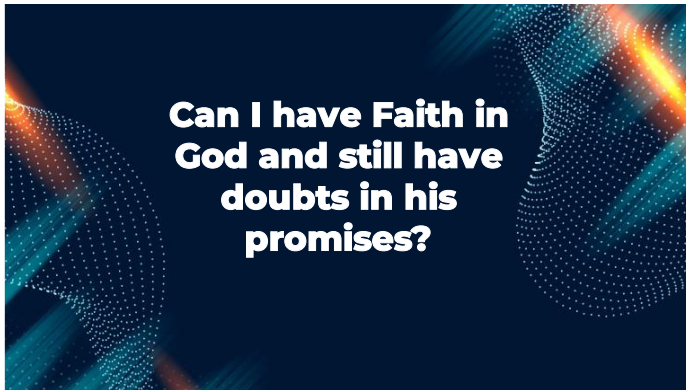


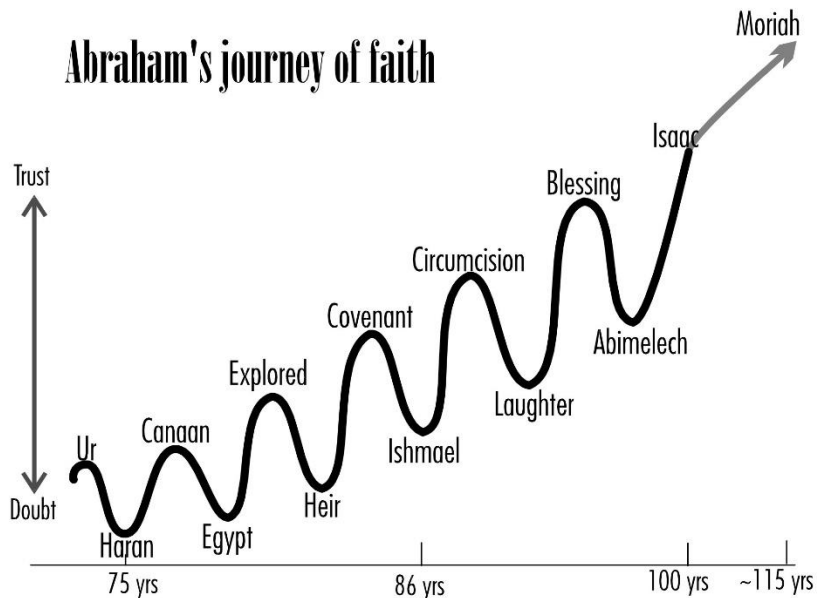
The elements of Abraham's saving faith?

We have come a long distance on our Roman Road. Paul up to the fourth chapter verse 12, wrote about the unifying factor of his letter. All have sinned. All fall short. For the Intellectual Greeks, it was the leveling point of their understanding. For the Roman moralist group, it was about the standards of life were not the nation nor the empire but God. For the Jews, both the Alexandrian and Judean they need to see a greater distinction.



These devout Jews were in jeopardy of losing all their ethnic distinctiveness. The two groups of Jews thought that to keep their lives in tune with God, they had to keep the means and methods of Judaism. For them, it was about "Doing things." And if they did enough things that would make them righteous.

In the previous section of Chapter Four the teaching was that we all are saved by faith as exemplified by Abraham. Now Paul interjects a new argument. Paul reminded the young church about what happened after Abraham was counted righteous by his belief. This is where Paul really begins to dissect faith.



Commentary

In a quick reading of this portion of Romans and the absoluteness of Paul that "we are saved by faith apart from the words of the law" 3:28, can cause some puzzlement when compared to James and his statement of, "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

Regarding the so-called contradiction between the inspired authors, James and Paul, it simply does not exist. Paul wrote of justification "by faith," and James of justification "by works." So what? Justification is obviously by both! It would require a statement by one of them to the effect that salvation is by one or the other "only," in order for there to be a contradiction (this is merely basic English); but of course, neither writer said any such thing; and James went so far as to guard against anyone's ever saying such a thing when he wrote: "Ye see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). The alleged contradiction is thus between human error and the word of God, not between the apostolic authors.

These verses aren't a contrast between faith and works. They're a contrast between true faith and false faith. Anyone can say they believe in God, even demons (James 2:19)! True faith is proved real because it results in good works. False faith is proved dead because it doesn't.

Tonight's study is the next step. We are saved by faith, and this causes us to be heirs of promise. Promises that only require faith for them to be a part of our life. Faith in God is the starting point, Faith in what God can do is continual.

Faith's object: God's promise (vs. 18)

18 In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "So shall your descendants be."

Abraham didn't just believe in God in general; he believed in a specific promise that God had proclaimed. Faith alone if not pointed to the correct object is not saving faith.

