



FAITH & WORKS

Part 6 of Religion Saves

Pastor Mark Driscoll | February 10, 2008

You're listening to "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions," a sermon series in which Pastor Mark Driscoll answers nine controversial questions about Jesus and Christianity. The following is a presentation of Mars Hill Church in Seattle. For more audio and video content, please visit marshillchurch.org.

Well, howdy, Mars Hill. How you all doing? Good to see ya. Missed ya last week. We had church, I don't know if you were aware of that.

(Laughter)

It was me and seven people who really love Jesus.

(Laughter)

Everybody else was watching the Super Bowl. A couple of quick announcements. If you're new, my name's Mark. Good to have ya. We've got the Downtown campus luncheon next month. Pray for that campus. It'll be our sixth campus. We meet here in Ballard. We meet over in Wedgewood, West Seattle, Shoreline. Also on the East Side. They've got a new building. They're meeting in Redmond. They're going to be moving to Bellevue this summer. Much, much, much larger facility.

And then the Downtown campus will be our sixth. So, be in prayer for them. If you do get over there, help serve, get that building ready. And we certainly would appreciate that. Another thing as well, at the end of last year we told ya we were down financially. People were real generous; we made up the difference. We ended the year ahead for the 11th year in a row. And now we're getting killed again.

So, we're down 300 grand. I feel like a really bad poker player. It's like way up or way down. We can't just sleep good at night. So we're about 300 grand down for the year. Really, it's the Ballard campus that's killing us. We love you guys. Apparently, you don't love us, but we love ya.

(Laughter)

And if you've got giving to catch up on and you're a Christian, we'd sure love to see you do that so we could get back to zero. Our whole goal is to be at zero.

Lastly, we're in the middle of a series if you're new. We let people vote online for questions that they post. I think we got 893 questions, 5½ thousand comments, 343,000 votes. We took the top nine, created this series called "Religion Saves and Nine Other Misconceptions." Today we're dealing with the fourth most popular question, faith and works.

Next week, it will be dating and courtship. You won't want to miss that. And you can go online to marshillchurch.org. There's a bubble suit we're going to give away to create a Christian zone of dating holiness.

(Laughter)

And you might be able to win that. So, you can check that out next week. It's awesome. It's huge. So, this week we'll deal with faith and works – hugely important issue. One of the issues, perhaps the issue, that divided Christianity into the Protestant and Catholic streams. I was born and raised in Catholicism, and met Jesus at 19, and had been in the Catholic stream the first 19 years of my life, the Protestant Reform stream ever since. And we'll explain some of the distinctions between those two tonight.

But I'll go ahead and pray, and we'll get right to work. If you missed some of the notes, you could also go onto the church Web site, marshillchurch.org. The blog tomorrow will have all the points, as well as Facebook, MySpace – we put it everywhere. So, if you don't catch everything in the notes, don't sweat it. It's good to have ya, and you can catch up tomorrow.

Father, we begin with prayer because you are great and because we need you. And Father, it is a great joy to understand your love for us, and Jesus' work for us, and Jesus' work in us, and Jesus' work through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. So, as we study, I ask that you would allow me to teach well. That you would give me a heart of enthusiasm and a mind of truth. I pray for the people, Lord God, that you would open up their hearts and minds to receive your Scriptures, to receive your Son, and to experience the new life that he would give them through the power of the Holy Spirit. And so, Jesus, we ask this for your glory and for our good. And we ask this in your name, amen.

Here is the – here’s the question I was given to answer. “If salvation is by faith alone,” quotes Roman 3 – and all of Romans 3 is actually on being saved by faith alone; I’ll explain all these big terms in a moment – “then why are there so many verses that say or imply the opposite, namely that salvation is by works,” quotes James 2:24? And James 2 is the predominant chapter in the New Testament that talks about salvation including works.

Then goes on to quote Matthew 6:15, 7:21, and Galatians 5:19-21. I’ll focus on Romans 3 and James 2, those are the two big chapters that seem to be in contradiction, or at least in confusion. The quote from Romans 3 that is mentioned in this question is this. It says, “One is justified by faith apart from works of the law,” and then James 2:24, which is quoted here, says, “A person is justified by works and not faith alone.”

And the question here is justification. It’s mentioned roughly 220 some times in the New Testament. And the problem is this, God made us in his image and likeness. He made us very good. We are by nature and choice sinners. We’ve rebelled against God. We’ve sinned against God. We’re separated from God. At the end, we’ll stand before God and he will judge us. And God is holy and good, and we are unholy and sinful. And the question is, “How could God declare us just, allow us into his eternal Kingdom, and he himself still remain holy, good, and just?”

You and I know that if you are absolutely guilty, a good judge has to declare you guilty. A good judge can’t declare you innocent. That would be unjust. And some would say, “Well, what about good people/bad people?” And the Bible sees two kinds of people – perfect and imperfect.

Jesus says, “Be perfect, as God is perfect.” So, in the perfect category is Jesus, and in the imperfect category is everyone else. That would include you and I. And those of us who are in that category can’t stand before God and say, “I know you’re a perfect God, and I know your Kingdom is a perfect place, and I know the qualification to be there is perfection. And I want you to declare me perfect.” Can’t do it. Can’t do it.

So, what will we do when we stand before God? There are two options. One is to say, “Well, I believe in Jesus, and I’ve done all these good things. We’ll call them works. I’m moral. I’m spiritual. I made a good effort. I hope you’re grading on a curve, ‘cause I know I’m better than this other guy. At least I could find my pants. I hope he’s in line ahead of me; I’ll look pretty good, following up on that guy.”

