

Session Five

Faith Working Through Love

Abide

The Eucharist, Grace, and Staying in Christ

Part One: Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers that the one place the phrase faith alone appears in Scripture, it is being denied, and that James makes the chronology of Abraham's life into his actual argument.

Catholic Touchstone. Faith is not one item on a list with love and works beside it. Faith that is alive works through love, and faith that does not is described by St. James in a single brutal word: dead.

The envelopes open tonight. Plan the order carefully; the reveal comes early and everything after it is shaped by what people wrote.

What You Need to Know

James 2:24 is the only occurrence in the whole of Scripture of the words faith alone, and it appears in a sentence denying them: a man is justified by works and not by faith alone. That does not by itself settle the doctrine, since the two authors may use terms differently, and an honest leader says so. But it does put the burden of explanation on the person who wants to affirm the exact phrase Scripture negates.

The more interesting move is what James does with Abraham, because he chooses the same man Paul chose. He asks whether Abraham was not justified by works when he offered Isaac on the altar, and then says something easy to read past: the scripture was fulfilled which says Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.

The scripture in question is Genesis 15:6. The offering of Isaac is Genesis 22. Genesis gives you part of the gap outright: Abram is eighty-six when Ishmael is born (Genesis 16:16) and a hundred when Isaac is born (Genesis 21:5), and the reckoning of Genesis 15 stands before both, so some fifteen years pass before Isaac exists at all. Genesis never states how old Isaac was at the offering, only that he was old enough to carry the wood and to ask his father a question, so the full interval is longer than fifteen years but the text does not measure it. Do not put a number on it in the room. A long stretch of one man's life is all the argument needs. James is not confused about the order. The gap is his argument. The reckoning of Genesis 15 comes to its completion in the obedience of Genesis 22, which means for James the faith that was reckoned and the obedience that followed are one thing extended in time.

The three tenses, which the sealed question is designed to surface

Scripture speaks of salvation in three tenses and a Catholic should be able to use all three. By grace you have been saved, past, at Ephesians 2:8. To us who are being saved, present, at 1 Corinthians 1:18. We shall be saved by him from the wrath of God, future, at Romans 5:9, and he who endures to the end will be saved at Matthew 24:13.

So the honest Catholic answer to are you saved is: I have been saved, I am being saved, and I hope to be saved. That is not evasion and it is not doubt. It is three verses.

Where the gap is narrower than the shouting suggests

Most thoughtful Protestants hold that genuine faith necessarily produces good works, and that a faith producing none was never real. Many Catholics, hearing faith alone, imagine a claim that conduct is irrelevant, which almost nobody actually teaches. Name this out loud tonight. A great deal of the heat in this argument comes from each side attacking a position the other does not hold, and your group should be able to spot that within thirty seconds of a conversation starting.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

“Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” **Genesis 22:12**

Now I know. The obedience does not create the faith; it discloses and completes it. Note also that Isaac carries the wood up the mountain while his father holds the fire and the knife, which the Fathers read as one of the clearest figures of the Passion in the Old Testament.

Voices of the Church

Voice of the Church

The Second Council of Orange

529

This council condemned the view that anyone can make the first movement toward God by natural powers, and taught that even the desire to believe, the beginning of faith itself, is the effect of grace.

Keep this ready for any conversation in which Catholics are accused of works-righteousness. The Church ruled against that position roughly a thousand years before the question was raised again.

Historical; the council and the substance of its canons are securely attested.

Voice of the Church

St. Augustine

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Augustine teaches that what distinguishes living faith from the faith the demons have is love, and that the same grace which gives faith gives the love by which it works.

This is the exact register of Galatians 5:6, and it is worth noticing that Augustine, the great doctor of grace, is also the one who will not let faith be defined without love.

Voice of the Church

St. Gregory the Great

Given as a summary of his teaching; no locus printed

Gregory teaches, in substance, that the proof of love is shown in deeds, and that faith which never issues in action has not been demonstrated to exist at all.

Pastorally this is where the Church has always landed: not that works purchase anything, but that a faith which changes nothing has given us no reason to think it is there.