The story of Abraham.

After the wickedness of the world had really come to a head in the flood, resulting in this brazenly defiant act of mankind building a gigantic tower as a declaration of independence from God, called "The Tower of Babel," God chose a man named Abram to father a nation, through whom God would one day bring salvation into the world. This all takes place in Genesis 12.

The problem is that Abraham and his wife are in their 70's and have no kids, and they remain that way until they are in their 90's. This is what it means to "hope against hope." Because, when you're 90 and you haven't had kids, you give up for obvious reasons.

In V18 He believed... according to what had been spoken. (specifically, that he would be the father of many nations and from his family would come salvation for the whole world. And so that from that point on, Abraham started walking around with joy and confidence regarding the future (he built himself a nursery and started picking out baby names and looking for land for this new nation--even when he's 90 with no kids.

V21 because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do. 22 Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness.

So, faith's object is the promise of God. Faith is believing that God will do what God said he'd do, and adjusting your life around that. Again, note: Faith is not just believing in God, it is trusting in a specific promise he has made. In Abraham's case it was the promise to send a son that would bring blessing and salvation to the world.

Paul makes the bridge to us in vs. 23: 23 Now 'it was credited to him' was not written for Abraham alone, 24 but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Abraham believed God would send a son that would bring blessing and salvation to the world and that was credited to him as righteousness.

This raises the question: What is it that we believe that gets credited to us as righteousness?

That God raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. The resurrection, Paul says, was proof that God had accepted Jesus as the payment for our sins. So when we believe in the resurrection, we are saying, "I believe it worked. I believe that when Jesus said "it is finished," that it was finished."

"Saving faith is not believing that God is there. Further, it is not believing in a God who saves. It is believing God when he promises a way of salvation by grace".

And when we do that and arrange our life around that, it is credited to us as righteousness. Paul says, our faith is the same as Abraham's: We both believe that God keeps his promise to send salvation. Abraham believed that God would send it; you and I believe that he has sent it. People in the OT were saved just like us. They believed that God would send a Savior; we believe that he has. They looked forward to the cross; we look backwards at it. The direction is different, but the object is the same.

B. Faith's focus: God's power (vs. 19)

19 Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; 20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

There were lots of things Abraham could have brought into consideration as he thought about his future; lots of things that could have discouraged him:

- Like the infertility of his own body.
- Sarah's age
- Their past inability to have kids.

But he didn't think about those things. He focused only on God's power. Depending on God alone can be scary, but Abraham did it. Most of us prefer a faith where we have to depend a little bit on God and a little bit on us. If this promise were made to us, we'd be saying, 'OK, God, thanks. And we'd head right toward the doctor and say, "What kind of pills does she need and what do I need?" And we'd be looking on the internet for home remedies. "How to have kids when you're 90." We'd want to hedge our bet. We're hoping God keeps his promise, but we've got other ways of getting it done if he doesn't.

We have what Tony Evans calls "mutual fund faith." If you're in the stock market at all, you know a mutual fund is a way of spreading your investment risk. A mutual fund is a really big fund where lots of people have pooled their money and you invest in lots of different companies and not just one. That way your risks are spread out, and if one company fails, the risk is mitigated.

In what ways do we hedge our faith today?

Refusing to accept full forgiveness.

- The inability to accept the past being the past. You live with a haunting shadow of the thoughts, attitudes, and actions that were not pleasing to God. Every time you start to find peace with God there is a foul smell coming from somewhere from your past and it sours it all.

Being a Christian is to live in faith. Not just have faith that there is a God out there somewhere, but a mighty God in you. "Greater is He who is in me than he that is in the world. In faith, the moment you accepted Christ, you became a chosen child of God. You have been appointed to walk in victory; all your needs will be supplied; you will reign forever with Christ. Nothing can overcome you unless you simply give up. No weapon formed against you will prosper, all those who rise against you will fall. Nothing can separate you from his life; goodness and mercy as you will follow you all the days of your life; in all these earthly trials he is working in you an eternal weight of glory.

Is this how you are walking through life?

Refusing to face tomorrow.

Another way we hedge our bet is by Refusing to face tomorrow with the confidence of those promises: Like Abraham, you think your past failures define your future. But faith says my future is not determined by my past, but by the promises of God.

People who are considering Christianity sometimes tell me: "I just don't think I can live this out." But in saying that, your focus is on you! The focus of your faith should no longer be our power, but his. The Christian life is not you for Jesus, but Jesus in you.

That's what Paul said in Gal 2:20: Christ lives "in me." In me. Many people think of the Christian life like a wrestling match. You are in there with "the world, the flesh and the devil." But Jesus will be there in your future. You do it for Jesus. Then, Jesus and you. "Jesus take the wheel." It's really Jesus in you. He becomes the power in your fight. Whenever our focus goes from God to us, we start to hedge our bet.

