

would know His followers by the love they had for each other. Jesus said that the world would know His followers by

Jesus said that the world would know His followers by the love they had for each other. Jesus said that the world

the love they had for each other. Jesus said that the world would know His followers by the love they had for each other.



COMMUNITY GROUPS

RIVERS CROSSING CHURCH

Community Group Discussion Guide

October 29, 2023

Foundations of Faith Week #5 / Pastor Paul Taylor

Faith or Works? Yes

GETTING TO KNOW YOU

1. Icebreaker Question | Briefly share your best (“high”) and worst (“low”) moments from the previous week or since the last time you met as a Community Group.
2. Reflecting on this week’s teaching from Pastor Paul, was there anything you heard for the first time or that caught your attention, challenged, or confused you?
3. Martin Luther, the German theologian and religious reformer who famously initiated the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, struggled with the book of James, especially the tension it seemingly created between faith and works.
“Therefore St James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the Gospel about it.” – Martin Luther, *Works*
What sort of tension, if any, have you felt and/or experienced in your life regarding the intersection of faith and works? Explain your answer.

DIVING DEEPER

4. James’ teaching about faith and works seems to pit him against the Apostle Paul’s teaching on faith and works. Read the following Bible passages before engaging with the corresponding questions.

Romans 3:28 (NIV) – For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Galatians 2:15-16 (NIV) – ¹⁵“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

James 2:14,17,24 (NIV) – ¹⁴What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?...¹⁷In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead...²⁴You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

a) Do you believe James’ teaching can be harmonized with the Apostle Paul’s teaching? If so, how? If it helps, recall Pastor Paul’s explanation that to James, real genuine saving faith will lead to good works.

b) New Testament scholar N.T. Wright addressed this tension between James and the Apostle Paul by sharing the following analysis...

“The apparent discrepancy between James and Paul dissipates when we observe what they are each arguing for and against. They are using the same language, but they have different referents in mind, and they address different concerns (see the table below). Paul is against those who demand that gentiles become Jewish proselytes as a condition of being followers of Jesus. James is against those who teach salvation by mere assent without actually following the words of Jesus. James

and Paul can be brought together when we remember that James' statement that 'faith without deeds is dead' can be correlated with Paul's remark that 'the only thing that counts is faith working through love' [Galatians 5:6]." – N.T. Wright, *The New Testament In Its World*

Subject	Paul	James
Faith	Trust in God's redeeming action in Jesus and allegiance to Jesus as Messiah and Lord. Such faith justifies.	Mere assent to the existence of one God (Jewish 'monotheism'), which does not lead to upright conduct. Such faith does not justify.
Works	Connected with the Jewish way of life codified in the Torah, a kind of 'doing' that leads to 'boasting' in ethnicity and effort. Such works do not save.	Loving expression of faith in action. Such works are required for justification.

What additional insights do N.T. Wright's remarks give you on the topic of faith and works and the supposed tension between James and the Apostle Paul?

5. Pastor Paul shared that there's living faith and dead faith. We can think we're saved, but not actually be saved. We can believe the right things about God and even fear God, but not be truly changed by God.

a) How do these words resonate with you? Was there ever a time when these words would've applied to you and your faith? If you're willing, share about that.

b) Salvation can be properly understood by recognizing that – 1) God works for you, 2) God works in you, and 3) God works through you. Read Titus 3:3-8 together.

Titus 3:3-8 (NIV) – ³At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. ⁴But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, ⁶whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. ⁸This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

How do you see these elements of salvation reflected in this passage?

How would you describe the work of salvation God's done in your life? If it helps, think about how you'd share this to a neighbor who doesn't believe in Jesus.

6. Pastor Paul shared that intimacy with and grace from God drive genuine faith, which works itself out in actions and loving others.
 - a) As you draw closer to God, do you experience inner (i.e., heart and mind) and outer (i.e., actions) change in your life? If you're willing, share a recent example of what this looked like.

 - b) As we follow Jesus Christ, how can we fight against any urge to allow our works to "elevate" us above others or be the basis of God's love for us?

TAKING IT HOME

7. Read Ephesians 2:8-10 together. Where might God be prompting you to step into greater works as a result of the transformation He's done in your life?

Ephesians 2:8-10 (NIV) – ⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

8. What's your biggest takeaway from this week's sermon and our group discussion? How can you put that into action this week?

PRAYER REQUESTS

-
-
-
-

RIVERS CROSSING - THINGS TO KNOW

1. When Ordinary Becomes Extraordinary (WOBE) | We're having a night of worship and prophetic ministry on Sunday, November 5th at 6:00pm at our Mason campus. As we gather to exalt the name of Jesus, you will encounter the power of God and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. Come expectantly, come ready to see God move, come to seek the extraordinary life. Where possible, Community Groups are encouraged to attend and participate in WOBE together.

2. Baptisms – Sunday November 26th | We believe baptism is an integral part of your spiritual journey and necessary as you seek to become a fully engaged follower of Christ. If you've recently decided to follow Jesus or you've been a Christ follower for a while but never gotten baptized, now is the perfect time to take this next step! Learn more and sign up by visiting <https://riverscrossing.com/grow>
3. Serve at Rivers Crossing | One of the marks of a fully engaged follower is their willingness to invest into God's kingdom with their time, talents, and resources. We have opportunities to serve all throughout the week! Find the team that's the right fit for you and partner with us to create an environment for people to become fully engaged followers of Jesus. Learn more at <https://riverscrossing.com/serve-here/>