And the other is to say, “You know what? I don’t have anything to say before God other than I trust in Jesus. That’s the answer. That’s the answer. This is justification. This is the issue that split Protestantism and Catholicism. The issue of justification, Martin Luther says, is the issue by which the Church – that’s us – it stands or it falls. Everything lives or dies on the issue of justification.

John Calvin said justification is, quote, “The principle of the whole doctrine of salvation, and the foundation of all religion.” Now here is what we believe. We believe that justification is by grace alone. It’s a gift. It’s received by faith alone, trusting in Jesus Christ alone, our great God and Savior. That it is not inclusive of anything we do. That salvation is not contingent on me, but Jesus. Not what I do, but what he did through his death, burial and resurrection. Not through the life I live, but through the death he died.

It is not my own doing. It’s a gift that I receive. And I just trust in Jesus so when I stand before God the Father, my answer will be Jesus. That’s my answer. Okay?

Now, it’s spoken of this way in II Corinthians 5:21, something that Martin Luther calls the great exchange. The Gospel is stated this way – the Good News of Jesus is stated this way, “God made him” – that is, Jesus – “who knew no sin” – he didn’t sin, he was perfect, he’s God become a man. “God made him who knew no sin to become sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” We’ll call this imputation, reckoning, impartation, whatever words you want to use.

The big idea is, all my sins (past, present, and future), they went to Jesus. He suffers, dies in my place, paying my penalty for my sins. That’s justification. Additionally, he gives to me his righteousness as a gift. “God made him who knew no sin to become sin” – my sin goes to Jesus – “so that in him we might become” – I might become – “the righteousness of God.”

My sin goes to Jesus. Jesus’ righteousness comes to me at the cross. That’s why we’re Christians. This is the heart of all we believe. Now, this is not my doing. I can’t stand before God and say, “I’ve paid you back.” No, Jesus died for my sins. “I’ve lived a good life.” No, Jesus lived a perfect life. “Well, I have some righteousness through my morality, spirituality, or good deeds, or good works.” No, not at all. I trust in Jesus, and he has given me his righteousness. That’s the only righteousness I have. That’s Christianity.

Now, I wish I could preach like a 27-hour sermon for you on this. And actually, I could, but we don’t have time. And I would get into all of the issues of justification and the historical outworkings and new perspectives on Paul. And I’d explain big words like variegated nomism, so you’d feel like you got your money’s worth.

But to sum it all out, what I would do is I’ll just tell you briefly some of the key doctrines – or texts, I should say, around the issue of justification, and then we’ll move forward. But the big idea here is this, Jesus Christ has done something for us. Through his sinless life, his substitutionary death, and his bodily resurrection.

And Titus 3:7 says it this way, we are, quote, “justified by his grace.” It’s a gift. Nothing we do, it’s a gift. Galatians 2 – and much of the whole book of Galatians is on this issue of justification by faith alone through grace alone in Jesus Christ alone. But in Galatians 2:16, he says this, “A person is not justified” – there’s our word – “by works of the law,” – by morality, spirituality, being a good person – none of that.

You can’t stand before God and say, “I feel like I’ve earned it.” He’ll say, “Were you perfect?” “Well, no.” “Okay, then you didn’t earn it.” He goes on to say, “But through faith, trusting in Jesus Christ. So, we also have believed” – another word for faith – “in Christ Jesus in order to be justified” – there’s our word again – “by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified.”

No one could stand before God and say, "I was baptized as a baby. I went to church my whole life. I gave real generously. I tried to do good deeds. I helped the poor. I looked after widows and orphans." All of that may be well and good, but it's not sufficient for you to overcome your debt of sin to God. And it is not sufficient to pay the penalty of your debt of sin to God.

He says, instead, trust in Jesus and everything's okay. Your relationship with God is secured through faith in and grace from Jesus. And then he says in Romans 3:20-25, "For by works of the law" – being a good person, doing your best – "no human being will be justified, declared righteous in the sight of God, since through the law comes the knowledge of sin." Right? Which means when you read the Bible, what you should feel is convicted. You should read it and say, "Okay, what am I supposed to do?"

If you start at Genesis and just read the first five books, you will find a list of more than 600 laws, all these things you are to do and not do. And the further you read, the longer the list will get. And at some point, you should realize you're not doing all that stuff. Right? You should go, "I didn't do that. I won't do that. Did that twice. Oops, wasn't supposed to. Don't intend to ever do that, though apparently God would like –"

When you read the Bible, you see all the things you failed to do. What he's saying is, "The Bible is really good, but we're really bad." And so, when you read the Bible, you should feel really bad, 'cause you're really bad, but that's okay, 'cause the Bible's really good. There's nothing wrong with the Bible; there's something wrong with you.

All right, so, as we read the Bible, we realize, "Man, there's a lot of things I'm not supposed to do that I'm doing. There's a lot of things that I'm supposed to do that I'm not doing. I have sins of omission – I didn't do that. I have sins of commission – whoops, shouldn't have done that. Sins of thought, word, deed, motive, even did the good thing, but didn't do it for the glory of God, did it for my own glory. What? That doesn't count?" Nope. "Oh, my gosh."

All right? You read the Bible, and all of a sudden you realize, "I've definitely got a problem. I'm a sinner." Okay? If you've not read the Bible, read it, you'll feel bad. And then, you'll know why you need Jesus. That's the big idea.