C. Faith's boast: God's trustworthiness and ability (vs. 20–21)

20 yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, 21 and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. 22 Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness.

A big theme for Paul in Romans is what we boast in. If we're saved by works, he says, we can boast about we've accomplished. But if we're saved by faith, we can only boast about what God has done. If Abraham had kids in his own strength when he was 90, he would have said, "I am a superman!" But as it stands now, when you meet Abraham in heaven, he's not going to be talking about what a rare male specimen he was. 'Yeah, at 90 years old I was havin' kids... the ol' boys' still got it.' When you meet him in heaven, he'll say, "I was a miserable, dried-up failure. God did it all. He gets the glory."

If any of your salvation came from your own strength, when you get to heaven you may boast about all you've overcome. But as it is, like the old hymn said, "when we've been there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun; we've no less days to sing God's praise, than when we've first begun!"

Nobody in heaven is going to be walking around with stupid narcissistic Nike shirts on saying, "Just do IT."

D. Faith's feebleness (vs. 20)

Let's go back to vs. 20 again:

yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

I struggled with this verse. Not once, but twice Abraham lied and told some king that Sarah was his sister to protect himself. Once with Pharaoh; another with Abimelech.

And again specifically about his promise for a son, Abraham gets impatient and takes matters into his own hands and sleeps with maidservant Hagar to try and accomplish things. These all sound like wavering to me. Paul did know these things. Yet still, he said, "Abraham did not waver in unbelief."

I don't know about you, but I find that comforting. It means: You don't have to have unflinching faith to walk with God. Scripture is filled with stories of great saints who wavered...

- Read the book of Job, whom God called the most righteous man on the face of the earth: he wavered
- Peter, the future leader of the church, wavered over and over: once on top of the waves; once at the end of John 6; and then 3 times when he denied Jesus.
- John the Baptist, whom Jesus said was the greatest ever born among women, wavered and doubted.
- In Mark 9: A man comes to Jesus and says, "My son is sick, often afflicted by a demon, and I've taken him to your disciples and they can't help him. If you can, can you help him?" Jesus is like,

“If I can? Do you believe?” The man’s response: ‘I believe, help my unbelief.’ So Jesus simply healed the son even though the father did not have great and grand faith.

So, why would Paul, despite all the ways Abraham faltered, say, “He did not waver in unbelief”? Because Paul understood that faith is never falling, but always looking to Jesus after you do.

E. Faith’s result: righteousness (vs. 22–25)

24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, 25 He who was delivered over because of our wrongdoings, and was raised because of our justification.

Faith is merely the hand that lays hold of Jesus.

It is the admission that you cannot save yourself, but God has kept his promise and done it for you. That though you are faithless, he was faithful. Faith declares though you are unrighteous, God was gracious; though you are powerless, he is powerful; that he is faithful and just in all of his ways.

This faith is what will propel you outward into the mission of God. One thing I noted as I read Romans 4 this week over and over was how Paul seems to brim with anticipation about what God will do over and over. He keeps saying (in vv 11–12, 16, 17, and 18), “God promised Abraham he’d be the father of many nations... that he’d have many descendants; this message is for all people of every nation who believe...”

Paul is confident that the God who raised Jesus from the dead will keep his promise to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. Paul’s confidence in God’s promise about salvation didn’t stop with his own salvation--it extended to seeing others come to know the good news. And that is going to give Paul the confidence to go and share with people, because he knows that God has promised to save people from every tribe and tongue and just like God kept his word to bring salvation, he will surely keep his word to extend salvation among every tribe and tongue.

The whole Christian life is started, empowered and sustained by faith in God’s promise.

Summary

Faith is not a general belief in God. It is confidence in what God has promised--that he will remove your sin-debt and turn you into a righteous person--and leaning your weight on that.

Faith is not a feeling. It is a choice to believe what God has said and rest your weight on it. People say, “I don’t feel faith.” Faith has little to do with feeling. It is simply a trusted fact.

“The promise must be by grace if it is to be guaranteed. To introduce works, ‘I must do my part,’ is to introduce an element of insecurity and uncertainty.”

William Newell

Insecurity Leads to:

- We try to whitewash our own lives.
- We cannot love God because self comes first.
- We cannot love others.
- We do not become the inheritors of God’s promises.

NEXT WEEK: BENEFITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Homework:

Read Romans Chapter 5:1-11

Answer these questions for yourself from this portion of scripture:

1. What is the hope of the glory of God?
2. How does this hope motivate you to live for God’s glory?
3. How has God demonstrated his love for you? How do you respond to his love?
4. How do you boast in God through Jesus Christ?
5. How do you share this boasting with others?