



## From Our Vicar

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### **Faith or Deeds – the Chicken or the Egg?** James 2:14-26

In this and last week's readings, the historically controversial issue of faith and deeds is addressed. The great reformer, Martin Luther, famously called James an 'epistle of straw' - in comparison to the major letters of Paul and John's gospel. Luther's issue was that those writings gave clear teaching on salvation through faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, which James does not address.

Luther was fighting a huge battle with the Roman church hierarchy to establish the biblical truth of salvation by faith in what Jesus has done for us, rather than by religious works and good deeds. So, when James wrote that 'a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone' this became a proof text for the church authorities in opposing Luther. Luther taught 'sola fidei' (by faith alone) based on Paul's 'for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God -not by works, so that no one can boast.' Eph 2:8-9.

Was James contradicting Paul? The answer is found in both the literary context of these sayings and the intent of each author in the matters he was addressing.

James was responding to those who emphasised the centrality of faith to the exclusion of deeds, pointing out that faith is rather proved by its actions. Actions are the evidence of faith, not separate to it. He used Abraham as an example – who scripture affirms as being recognised for his faith when he obeyed God in preparing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice - believing that God could raise him from the dead (Hebrews 11:19).

Paul on the other hand goes on in the Ephesians passage to say – 'For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works that God prepared in advance for us to do.' 2:10

So, both affirm faith and works - but it is the order that matters. This is the key insight of the reformation. We are not saved by what we have done -our works. Rather, we are saved by what Christ has done for us - so that we might do the good works that God has prepared for us. So, all the glory rightly goes to God, not to us, for it is he who makes such good works possible.

What actions does your faith prompt you in today?

God bless you,  
*Wayne*