It goes on, "For by the works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight" – Romans 3 – "for since through the law comes the knowledge of sin, but now the righteousness of God has been manifested, apart from law. All the law and the prophets bear witness to it" – the Old Testament – "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction.

"All have sinned, all have fallen short of the glory of God" – everybody's in that imperfect sinner category – "and are justified" – there's our word – "by his grace as a gift" – right? It's a gift, nothing we earn – "through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith."

What he's saying is this, we're all sinners. We're all separated from God. God's wrath hangs over all of us. God's wrath is spoken of more than 600 times in Scripture. In sheer tonnage, it is mentioned more often than the love of God. God doesn't like sin. He doesn't like our sin.

Jesus comes as God, lives a perfect life, doesn't sin at all. Goes to the cross, dies in my place for my sins, endures the wrath of God and punishment that I deserve. The result, then, is that God's wrath is propitiated, taken away, diverted from me and poured out on Jesus. And I receive forgiveness, and life, and love, and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, providing I receive grace from him and I trust in him. That's it.

That's justification by faith alone through grace alone in Christ alone. It's the hallmark of the Protestant Reformation. It's the heart of everything I believe as a Bible teacher. And it is so exceedingly important, and related to that is not only what Jesus has done for us, but also what Jesus does in us. And what Jesus does through us.

But my Catholic friends, as well as others, they take these and they coningle them in a way they shouldn't. Okay? Justification is what Jesus does for us. We'll now talk about regeneration, which is what Jesus does in us. And then we'll talk about good works, which is what Jesus does through us. And all are intimately related, interconnected, but there is a distinction. And if we confuse them, we lose sight of the fullness of the glory of Jesus Christ.

So, Jesus accomplishes salvation for us. That includes regeneration, which is Jesus doing something amazing in us. That'll be my next point. Now, here's the point. We were made in the image and likeness of God to love God. To serve God. To obey God. To live the life that God intends for us. By nature and choice, from Adam and Eve forward, we are all sinners.

Ecclesiastes says, "God made us upright, and we've gone crooked after all kinds of sinful schemes." The question then is, well, how is God going to change our dispositions and our appetites and our desires and our life? And that is the doctrine of regeneration. I think the doctrine of regeneration explains this whole Protestant/Catholic, faith versus works conflict.

The doctrine of regeneration in the Old Testament is referred to as receiving a new heart. A new heart. The heart there is not just the physical organ, it's the center of who you are. It's your desires and your will and your appetites. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Out of the heart comes your whole life." What you eat. What you wear. What you smoke. What you drink. Who you love. Who you touch. Who you don't touch. What you read. How you spend your money. How you respond in traffic. What your desires and hopes and dreams and fears are. All of that comes out of your heart.

Your heart is the center, sum, substance, essence of who you are. The heart is so central to biblical theology, that it's mentioned more than 900 times in the biblical. The heart is mentioned more than 900 times. It is the root cause of every other issue in life.

Two of the books in the Old Testament that promise Jesus coming to take away sin and give us a new heart are Jeremiah and Ezekiel. They have multiple references. I'll give you one from each. Jeremiah 24:7, he says this, "I will give them heart" – God says – "a heart to know that I am the Lord" – that ultimately will be the Lord Jesus Christ – "and they shall be my people, and I'll be their God" – relationship with God out of a new heart – "for they shall return to me with their whole heart."

So, wholeheartedly being committed to Jesus our Lord out of a new heart that really loves him and wants a relationship with him. Ezekiel 36:26, 27, God says, "I will give you a new heart, and a new Spirit" – that's the Holy Spirit – "I'll put within you. And I'll remove your heart of stone from your flesh, and I'll give you a heart of flesh. I'll put my Spirit" – the Holy Spirit – "in you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Because we're sinners, we have a hard heart. A heart of stone is the metaphor. It's rebellious. And obstinate. And foolish and disobedient. And self-righteous. And proud. And arrogant. And separated from God. Jesus takes out the heart of flesh, puts in a heart of stone. Not a perfect heart, but a new heart, a heart that wants to learn. That wants to change. That wants to obey. That wants to be with Jesus. That wants to be like Jesus. That wants to be for Jesus. You change from the inside out.

You change from the inside out. So much of modern counseling, therapy, psychology is an effort to change how people act. It's behavior modification. It's not bad. People are hurting, and they need to change. But the real issue, the only way to truly help someone is from the inside out. It's from the heart. Once the heart changes, then the life changes.

That's the Old Testament metaphor. The New Testament metaphor, brought in by Jesus, is of being born again, or a second birth. In John 3, there's a Bible teacher named Nicodemus comes to Jesus. And he basically asked Jesus, "All right, what do I need to know?" Jesus says, "You need to be born again." Nicodemus doesn't get the subtlety of the metaphor. Scratches his head, says, "I don't know if my mom's down with that."

(Laughter)

"I'm a grown man. If I get back in and come back out, that seems like it would hurt. That doesn't seem nice." Jesus says, "No, we're speaking metaphorically here. You were born physically. Now you need to be born again spiritually. You're first birth was of your mom. Your second birth needs to be of God the Holy Spirit."

Paul picks up this metaphor in Ephesians 2 and Colossians 2, and says that people who aren't Christians are physically alive, but spiritually dead. They don't love God, don't respond to God, don't worship God, don't pray to God, don't listen to God. They're physically alive, spiritually dead because they have physical birth, not spiritual birth. The Christian has physical birth and spiritual birth. They're born again. They experience a new birth.

