **Genesis 15**, when Abraham believed God's promise before Isaac was ever born, and God declared him righteous *on the basis of faith alone*. James looks to **Genesis 22**, many years later, when that same faith was *shown*, meaning proven genuine, through obedience. One event reveals the *root* of justification; the other reveals its *fruit*.

✚ **In both scenes, God is the same, and so is faith. But faith first *receives* before it ever *acts*.**

Paul describes the inward reckoning by which God declares the sinner righteous. James describes the outward reckoning by which faith itself is seen as genuine. Both use the term "justify," but in distinct senses: Paul in the divine courtroom; James in the public witness box.

Rahab's story underscores the same truth. She believed the report of the Lord before the walls of Jericho fell, hiding the spies because she already trusted the God of Israel. Her faith acted because it lived; her works evidenced what had already taken root in

the heart. She was not saved *by* the act of hiding them, but the act proved that her faith was alive.

Thus, the examples of Abraham and Rahab do not weaken the gospel of grace: They *illuminate* it. They show that when faith truly exists, it cannot remain motionless. It breathes, obeys, risks, and moves because the God who grants faith also empowers the life that naturally, inevitably flows from it.

As Paul would later say, “It is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:13).

✚ **James would nod in agreement, for faith that lives is never self-generated, but divinely animated.**

### When Faith Breathes — The Harmony of the Apostles

When the smoke clears from centuries of debate, the harmony between Paul and James stands unbroken. They speak not at cross-purposes, but from opposite sides of the same living truth. Paul proclaims the **foundation** of salvation: faith alone, apart from works. James proclaims its **manifestation**: faith that cannot help but work.

- One answers the sinner who asks, *How may I be justified before God?*
- The other answers the believer who asks, *How may my faith be shown before men?*

Paul warns the legalist who would add deeds to faith as a means of merit. James warns the nominal believer who would claim faith without any deeds that reveal it.

✚ **Both defend the gospel: one from the bondage of self-righteousness, the other from the delusion of lifeless profession.**

In truth, they stand shoulder to shoulder, their voices blending in sacred agreement: *Faith alone saves, yet the faith that saves is never alone.* It bears the pulse of divine life. It breathes, because God has breathed into it.

Such faith does not boast in its own vitality; it marvels that it lives at all. It traces every impulse of obedience back to the grace that gave it being. “Thou hast wrought all our

works in us,” Isaiah confessed (Isa. 26:12), and every true believer echoes the same. Works, then, are not the **price** of salvation but its **proof**. The living evidence that grace has entered the heart.

So, when James says, “Faith without works is dead,” he is not crossing swords with Paul; he is echoing heaven’s heartbeat. Dead faith is stillborn profession, but living faith is resurrection life. It moves, loves, obeys, and endures *because* the Spirit who quickened it will not let it die, as the gospels remind us: “A battered reed He will not break off and a smoldering wick He will not put out.” (Matt. 12:20)

**This is the faith that lives: not faith that *earns*, but faith that *breathes*. Not faith that performs for God, but faith that responds to God’s breath of life.**

And when it breathes, the world sees not the believer’s strength, but the Savior’s life pulsing within.