Catechism Connection

- CCC 1814-1816 on faith: a living faith works through charity, and faith without hope and love does not fully unite the believer to Christ.
- CCC 1991 states that justification includes acceptance of God's righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.
- CCC 162 warns that faith can be lost, and urges that it be nourished, which is the bridge into Session Six.
- CCC 2010 again, since someone will ask: no one merits the initial grace of conversion.

Thread Watch

Leader only. Read this before the session; the order matters.

- THREAD B resolves first, early in the Build. Open envelopes before the Abraham discovery, because the discovery answers what the envelopes surface.
- THREAD A comes near the surface tonight but resolves in Session Seven. If someone names it, acknowledge it and say we will finish it in two weeks.
- Expect a wide spread in the envelopes, and expect at least one person to be embarrassed. Handle the reveal warmly and do not rank the answers.

Session Goals

1. Every participant can answer the question are you saved using all three tenses.
2. Every participant can explain what James does with the gap between Genesis 15 and Genesis 22.
3. The group discovers that faith alone appears once in Scripture and is negated there.
4. Every participant can state the strongest Protestant reading of James fairly.
5. Nobody leaves thinking most Protestants believe conduct is irrelevant, because most do not.

Timed Plan

- Opening prayer and Win: 10 minutes.
- The envelopes and the three tenses, questions 3 and 4: 22 minutes.
- The Abraham discovery, questions 5 and 6: 25 minutes.
- The steelman and question 7: 22 minutes.
- Send, Live It, closing prayer: 12 minutes.

If you are running short: compress the steelman to a reading and one response. Never cut the envelopes or the Abraham discovery.

THE OBJECTION BENCH

Leader only. Deploy what the room needs, skip the rest. Do not hand this page out. The matching Take-Home carries a shorter version in the participant's own words.

"James means justification before men, not before God."

Handled in the steelman. It is the strongest reading and deserves the full treatment.

"So Catholics think faith is not enough."

Reframe rather than answer as posed. We do not think faith is too small a thing. We think the faith that justifies is living faith, faith formed by charity and given entirely by God's grace, and that this is the faith Scripture is actually talking about, because Galatians 5:6 says so. What we deny is that a dead faith, a faith that has lost charity, saves anybody.

The question assumes faith and charity are two interchangeable items on a list, so that adding one means

doubting the other. Catholics do distinguish them; faith is a real virtue and it can remain in a soul that has lost charity. That is exactly why St. James can call such a faith dead. What we deny is not the distinction. We deny that a faith stripped of charity is the living faith that saves.

"You are just adding a requirement to the gospel."

Point at who is doing the adding. Galatians 5:6 is Paul, not the Council of Trent, and 1 Corinthians 13:2 is Paul saying that all faith without love leaves him nothing.

If naming love as intrinsic to living faith is an addition, Paul made it.

Part Two: Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Lord, you gave us faith and you gave us the love that makes it move. Do not let us divide what you joined. Open our envelopes and our hearts tonight. Amen.

Win

1. Has anyone ever asked you whether you are saved? What happened in your chest when they did?
2. Bring out your envelope. What do you remember writing?

Build

Open the envelopes. Have each person read aloud what they wrote. Do not comment on individual answers and do not rank them. Write the range on a board where everyone can see it.

3. Look at the range. What were we all trying to do?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Expect a spread: some flat yes, some hedged, some deflection, some who wrote that they did not know how to answer.

Name what the hedging was protecting rather than treating it as weakness. Most Catholics hesitate because they know something about perseverance and do not want to sound presumptuous. That instinct is sound; it just has no vocabulary yet.

4. Read these three and note the tense in each: Ephesians 2:8, 1 Corinthians 1:18, Matthew 24:13.

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

You have been saved, past. Us who are being saved, present. He who endures to the end will be saved, future.

So the answer is: I have been saved, I am being saved, and I hope to be saved. Have the room say it out loud together. That sentence is the practical payoff of the whole book.

Add that this is not a Catholic dodge invented to avoid the question. It is three verses, and any Christian who reads all three has to account for all three.

Live discovery. Give the group Genesis 15:6, then Genesis 22:1-18, then James 2:21-24, in that order and no other. Ask one question: what does James say was fulfilled, and when was it written?

5. What did you find?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

James says the scripture was fulfilled which says Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, and he says it was fulfilled when Abraham offered Isaac. But that scripture is Genesis 15:6, and the offering is Genesis 22, many years later.