And the result is, the new birth is what causes the new heart. The new heart. Now, I'll give you ten aspects of what the new heart experiences, and I want to preface it by saying this, "I hate religion." At Mars Hill, this may shock you. We hate religion. Because religion assumes that you don't want to do certain things, and so we have to make you do them.

Right? I need to yell at you, threaten you, talk a lot about hell, get real spooky. I need to put legalistic control mechanisms on you. Somebody to walk around with a clipboard and call balls and strikes in your life. Right? Religion assumes that you want to do evil, and we're gonna make you do good. That's not what we believe as Christians.

We believe that God gives us a new heart so that we want to obey him. Therefore, Christianity, the Church, Christian friends, Bible teachers like myself, our job is not to make you do something you don't want to do, but to help you do something that you want to do – love God. Read your Bible. Pray. Overcome sin. Change your life – with God.

See, it's not that you have an old heart that wants to do wicked. It's that you have a new heart, if you're a Christian, that wants to obey God. It means you don't have to do new things. It means you get to do new things. It doesn't mean that religion is about what you don't get to do. That Christianity is about what you do get to do. It's not about killing your desires and passion, it's about following your deepest and strongest desires in your new heart that Jesus gave you.

So, for us, we hate religion. My goal is not to make you do something you don't want to do, but to show you the goodness of Jesus and the power of a new heart with new desires. And then by God's grace help you and encourage you and instruct you to do what you want to do, knowing that if the desires are from God, God's will and your will intersect in your new heart, and what you want to do, at the deepest level, is what God wants you to do. So, go do it with passion and joy and freedom.

The result is, as well, out of that new heart there are ten things that happen. God does an amazing work. The first is that when you get a new heart, you're born again, you get a new Master. Somebody else is in charge of your life. His name is Jesus, and you exchange Satan for Jesus. It's a great upgrade, by the way. Just so you know.

Okay, I John 4:4, "Little children" – little born again ones is what he's saying, new Christians – "you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you" – that's the Holy Spirit, the same spirit that empowered the obedient new life of Jesus takes up residence in the new heart of the Christian, to empower them to live a new life like Jesus did – "for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."

Well, who's in the world? Satan. Who's in the Christian with the new heart? The Holy Spirit. You have a new Master. You don't belong to Satan, you belong to Jesus. You don't have to obey what the world tells you to do. You can obey what the Holy Spirit empowers and motivates and compels you

to do.

Greater is the power in you for good than the power around you for evil. That's encouraging, and that changes everything. New Master – Jesus is in charge, the Holy Spirit is leading. I'm getting a fresh start as a new Christian with a new heart.

Number two, the new heart includes you being a new creation. This is great. II Corinthians 5:7 – and these are some jacked up people, by the way, he's writing to. They get drunk all the time. They're suing each other. Sexual sin. Totally insane. And God did an amazing work to cause them to be new creations.

He says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation." New heart, new Master, new creation – "the old is passed away" – the way you used to live, the way you used to act, the way you used to think, the way you used to react, the way you used to feel – that passes away. "Behold, the new has come." You're a new person. You're a new person, a new creation. Fresh, clean start with God. Fresh, clean start with God.

Number three, another effect of the new heart, being born again, is a new identity. Isn't it amazing in our life, everybody wants a new identity, from makeovers to changing your look to changing your home to pimping your ride. Whatever it is, it's all about changing your appearances, having a new identity.

What we're talking about here is a new identity – not just externally and what is observed, but internally, at the very core and essence of who you are. Colossians 3:9-10, "You have put off the old self with its practices" – again, the way you used to be.

The way you used to think. The way you used to desire and act and react. Like a suit of dirty clothes you just take that off and drop it. That's not me any more. That's my old ways. That's my old thinking. That's my old identity. Just like dirty clothes, you just take 'em off. Put on the new, the new identity. The new identity which clothes you in the righteousness of Christ. Put on the new self. New way of thinking. New way of acting. New way of reacting out of the new heart, as a new creation, with a new Master, pursuing a new life, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator.

We're made in the image and likeness of God. We have sinned and our life has been marred by sin, so our thinking and our feeling and our acting and reacting and motives are all muddled and confused and crooked. But out of Jesus' work for us on the cross, and Jesus' work through us and in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, you know what? We could start to live like we were supposed to live – loving God. Serving God. Knowing God. Trusting God. Obeying God. Being more and more like Jesus. That's new identity.

You're not a loser. You're not a failure. You're not hopeless. You're not worthless. If you are a Christian, you are a new creation with a brand new identity. You put off your old way of life. You put on your new way of life. And you live out of your new identity as a Christian. As a Christian.

Number four, the other aspect of the new heart is a new mind. I love this one. I Peter 2:2 says, "Like newborn infants long for the pure, spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation." He's talking here about the Bible, about Scripture. And what he's saying is, that just like when a baby is born, a baby wants to eat all the time.

How many new moms would testify that that's true? You could tell who the new moms are, because they're exhausted. They have bags under their eyes. Their children eat all night, and mom can never get any sleep. Right? Because a baby comes out screaming, basically declaring, "I want everything on the earth to be fed to me now. And we're gonna do this again in an hour."

(Laughter)

Right? And that's how it goes. Kids like to eat. And you know what? Just like babies need milk, so Christians need Bible. Just as babies are hungry, so Christians with a new heart, their new mind is hungry for truth. Hungry for truth. So you get a new mind.

~~No, because as a Christian, what you're thinking is~~ changed on all kinds of issues. Right? You'd say something

one week, you became a Christian, you're hanging out with your buddies, and you'd be like, "Hey, that's wrong!" They'll be like, "That's what you said last week." You're like, "But that was the old me. This is the new me. Old things have passed away. All things have become new. My thinking is totally changed."

