

Romans Session 59 Salvation by Divine Power Not by Human Effort 2

Romans 4:18-21 (NASB)

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."*

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.*

After showing that salvation comes by faith and not works, and from grace not law, Paul concludes the chapter by showing that faith also comes by divine power, not by human effort.

In this passage the apostle points out three realities of saving faith;

1. Its analysis (v 18-21)
2. Its Answer (v 22)
3. Its Application (23-25)

ANALYSIS OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

In this passage Paul lists seven key characteristics of Abraham's faith and of all faith that is God-given, the only kind of faith that results in salvation.

First, the apostle declares of Abraham that **in hope against hope he believed**.

The terms hope and faith are related but they are not the same.

Hope, in this case, is the desire for something that might be true or might happen, whereas **faith** is the firm confidence that it is true or will happen.

The ancient patriarch had **hope** when from the human vantage point, there was absolutely no basis or justification for **hope**.

Yet despite the seeming impossibility hoped for, **he believed** it would happen as God said.

The object of Abraham's faith was God, and His promise that he, that is Abraham, **might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken**,

Genesis 15:5-6 (NASB)

⁵ *And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."*

⁶ *Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*

Second, Paul declares that Abraham believed God **without becoming weak in faith**.

To become weak in faith is to allow doubt to cloud and partly undermine belief.

Abraham had been trusting God for 25 years, acknowledging, as Paul had just intimated that God;

Romans 4:17c (NASB)

¹⁷ *God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.*

Now as far as we know, Abraham had not witnessed any miracle of God. He had not seen God raise the dead or call anything or anyone into being who did not already exist.

Yet he firmly believed that the Lord was easily capable of doing such things.

Commenting on that characteristic of Abraham's faith, the writer of Hebrews said,

Hebrews 11:17-19 (NASB)

¹⁷ *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;*

¹⁸ *it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."*

¹⁹ *He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.*

Third, Paul tells us that Abraham's faith prevented him from becoming discouraged by his own natural weakness. Because Abraham's faith in God was strong and unwavering, his own ignorance and weakness were no obstacles to his trust.

Therefore, he did not falter when **he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old.**

Abraham's natural procreative power, was now gone, **as good as dead**, yet that physiological fact did not diminish his faith.

Natural impotence was not a problem to Abraham, because his faith was in the supernatural God who had created him in the first place.

Many generations before the time of Abraham, Noah had demonstrated similar unwavering faith in God.

When the Lord commanded Noah to build an ark, he had never seen rain, because all the earth's necessary moisture came from mist and dew.

Yet for 120 long years Noah faithfully continued to build the ark, for no other reason than that it was God's will.

In obedience to God he gathered the animals exactly according to the Lord's instructions and led them into the ark before it started to rain, a phenomenon unknown until God then sovereignly opened the flood gates of the heavens.

Hebrews 11:7 (NASB)

⁷ *By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.*

Noah did not build the ark because he saw a need for it but solely because it was his divine commission.

Not only did he build an ark, but also during that time he was a faithful preacher of righteousness.

2 Peter 2:5 (NASB)

⁵ *and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly;*

Noah preached to the unbelievers of his day, who doubtless ridiculed him incessantly about his seemingly foolish and pointless construction project.

That is the kind of undaunted faith that Noah's descendant Abraham had.

Fourth, Abraham did not doubt God's promise when the circumstances around him seemed to make its fulfillment impossible.

When God repeated the specific promise that Isaac would be born to Abraham and Sarah the following year, both Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age, past child bearing age. But the deadness of Sarah's womb was no more a hindrance to Abraham's faith than was the impotence of his own body.

Fifth, with respect to the promise of God, Abraham did not waver in unbelief. He did not vacillate between faith and doubt as many believers frequently do.

When from the human standpoint things are going well, it is easy to trust God.

But when things seem impossible, it is even easier to distrust Him.

Sarah was a woman of faith, and according to Hebrews;

Hebrews 11:11c (NASB)

¹¹ she considered Him faithful who had promised

But before her faith came to that point of unqualified trust, she had laughed at the promise she overheard the Lord making to her husband. (Gen 18:12).

It would seem from the Genesis narratives that Paul was mistaken about Abraham's unwavering faith.

Genesis 15:1-3 (NASB)

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

² Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

³ And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."

Abraham openly admitted before God that he could not understand how the divine promise of an heir, much less a multitude of nations, could be fulfilled.

The only heir he could see was his chief servant, Eliezer, who would have received Abraham's inheritance had no son been born to him by Sarah.

But listen, struggling faith is not doubt, just as temptations to sin is not itself sin.

The very fact that Abraham was trying to understand how God's promise could be fulfilled indicates he was looking for a way of fulfillment, although he could not yet see a way.

Weaker faith might have simply succumbed to doubt.

Sincere struggling with spiritual problems comes from strong, godly faith.

Such faith refuses to doubt and trusts in God's promises, even when no way of fulfillment is humanly imaginable.

God's testing of His children's faith is designed to strengthen their trust, and they should thank Him for it, hard as it seems to be at the time.

James 1:2-4 (NASB)

² *Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials,*

³ *knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.*

⁴ *And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

When Abraham was tested by God, he **grew strong in the faith.**

John Calvin wisely observed that believers "are never so enlightened that there are no remains of ignorance, nor is the heart so established that there are no misgivings."

A Christian who claims to understand all of God's truth and to envision the fulfillment of all His promises is not demonstrating great faith but great presumption.

Godly faith is not full understanding but full trust;

Hebrews 11:1 (NASB)

¹ *Now faith is the assurance (trust) of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

Sixth, Paul says that Abraham's faith was characterized by his **giving glory to God.**

Godly faith glorifies God: The One who gives the faith receives all the credit.

Conversely, any faith that does not glorify God is not of or from Him.

Faith in God, because it affirms His trustworthy character, is the supreme way that men glorify Him, while without faith, any attempt to worship, praise, or honor Him is a worthless, self-righteous sham.

John makes the sobering declaration that;

1 John 5:10c (NASB)

²⁰ *the one who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has given concerning His Son.*

Let us know that the greatest way to honor God is always through trust.

Seventh, Abraham was fully persuaded that God's promise was certain and His power sufficient,

²² *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

This statement sums up the fact that his faith in God was complete and unqualified.

Next week we will go on to look at the Answer to Abraham's faith and the application of Abraham's faith