

It's really easy sometimes to be so familiar with certain terminology that we don't actually get a full grasp of that it actually means. Already in our look at James we've discovered that there is a lot more to wisdom than we first thought, and faith is another one of these things that we need to get a deeper look into. Faith is a word that we can hear a lot of these days, especially in our shrinking, and increasingly pluralistic world we hear of different faith groups, but faith is way more than just another loose name for religion. We also think faith is a matter of belief, but James goes straight ahead and busts this myth when he tells us in verse 19 that even the demons believe in God, they know he exists and they know the truth about them and it scares the life out of them! Acceptance that God exists and is who he says he is doesn't constitute as faith. Similarly acceptance and agreement with God isn't faith. We can see this when Nicodemus comes to God and he has weighed up the facts and come to the right conclusions, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him". Knowing the right answer isn't faith. Faith isn't faith until it is an active trust placed in God and a constant dependence in Him.

James doesn't beat around the bush; he is straight to the point and says that a claim to have faith without an action to accompany it is just a claim and that faith is dead. A simple claim to have faith, but to not have real alive faith will cause someone to talk all the right talk, but to be completely inactive and not actively serving God at all. In verses 15 and 16 James exposes how ridiculous it is to try and claim to have faith without having any actions to accompany it.

When you think about what faith actually is: a constant trust and dependence on God then it is easy to see how it will produce action. With the knowledge that God is gifting us with skills and strength to achieve great things through him we have no need to be fearful to act out for him. With this fear removed, faith gives us all the freedom to work for him.

It could seem like Paul and James are at complete loggerheads over the issue of what it is that saves us. We know James argues that action is required, and it goes without saying that real faith will produce good actions, but Paul says even the good actions of observing the law no-one will be justified.

To get our heads round we need to understand why James and Paul wrote their letters.

**Paul** is writing to people to give them an important warning that they don't need to adopt Jewish customs before being acceptable to God. He argues that nothing we do can make us acceptable to God, but it's only thanks to his our faith that God is a God of grace that we can be saved. We know that Abraham is a great man of faith because he trusted God enough to act, even when it meant losing something that you have always wanted, and something that God had promised to you in the first place, where we would be at least asking serious questions about what's going on and what God's plans for us are Abraham trusted enough to act.

**James** is also writing to people to give them an important message, but it isn't to people who want to know what to do in order to be acceptable to God, James' message is written to people who are already accepted by God. James wants to get through that if they are in fact saved and accepted by God then action will be a direct consequence of that. James is talking about what happens once you are saved and not actually what it takes to get there in the first place, it goes without saying for James that it is the saving faith in God that saves someone. James uses Abraham as a great man of action because he trusted God enough to act. If Abraham had no faith in God he never would have gone through with what God asked him. The fact that Abraham acted shows that he trusted God. Where we would be asking some serious questions about what God is asking us to do Abraham trusted enough to act.

Paul and James don't have conflicting messages, they're not even talking about the same subject, Paul's message is about how our salvation is a gift to us and not something we can achieve, and James' message concerns assurance of salvation that comes from seeing our faith in action.

If anything these two messages complement each other. James agrees with Paul's message that only faith can save, he never claims that our actions can save us rather that they are a consequence of our faith. Both Paul and James use the example of Abraham's obedience to God as acting in faith.

The reason James wrote his letter was to give encouragement to the people who would read it and to give them practical advise for their everyday lives and because of this the book is full of James encouraging his readers to put their faith into action. James encourages his readers to not suck up to rich people in order to hopefully put an end to their financial troubles, but to act in faith and being joyful throughout their trouble. It's in examples like this where we can see the mixture of faith coming with action and that the two are inseparable, even if the action only goes as far as if we in trouble our faith should promote in us the action of praying or if we are sick to act in calling the elders, faith will be the motivator and produce action.

James wants us to learn that if we study God's word and have all the academic knowledge of the bible, but don't have the faith to trust God and his word and act on it then we are only fooling ourselves. Our attitudes need to be right and out of that will flow action. Our motivation is to act through the faith in the grace we have already received from God and give glory to him for that, and also to act so others may see our good works and give glory to God.