This is what happens. I could still remember this in college. I became a Christian, and the first thing I wanted to do was read my Bible all the time. I had a job. I had classes. It's not like I didn't have anything to do. But all of a sudden I sat down, in about a month or less, and I read the whole Bible. Just in my free time.

People were like, "You wanna go out and party?" "Nah, I wanna read." "What? Don't you wanna meet girls?" "No, I'm trying to figure out Job. That poor guy – what happened to that guy?" I'm reading Job all the time. I really dug Job.

Then I hit Leviticus. They're like, "What's that about?" "I have no idea what that's about, but I gotta find out. It's in the book. It must be huge."

(Laughter)

Next thing I know, I meet a guy, and we're talking, and I said, "So, what are you learning in the Bible?" He tells me, and I said, "Dude, you've got a lot of information. Where'd you get that?" He said, "I got that from my reference books." I was like, "Really? What's that?" I had no idea. He said, "Well, if you go to Christian bookstore, they've got Christian books that'll help you figure out what the Bible says." "Whoa, awesome."

Next thing I know, like a total freak, I'm running to the Christian bookstore, and I walk in, and I'm like, "I need books. I don't know what I'm lookin'

whoever loves has been born," – or born again, there's the whole concept of second birth – "and knows God." Once you have a new heart, you're new heart has new emotions. This includes love.

I'll be honest to tell ya, before being a Christian, I was not a naturally loving guy. I had been lied to, cheated on, abused, taken advantage of, and jacked with so many times. I didn't trust anybody, and I certainly wasn't going to give my heart to anyone, because I had learned the hard way, you're just gonna get taken advantage of.

I was literally, to all intents and purposes, a violent, angry, bitter person, to the degree I fought a lot of guys and put a handful in the hospital. I got called "Most Huggable" in high school. I wasn't that guy at all. All right?

And when I met Jesus, I realized God's love for me, and my new heart became more loving. Now, all of a sudden, I'm able to love people. It's really a work of God. Right? And love is where you take a risk with somebody and say, "You know, you could really destroy me, 'cause I actually care." That's what love is. God does that with us. He loves us, reaches out to us, pursues us.

So, the truth is, I really love Jesus. But that's the new heart. I really love my wife. That's the new heart. I really love my five kids. That's the new heart. And I love my family. You know what? I love you. And I love this church. And I love the people in this church. And I love the people who allow me to teach them the Bible. I really care for the people in this church. And I want the best for them.

And it's love out of the new heart. And that's God's work. Without the new heart, there wouldn't be new emotions. And the emotion of love, well, it wouldn't really exist. Not like it should.

Number seven, one of the effects of the new heart is that it craves new community, new relationships, new friendships around Jesus. I John 1:3, "That which you have seen and heard we proclaim to you all, so that you, too, may have fellowship or friendship with us. And indeed, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ."

The new heart wants to have a friendship with God through Jesus Christ. The new heart also wants to have a friendship with other Christians. The new heart wants to come to church, learn the Bible, pray, and grow, and change.

The new heart wants you to leave church meetings like this, wants to go to a community group and meet people. Wants to have Christian friends. Wants to pray for people. Wants them to pray for you. Wants to have people to discuss the Bible with. Wants to have people that know you and you know them, and you love one another, and you're connected at the heart, and you're living life together with Jesus at the center of your relationships.

God doesn't just say, "Here's the list of things to do." He helps us do them, and he brings people to help us live a new life, so we're not alone any more. It's the new community. The new heart desires the new community. I can still remember as a brand new Christian, I desperately wanted to go to church. Couldn't even explain it. I didn't know where to go to church, but I knew I was gonna find one.

And by God's grace, I found a wonderful church, where the Bible was taught, and the pastor was godly, and he had an awesome family. They were super encouraging. And you know what? I loved going to that church. 'Cause I learned about Jesus, and I met some great people, who to this day, almost 20 years later, are still friends.

That's the new community. I love that. That's why I love the church. People complain about the church all the time. Those are people who need new hearts, in my opinion.

Number eight – and I'm right.

(Laughter)

Number eight, the new heart also gets a new power. Again, it's not just God saying, "I want you to do all this stuff." It's God then giving us the power to do what he has called us to do. Romans 8:12, 13, "So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh" – let me explain this. You don't owe sin anything. I see this often. For example, let's say with young women who are dating the wrong guy, living with the wrong guy, sleeping with the wrong guy, and they feel like they're obligated. Right?

"I crossed a line; I'm stuck with him. I crossed a line; I'm indebted to him. I said I love him; I guess I have to hang in there. I said I'd marry him; so I guess I will." Here's the deal. If you're not married, you're not obligated. You're not indebted. You made a mistake. Don't repeat it for 50 years. Repent, turn around, get out, walk away. People need to know, you're not indebted to your sin. You're not. You don't owe your sin anything. It's what he says.

"We are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh, not according to sin and simple desires, for if you live according to the flesh, you'll die." Your joy will die. Your intimacy with God will die. Your friendships with others who love God will die. Eventually, it could lead to your own death.

"But if by the spirit you put to death the deed of the body, you will live." Jesus Christ is God. He died for all my sins – past, present, and future. And him dying for my sins means that I now have the power, the new power, to put my sin to death. I don't have to manage my sin. I don't have to try and keep my sin under control. I don't need to sin a little bit. I don't need to feed my sinful desires. My sinful desires can die.

