

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

Lesson 5 — Believing Loyalty

Tuesday, June 30 -- 6:00 PM

After Michael S. Heiser, *What Does God Want?* · Septuagint (LXX) & ESV side-by-side

KEY TEXTS

Mark 1:14-15 - John 3:3-8 - Romans 10:9-13 - Ephesians 2:8-10 - James 2:14-26 - Acts 2:38 - Romans 1:5; 16:26

THE BIG IDEA

What God wants from us is not a transaction. It is a relationship. The way the New Testament names that relationship is **pistis** — the Greek word usually translated “faith,” but better rendered as **believing loyalty**: trust that produces a settled allegiance to the risen Jesus as Lord. Paul calls it the “obedience of faith.” It is the opposite of a one-time card-signing. It is what it feels like, from the inside, to be a member of the family of God.

INTRODUCTION

Lesson 4 ended with the empty tomb. Lesson 5 asks the question every honest person asks next: *how do I receive what He has done?* The New Testament's answer is deceptively simple and surprisingly demanding. The answer is *pistis* — a word translated “faith” or “belief” in English Bibles, but carrying the freight of trust, fidelity, allegiance, and loyalty in its Greek and Hebrew context. Believing loyalty is the door of the family.

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WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

PART ONE

What *pistis* Actually Means

Not mental assent — trust that walks

In modern English, “belief” usually means “mental acceptance of a proposition.” *I believe Paris is in France.* That is not what *pistis* means in the New Testament. *Pistis* and its Hebrew cousin *emunah* describe the kind of trust you put in a covenant partner — trust that produces fidelity, loyalty, and reliance. James 2 will remind us that even the demons “believe” in that thin intellectual sense and shudder. Saving faith is something more.

Matthew Bates and other scholars have argued for translating *pistis* as “allegiance” in many New Testament contexts — especially where Jesus is being confessed as Lord (*Kyrios*) in a world where Caesar also wanted that title. To “believe in Jesus as Lord” is to swear fidelity to a new King.

KEY INSIGHT

Three things at once. Saving faith involves *notitia* (knowing the content of the gospel), *assensus* (agreeing that it is true), and *fiducia* (trusting Christ Himself, not merely the propositions). The Reformers distinguished these three precisely because so many modern people stop at the first two and call it faith.

Romans 10:9-10 - Confess With Your Mouth, Believe in Your Heart

Greek New Testament

⁹ ὅτι ἐὰν ὁμολογήσης ἐν τῷ στόματί σου Κύριον Ἰησοῦν, καὶ πιστεύσης ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου ὅτι ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὸν ἤγειρεν ἐκ νεκρῶν, σωθήσῃ.

¹⁰ καρδίᾳ γὰρ πιστεύεται εἰς δικαιοσύνην, στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν.

English Standard Version

⁹If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

¹⁰For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

PART TWO

Repent and Believe

Mark 1:14-15 - Jesus' first sermon in one verse

Jesus' first recorded sermon in Mark is four lines long: *the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*. Repentance (*metanoia*) is a complete change of mind — a turning. Faith (*pistis*) is the corresponding step toward Christ. The two go together. You cannot turn toward Jesus without turning away from what kept you from Him.

On the day of Pentecost Peter answers the same question with the same words: *repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit* (Acts 2:38). Repent. Believe. Be baptized. Receive the Spirit. The pattern is the same on every page of Acts.

Mark 1:14-15 - Jesus' First Sermon

Greek New Testament

¹⁴ ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν, κηρύσσων τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ...

¹⁵ πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς καὶ ἤγγικεν ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ· μετανοεῖτε καὶ πιστεῦετε ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ.

English Standard Version

¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God,

¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

PART THREE

Born From Above

John 3 - new birth is something God does

Jesus tells Nicodemus that no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born “from above” (*anōthen*). The new birth is something God works in us, not something we work up. The Spirit blows where He wills (John 3:8). Our part is to receive what He gives.

Titus 3:5 puts it the same way: “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” The family is born of water and Spirit, not of human will or effort.

KEY INSIGHT

The two natures of regeneration. The Bible never makes new birth either purely human (a decision we work up) or purely divine (something God does over our heads). It is both at once: *God begets, we respond.* The Spirit wakes the soul, and the soul gladly says yes.