James is not muddling the order. The gap is the point. For James, the faith reckoned in chapter 15 and

the obedience in chapter 22 are one thing stretched across a life.

Then have them read Genesis 22:12 again: now I know that you fear God. The obedience does not manufacture the faith. It discloses and completes it.

6. Read James 2:24 aloud. What phrase appears there, and where else does it appear in Scripture?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

Justified by works and not by faith alone. That is the only occurrence of the phrase faith alone in Scripture, and it is being denied.

Be careful and fair here. This does not by itself settle the doctrine, because James and Paul may use justify in different senses, and you should say that before anyone says it to you. What it does do is place the burden on anyone who wants to affirm the exact phrase Scripture negates.

DIG DEEPER: Galatians 5:6

Paul writes that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but faith working through love.

This is the Catholic position stated by the apostle the objection is usually built on. Faith is not one ingredient beside love; living faith is the kind that works through it.

The Steelman

THE DEPTH Read in full.

The strongest form of the objection.

James and Paul are answering different questions and the words are doing different work. Paul asks how a guilty man gets right with God, and answers: by faith, apart from works. James asks how you can tell whether someone's claimed faith is real, and answers: look at his life. Justify in James means shown to be righteous, demonstrated, vindicated, which is a normal use of the word. James even sets it up that way, describing a man who says he has faith, and asking what good it is.

And notice that the faith James condemns is not what any Protestant means by faith. He says the demons believe, and shudder. That is bare intellectual assent to a proposition, and no serious Protestant has ever taught that assent saves. Luther himself, in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans, described faith as a living, busy, active thing; the wording here is a paraphrase of that preface rather than a quotation. So James is refuting a position nobody holds, and the Catholic use of him is aimed at an opponent who is not there.

7. How much of that is right? And what does James still say that has to be answered?

ANSWER (share after the discussion)

A great deal is right, and concede it early. James is plainly attacking dead assent, the demons' faith, and it is true that no serious Protestant defends that. It is also true that the two authors may use justify in different senses, and a Catholic who denies that possibility is overreaching.

What still stands is the Abraham argument, and it does not depend on the meaning of justify. James says the reckoning of Genesis 15 was fulfilled at Genesis 22. Whatever justify means, James has told us that the faith which was credited reached its completion in an act of obedience many years later, far down

the same life. That is a claim about the shape of saving faith over time, not about vocabulary.

And James chose his example deliberately. He goes to the same man and the same verse Paul uses. He is not writing past Paul; he is reading the same text and drawing out what happened next in the story.

Then close the distance honestly. If your interlocutor holds that genuine faith necessarily produces works, the two of you agree about far more than the argument suggests, and you should say so out loud. The remaining question is technical: whether that transformation belongs to justification itself or follows from it. That is worth discussing and it is not worth shouting about.

Send

8. Say the three-tense answer out loud, in your own words. Does it feel true?
9. Where in your life is your faith currently working through love, and where has it stopped?

Live It This Week

- Memorise the three-tense answer. Practise it until it is not a speech.
- Read James 2 in one sitting and notice how practical the whole chapter is.
- Do one concrete thing for one person, this week, that costs you something.
- Keep praying for your person by name.

Closing Prayer

Lord, give us faith that moves. Keep us from arguing about love instead of practising it. Amen.

Memory Verse

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any avail, but faith working through love.” **Galatians 5:6**

Part Three: Leader Reference Card

- Genesis 15:6, reckoned as righteousness
- Genesis 22:1-18, the offering of Isaac (live discovery)
- James 2:14-26, with 2:21-24 central
- Galatians 5:6, faith working through love (memory verse)
- Ephesians 2:8, past tense
- 1 Corinthians 1:18, present tense
- Romans 5:9 and Matthew 24:13, future tense
- 1 Corinthians 13:2, all faith without love
- Matthew 25:31-46, the judgment of the nations

Catechism: CCC 162, 1814-1816, 1991, 2010.

Patristic and conciliar: Second Council of Orange, 529. St. Augustine, on faith working through love (summary; no locus printed). St. Gregory the Great, on proving faith by works (summary; no locus printed).