My sins can die, because Jesus died for them, and he gives me the power to put them to death. And I'm not indebted to those desires that are wicked any more. I don't owe them anything. I could walk away with Jesus. This is a new power. You don't have this before you're a Christian.

Now, when you're a non-Christian, you are enslaved to sin. That's the ninth point. You have new freedom. Romans 6:6, "We know that our old self is

crucified with him” – Jesus died for our sins, so that our sins can be put to death, so that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

As a non-Christian, you are a slave to sin. Right? It controls you. That’s why some of you, you can’t stop eating, smoking, drinking, lusting, lying, or not doing any of those things, and being proud, which is the worst sin of all. So I got you, too. Everyone’s guilty. We can’t stop.

Some of you say, “Well, I’m not a slave. I’m free.” Then prove me wrong by never sinning again, by living free of sin in thought, word, deed, motive, sins of omission and commission. From this point forward, don’t do anything unrighteous to any degree.

You say, “I can’t.” That’s ‘cause you’re a slave. A slave to sin. You can’t get out of it. It controls you. You may swap sins. You may stop drinking and start sleeping around. Right? You could trade sins, but you can’t put sin to death. Paul says, we have a new freedom in Jesus, to be dead to sin, turn our back on it, walk away, go live a new life.

You know what? That’s actually true. Some of you have experienced that. You were deeply held by various sins. Sins you’ve committed, sins that have been committed against you. And Jesus has liberated you. And with the new birth and the new heart, you have a new power and a new freedom, and you’re enjoying a new life, which is our tenth point.

The new heart comes for the purpose of a new, brand new, totally new life. I Corinthians 6:9-11, “The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God.” It goes on to list sexual perverts, and thieves, and alcoholics, and all kinds of people. And he says, “Such were” – past tense – “some of you.” You were. That’s how you used to be.

But you were washed, right? Jesus cleaned you up. You were sanctified. Jesus is changing you from the inside out. You were justified. That’s Jesus’ work for you on the cross. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. A new life.

Here is what Christianity, Jesus offers – brand new life. New heart. New mind. New desires. New will. New relationships. New Master. New power. New freedom. New identity. New creation. New life. Best thing in the world. I promise you, best thing in the world.

Deep down, it’s what people want, and they can’t. Because it’s not just changing your behavior. It’s about getting a brand new heart, being born again, so that the same Spirit who empowered the life of Jesus can empower your heart to live a passionate, free, new life. That’s Christianity.

Again, first point, justified – that’s what Jesus does for us. Regeneration – that’s what Jesus does in us. That leads to my third point, which is good works, what Jesus does through us. And this is the order: Jesus does something for us, in us, through us. This is where the works come in. By works, we mean obedience, holiness. We mean doing what God wants you to do, and not doing what God doesn’t want you to do.

And when you do that which you’re not supposed to do, you repent and apologize and change. And by the power of God, live the new life that God would have for you. And the conflict comes up in James 2, which the question alluded to.

I’ll read the verses of controversy to you. James 2:14, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works. Can that faith save him?” James 2:17, 18, “So also by faith itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But some will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

It goes on in James 2:20-22, “Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not our father, Abraham, justified by works when he offered up his son, Isaac? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.”

And then James 2:24-26, “You see that a person is justified by works, not by faith alone. And in the same way, was not also Rahab, the prostitute, justified by works? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.”

Here’s what he is saying. This is Jesus’ brother, James. Pastors a church where people have known the Bible for a long time. The church has been around for a while, and you know what? They’re just living pretty crummy, mediocre, pathetic Christian lives. It doesn’t look like they’re living much of a new life. Right?

And what he’s saying is, “If you really were justified and met my brother, then you’d really be regenerated. He would have changed your heart. Then you would be doing the things that he wants you to do – good works. What you can’t say is, ‘I met your brother, and nothing happened.’ You can’t say that. You can’t say, ‘I met Jesus.’ What changed? ‘Nothing.’ You didn’t meet him, or you dialed the wrong number. You got the wrong guy.”

You meet Jesus, you change. You change inside. Your heart, your mind, your desires, your will, your passion, your power – it changes. You change. And you live differently. That’s the big idea. Your works are different. Your life is different. And you can’t say, “Well, I met Jesus, and nothing happened.”

Paul brings this all together in Ephesians 2:8, 9, and 10. Here’s how he says it, “For by grace” – talking about justification here – “you have been saved through faith.” Grace from Jesus, faith in Jesus – that’s the basis and grounds of our justification. “And this is not your own doing, it’s a gift” – you didn’t earn it, you didn’t deserve it, didn’t merit it – “of God, not a result of works” – nothing we did to be justified – “so that no one could boast.”

You can’t stand before God and say, “Here’s my resume. I lived a good life. I feel like I did a good job.” Not at all. The right reaction to Jesus is humility. Humility. “I did nothing. You did everything. You gave me a gift. I’m glad. Thank you. I love you. You’re the best.” It’s humility – “so that

no one can boast. For we are his workmanship” – Jesus is always working on us – “created in Christ Jesus for” – what? – “good works, which he prepared beforehand for us to walk in.”

We’re saved by grace through faith in Christ alone, to do good works, which he has prepared for us to do. We’re not saved by our works. We’re not saved by what we do. We’re saved by Jesus and his works of life, death, burial, resurrection. But we’re saved to our works. True Christians live new lives. True Christians have absolute change of heart, which leads to transformation of life. It just does.

How many of you would, honestly, raise your hand for those who are non-Christian and say, “This is true. Jesus changes hearts, and out of heart comes new life. It just does.” Anyone experience that? How great that is. Some of you are shocked you’re even here, going, “I’m in church. What happened?”

