

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

"What Gospel is Driving Your Faith?"

James 2

From Sunday, Nov 15

Appetizer:

In addressing the discussion between "faith" and "works", Pastor Phil starts his sermon expressing the frustration of how his faith tends to tip the balance more in the favour of "private" rather than "practical".

Question: Do you ever feel that tension? Would you think that this is the norm for most Christians? Why is that such a struggle for so many of us?

Main Course:

- a. Pastor Phil borrows a thought from author John Ortberg who presents two ways of thinking of faith. The first is a "Bounded Set" – where becoming a Christian is about crossing a line of decision based upon a "minimum set of requirements". Once a person has crossed that line of faith, one goes from being "out" to "in", in regards to entering "The Kingdom of Heaven".

Question: Does this framework describe how you became a Christian? Is this framework the norm for how Christians think about salvation? Is this framework found in the teachings of Jesus?

- b. The second way of thinking presented was the "Centred Set" – where becoming a Christian was based upon how closely a person was oriented to being and acting like Jesus or not. (The example given was of baldness. Mr Clean was the centre, and Albert Einstein was on the furthest end of the continuum.)

Question: Which of these two frameworks of understanding salvation better lines up with the teachings of Jesus? Compare Jesus' Gospel (the latter) with the Gospel of the Pharisees (the former). Describe how the uncertainty of Jesus' conditions for entering the Kingdom of Heaven would have been so infuriating for the religious leaders and how liberating it would have been for the "common-folk".

Quote 1: "Jesus is radically gracious in His desire to accept and love. He is also radically severe in His warnings about sin and judgment. And He is radically silent about the minimum amount that a person needs to believe or do to get into heaven when they die." **Discuss.**

Quote 2: "The world does not consist of 100% Christians & 100% non-Christians. There are people who are slowly ceasing to be Christians but who still call themselves by that name. There are others who are slowly becoming Christians though they do not yet call themselves so." **Discuss.**

Dessert:

1. Pastor Phil concludes his message by hoping that the Church will re-shape itself so that it is "less heavenly minded so that it is of earthly good". The desire to tip the scales to be less theoretical and more practical in how it serves the community outside the walls of our church.

He asks the question, "If our church closed its doors today, would the community know? Would they care? Would we be missed?". **Discuss.**

2. The mission of the church is to serve beyond itself and not be "insider-focussed". Pastor Phil closed his message by insisting that "doing church" as we've known it for our lifetimes has been a wonderful luxury, but cannot be called an essential service because it does not line up with the teachings of Jesus. **Agree or disagree?**