John 3:5-6 - Born of Water and Spirit

Greek New Testament

⁵ἀπεκρίθη ὁ Ἰησοῦς· ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἔξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος, οὐ δύναται εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ.

English Standard Version

⁵Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.”

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

PART FOUR

By Grace, Through Faith, For Good Works

Ephesians 2 - the gospel grammar in three lines

Paul reduces the gospel grammar to one sentence in Ephesians 2:8–10. **By grace** — salvation is a gift from God, not earned. **Through faith** — received by trust, not works. **For good works** — God's workmanship (*poiēma*) created in Christ Jesus for works He prepared beforehand. Saved *by* grace, *through* faith, *for* obedience. Never one without the others.

James 2 puts the same point from the other side. Faith that produces no works is dead — not because works *save* us, but because faith without works is not *pistis* at all. It is only intellectual assent, the kind of “faith” the demons have. Real allegiance shows up in the body.

Ephesians 2:8-10 - By Grace, Through Faith, For Good Works

Greek New Testament

⁸τῇ γὰρ χάριτί ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ τῆς πίστεως· καὶ τοῦτο οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, Θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον...

¹⁰αὐτοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν ποίημα, κτισθέντες ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ἐπὶ ἔργοις ἀγαθοῖς.

English Standard Version

⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

¹⁰For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

James 2:17, 22 - Faith Without Works Is Dead

Greek New Testament

¹⁷οὕτω καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔργα ἔχη, νεκρά ἐστι καθ' ἑαυτήν.

²²βλέπεις ὅτι ἡ πίστις συνήργει τοῖς ἔργοις αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων ἡ πίστις ἐτελειώθη.

English Standard Version

¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

²²You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works.

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

PART FIVE

The Obedience of Faith

Romans 1:5 and 16:26 - the phrase that bookends Paul's greatest letter

Romans is the most important theological letter ever written, and Paul opens and closes it with the same phrase: **the obedience of faith** (*hypakoēn pisteōs*). His apostolic mission, he says, is “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations” (1:5). The closing doxology in 16:26 names the same goal.

Obedience and faith are not in tension. Obedience is what faith looks like when it walks. Believing loyalty is the door of the family and the floor of the family's house. We were rescued from rebellion in order to become His glad and free children — not slaves who must earn their keep, and not orphans who have no Father to please.

KEY INSIGHT

Believing loyalty. Pull together what we have seen: trust the gospel of the risen Jesus, confess Him as Lord, repent, be baptized, receive the Spirit, and walk in the good works God has prepared. That is what God wants from us. That is the door of the family.

Romans 1:5 - The Obedience of Faith Among All Nations

Greek New Testament

δι' οὗ ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολὴν εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ὑπὲρ τοῦ ὀνόματος αὐτοῦ.

English Standard Version

through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.

Pleasant Springs Church

WDGW? — What Does God Want? • Lesson 5 of 6

DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

1. How does translating *pistis* as “believing loyalty” rather than mere “belief” change how you think about what God wants from you?
2. Jesus' first sermon is “repent and believe.” What is one thing in your life you need to *turn from* in order to keep walking with Jesus?
3. John 3 says we must be “born from above.” Have you experienced the new birth? When? If you cannot point to it, what is keeping you from yes today?
4. Ephesians 2:8–10 puts grace, faith, and works in their proper order. Where in your spiritual life have you been tempted to flip them?
5. James 2:17 says faith without works is dead. Where in your life has your “faith” been all words and no walking? What changes this week?
6. Paul calls the goal of his ministry “the obedience of faith.” What does it look like for *your* obedience to flow from love and gratitude, not duty or fear?
7. If a friend asked you today, “what does God want from me?” how would you answer in one paragraph?

A PRAYER IN RESPONSE

*Lord Jesus, give us the gift of believing loyalty. Forgive the cheap faith that has spoken your name without following you. Wake the dead places in our hearts. Make us your workmanship, created for the good works you prepared before the world began. We confess with our mouths that you are Lord. We believe in our hearts that the Father raised you from the dead. Save us. Make us yours. And keep us walking in step with the Spirit until we see you face to face. **Amen.***

SOURCES & FURTHER READING

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WDGW? — *What Does God Want?* • Lesson 5 of 6

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- Septuagint Greek text: Rahlfs-Hanhart, *Septuaginta* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft).
- English text: *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Crossway Bibles.