(Laughter)

“I didn’t ever want to go to church, repent of sin, read the Bible, pray, get in a community group, serve Jesus. That was not in my thinking. And now, it’s really what makes me excited and happy. That’s the life I want to live.”

In Matthew 7 and 12, Jesus uses an analogy, and now I’ll explain to you why we have a fruit tree up here. Jesus says that there’s really two kinds of people. Right? There is the non-Christian and the Christian, and being the second most innovative church in America, we have this. So, there you go. Now you know why we’re on the cutting edge. This is the cutting edge, by the way, trees.

Now, Jesus says, “If you really are a Christian, you will bear fruit.” That’s good works, obedience. You’re gonna read your Bible. And pray. And hate sin. And want to go to church. And be connected with other Christians. And help the poor. And live a sacrificial life. And care for those in need. And what he says is, “A good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.”

And the problem that James has is he has a lot of people saying, “We’re the third kind of tree. We’re the Christian tree with no fruit.” He says, “There is no kind of Christian tree with no fruit. That doesn’t exist.” If you don’t have any fruit on your tree, you gotta ask yourself, did I ever meet Jesus. Right?

He said, “I am the vine. You’re the branches. If you abide in me and I abide in you, you’ll bear much fruit, fruit that will last.” You can’t say, “I’m totally connected to Jesus. I just have never seen any fruit.” Jesus would say, “You’ve not been connected to me. If you’re connected to me, you’re gonna bear all kind of fruit.”

So, what James is telling people is, don’t be certain that you’re a Christian. And I would use it in our modern day vernacular by saying just ‘cause you were baptized as a baby, don’t assume you’re a Christian. Just because you came forward at an altar call at a youth camp, don’t assume you’re a Christian. Just cause you prayed the sinner’s prayer at some point in the past, don’t assume you’re a Christian.

Just because your Baptist grandma told you she’d give you a cookie if you let Jesus come in your heart, don’t assume you’re a Christian. That’s what Baptist grandmas do, “I’ll give you a cookie if you let Jesus in your heart.” Then she can sleep well. She means well, but sometimes it’s very counterproductive. You know?

Because what happens is, you grow up thinking, “I was baptized. I said a prayer. I went to church for a while and was part of a Christian family. I said, “Jesus come into my heart,” when I was a little kid. I’m a Christian.”

Paul says, “Do you trust Jesus? Not just in the past, but ongoing relationship, do you trust him yesterday, today, and tomorrow forever?” And James says, “And let’s look at your life.” Right? “If by faith you really are connected as a branch to Jesus the vine, you’ll be a good tree that bears good fruit. You won’t be a bad tree that bears no fruit.”

And if you want to know whether or not you’re a Christian, look at your life and say, “Today, do I love Jesus? Do I hate sin? Do I want to read my Bible? Do I want to pray? Do I want to be like Jesus, with Jesus, for Jesus, like Jesus? Do I want to get to know other people who are into Jesus? Has he changed my heart, my mind, my desires my power, my passions, my pleasures, my preferences? What has he done in my life – anything? If nothing, maybe I’ve not met Jesus. Maybe I’ve not met Jesus.”

What’s the fruit in your life. If Jesus has done something for you, justified you; if Jesus has done something in you, regenerated you; then most assuredly, Jesus will accomplish things through you, good works and much fruit.

Now, some of you are here today, and you say, “Look, I’m a Christian, but on my tree I’ve got one puny little piece of fruit. It’s hanging on by a thread.” Well, you know what? You need to be pruned. That’s repentance. Cut off this sin, this folly, this rebellion, this bad idea, these relationships. You need to prune through repentance so that you can bear more fruit.

Some of you are here, and you’re not Christians. You need to give your life to Jesus, be connected to him and start to live a brand new life out of a brand new heart. I’ll tell you what this looks like practically. Tuesday, Pastor A. J. and I, we went out for coffee with a guy in the church, and I asked him, I said, “Oh, so did you watch the Super Bowl?” Or he asked me, I don’t remember which way it went.

I said, “Nah, I didn’t get to watch Super Bowl, I was working Sunday.” I said, “Did you watch the Super Bowl?” He said, “Yeah, I love the Super Bowl. I usually watch the Super Bowl. This year I didn’t.” I said, “Oh, what happened?”

He said, “My wife was at the women’s retreat, and I was home with my little boy,” I think he’s about 2. And he said, “He just wanted to play LEGOs

all day. So, I didn't watch the Super Bowl. I got on the floor, and I spent hours on the floor, with my boy, just hanging out, talking, wrestling, doing LEGOs."

I said, "How did you feel about that?" He smiled. He said, "It was wonderful. I totally love being a daddy." He said, "I love watching the Super Bowl, but that was funner than the Super Bowl." Is it a sin to watch the Super Bowl? No. But what's the new heart want to do? Hang out with your son. That's what the new heart wants to do. 'Cause that's what God wants you to do.

Right? God came down for us. A good daddy gets the Gospel, says, "I'm gonna get down on the floor to be with my kid in his world, play with his LEGOs. We then went from there to my house, where we had the whole department, the pulpit department over for a big party. Guys brought their wives, and there's women in the department brought their husbands. Everybody's hanging out there.

There was about 50 people at my house altogether, kids running around. Most of the kids are real small babies. There's like five, six, seven, eight – I don't know. There's a lot of little babies. Cute little people. And at one point, I don't know what happened, we're not Jewish, but it sort of went Jewish.

All the women are in one room, all the men are in another room. All the women are having their conversation. We're having our conversation. And I'm sitting there, in my house, seeing the fruit of the doctrine of regeneration. All these guys, pretty much they're all young, they're in their 20s, they're hip and cool. I think I might be the only guy there without a tattoo. You know, this is the crew.

And as I look around, here's what they're talking about in my living room. They're talking about the Bible, what they're reading in the Bible. They're talking about books, "And here's – and I'm reading this book, and I'm reading this book. Yeah, and I'm learning this, and I'm trying to figure this out."

They're telling their story – "Yeah, five years ago I wasn't walking with Jesus. Last thing I ever thought I'd be doing is workin' in a church [Chuckle] for Jesus." Guy saying, "Yeah, I never thought I'd get married, and then Jesus changed my heart and introduced me to this woman, and I'm just drawn to her. I love her. I care for her. I'm giving my whole life to her, and I really thank God for her. And yeah, we got sin and issues, and we're working it out, but my heart is 100 percent to be faithful to this woman for my whole life."

As I'm looking, we're having all these conversations. At that point, no disservice to the women, all the babies in the house were being held by men. Okay? There's new daddies sitting there holding their baby, rocking their baby, kissing their baby, saying, "Man, I really like being a dad. Being a dad's the coolest thing in the world."

Then the guys that are there with a wife but no kids are like, "Yeah, I can't wait to have a baby. Can I hold your baby?" So then we got the guys, "Yeah, let me hold your baby." And then we got the single guys saying, "I gotta get a wife so we could have a baby." And the single guys are sitting there saying, "Yeah, I really want to get married. And I really want to marry a woman who loves Jesus. And I want to have babies. And I want to be a daddy and a husband and serve Jesus together as a family."

And all these guys would say five years ago, it wasn't even a thought that ever passed through the mind. But that's what regeneration does. You just change. What makes you happy is different than what used to make you happy. This is not the easiest life, but it's the happiest life. It's the best life.

I just remember sitting there, thinking, "You know, you're not gonna find this anywhere in Seattle." I mean, when church gets out, if you go to a restaurant, or you go to a coffee shop, or you go out for happy hour, see if you can find 20 guys in their 20s sitting around, holding babies, talking about how great it is to be a one-woman man.

(Laughter)

You all chuckle. You go, "Yeah, that doesn't happen." And if you see that, go up and introduce yourself. It's someone from Mars Hill.

(Laughter)

I mean, that's regeneration. Your life changes. Your heart changes. Your mind changes. Your desires change. Your emotions change. Your relationships change. You're changed from the inside out. And friends, here's what I want for ya. I love ya. This is what I want for ya. I want you to live a new life as a new creation, with a new identity and a new mind, out of your new heart, with your new friends, pursuing your new desires as a new creation, with a new life, overseen by a new Master, whose name is Jesus.

That's what we want for ya. Again, it's not the easiest life, but it's the happiest. It's the happiest life. So, if you are here, and you are not a Christian, we want you to give your sin to Jesus, become a Christian, and enjoy the beginnings of a new life out of a new heart. That's what we want.

If you're here and you're a Christian, you're probably miserable unless you're living in the pruning of repentance. We want you to repent of sin, come back to Jesus, be pruned of all of your sin and folly and rebellion, so that you can be more fruitful and do the good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do. I'm gonna go ahead and pray for you. Then we're gonna give you a chance to respond.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that you are the vine and we are the branches. That by being connected to you, we can bear much fruit – fruit that would last. I thank you for the biblical imagery of a new heart. And God, being born again. God, that's what I ask that you would give to the people through your Holy Spirit. New heart, through a new birth, to live a new life.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that this is the best life. It's the only life. It's the happiest life. I thank you, Lord Jesus, that I get to see it in my home and in my life, with my friends and in our church.

And, Lord Jesus, I pray for those who may not be Christians, that you would regenerate them. That the first inclinations of their new heart would be to turn from sin and trust in you. Lord God, for those who are Christians that have sin, I pray that they would repent and be pruned, so that they could come back into intimacy with you and bear much fruit that would last.

And Jesus, I thank you that this is possible. And I thank you for the new heart, regeneration – regeneration, it's a wonderful gift, God. And we celebrate it, and by your grace, we'll live in light of it in Jesus' good name, amen.

[Applause]

Here's what we're gonna do – thank you, thank you. I'm gonna tell ya how to respond. Okay, first, become a Christian. If you are a Christian, repent of sin, work it out with Jesus, get it straightened out. If you're here and you are a Christian or become one today, you could partake of communion and remembering the body and blood of Jesus, which takes away sin.

You also can give your tithes and offerings, because Jesus says, "Where your treasure is, your" – what? – "is."

Response: Heart.

Your heart. Giving is always a heart issue. It's not a money issue, it's a heart issue. Your heart is demonstrated by your money. If you want to know what you love, balance your checkbook. Then you'll know what your heart really desires most. In giving, you're saying, "I love Jesus and my church, and I want to see other people meet Jesus and get a new heart. My treasure is following my heart."

And then, you're gonna sing and celebrate. And here's what I want you to think about while you sing and are celebrating, "I, by God's grace, if I'm a Christian, I have a new heart. And one of the deepest desires of the new heart is to worship Jesus. To honor Jesus. To sing to Jesus. To celebrate Jesus. To thank Jesus passionately, with desire."

And so, you're welcome to join us in the worship of Jesus, who gives us a new heart to do these things gladly. I love you guys, and I hope you enjoy the rest of our time together. Thank you.