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**Justification by Faith Alone Illustrated
(Part 3)
Romans 4:17-25**

Introduction:

Dr. A. J. Gordon, the famous **19th century** pastor, author, and founder of **Gordon College** and **Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary**, was traveling on a **train** one day and engaged in a spirited conversation with a fellow passenger on the subject of **“Faith.”** “I differ with you,” said the man, **“in that** any person is **admitted** to Heaven because of a little bit of theological **scrip** called **‘Faith.’** I believe that when God receives one into Heaven He makes a **searching inquiry** as to his **character** rather than inspection of his **faith.**” Just then the conductor came along and **examined** the tickets. When he passed, **Dr. Gordon** said, “Did you notice how a conductor just **looked** at the **ticket** and took no pains to **inspect** the **passenger**? A railway ticket, if **genuine**, **certifies** that the person presenting it has **complied** with the company's conditions and is entitled to transportation. So **‘faith alone,’** my friend, from God entitles one to that **saving grace** which produces a character **well pleasing** to God (Hebrews 11:6).”

Because of peoples **sinfulness** and their **total inability** to live up to God's **standard** of **perfection**, salvation can only be by God's **grace alone** through **faith alone** in **Christ alone**. And since a person can only become a **spiritual child** of **Abraham** by having the **same kind** of **faith** that he had, it is **crucial** that we understand what his faith was like. This is

what the apostle Paul shows us as we **conclude** our study of **Romans 4** this morning.

In Romans 4:1-25 we see six truths about justification by faith alone as illustrated primarily from the life of Abraham that contain valuable lessons for us today. Thus far we have seen the **first four truths**:

- 1) **Abraham** was **justified** by faith alone (vv. 1-5)
- 2) **David's** testimony **confirms** justification by faith (vv. 6-8).
- 3) **Abraham** was **justified** before his circumcision (vv. 9-12)
- 4) **Abraham** wasn't **justified** by the Law (vv. 13-16)

This morning we will discuss the last **two truths**. The **fifth truth** about justification by faith alone in this:

V. Characteristics of Faith modeled by Abraham

A. Having already seen last time in **vv. 11** and **16** that **Abraham** is the **spiritual father of all believers**, Jews and Gentiles alike, in **v. 17** Paul once again appeals to Scripture to **prove** his point: (as it is **written**, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the **presence** of Him whom **he** [i.e. **Abraham**] **believed**, even **God...** (Stop there)

1. Here Paul quotes a portion of **Genesis 17:5** that took place when **Abram** was **ninety-nine** years old, **one year** before his son of promise, **Isaac**, was born. At this time when God **reaffirmed** to him the promise saying, "I have made you the father of a multitude of nations," God also **changed his name** to "**Abraham**," which meant that very thing "**father of a multitude.**"

2. Having again affirmed the **spiritual fatherhood** of **Abraham**, Paul then **shifts** to the **kind of faith** that made him a worthy spiritual father. In **vv. 17b-22** we see **four positive characteristics** of Abraham's faith.
3. The **first characteristic** is that he **believed** God is **powerful**. Look at the end of **v. 17** where **Abraham** is said to have: **...believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.**
4. Here we see that the **object** of Abraham's faith was **God Himself**. It doesn't matter how **good** or **sincere** a person's **faith** may be, it will never benefit him or her if it has the **wrong object**.
5. Only the one true living God is the **right object** of our faith. Notice that Abraham **believed** in Him as the God "...who **gives life to the dead.**"
6. The **life-giving power** of God is clearly seen in the Old Testament. God said about Himself in **Deuteronomy 32:39**, "See now that I, I am He, and there is **no god** besides Me; It is I who put to death and **give life...**"
7. And in **1 Samuel 2:6** we read, "The LORD kills and **makes alive**. He brings down to Sheol and raises up."
8. Now although **some scholars** see this statement "who **gives life to the dead**" as a reference to Abraham's **belief** that God would **raise Isaac** from the dead if he **killed** him on **Mt. Moriah** in obedience to God (Gen. 22:5; Heb. 11:17-19), here it is **best** to take this as a reference to **God's omnipotent power** to

give life to Abraham and Sarah’s “**reproductive deadness**,” which we will see in **v. 19**.

9. Abraham also **believed** in God as the One who “...**calls** into being that which does not exist.” Most scholars see the word “**calls**” (kalountos) here as referring to God’s **creative activity** by which He **created** the world out of nothing or **ex nihilo**.
 10. Since God is the all-powerful Creator God who can **call** the entire universe that did not exist into existence out of nothing (Gen. 1; Ps. 33:6, 9; Heb. 11:3), He **certainly** can **call** “**many nations**” that did not **yet exist** into existence to fulfill His promise to Abraham.
 11. In **Genesis 18:14** God said to him, “Is **anything too difficult** for the LORD?” God also said in **Jeremiah 32:27**, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is anything **too difficult** for Me?”
 12. Jesus proclaimed in **Mark 10:27** concerning who can be **saved**, “With people it is **impossible**, but not with God; for **all things** are **possible** with God.” And **Luke 1:37** says, “For **nothing** will be **impossible** with God.” (Jer. 32:17; Zech. 8:6; Matt. 19:26; Lk. 1:37; 18:27).
 13. Abraham **believed** God is **powerful**. Do you? How **big** is your God this morning?
- B. The **second characteristic** of Abraham’s faith is that He **believed** God despite **obstacles**. Look at **v. 18: In hope against hope** he **believed**... (Stop there)

1. Basically the word “**hope**” (elpide) means to have **confident expectation** for something desirable. But here the terms “**in hope**” and “**against hope**” point in **opposite directions**.
 2. “**Against hope**” refers to the insurmountable **obstacles** that Abraham faced. Humanly speaking, there was absolutely **nothing** he could do to **change** his circumstances.
 3. Ever **feel** that way about the circumstances in your life? But despite his impossible **obstacles** “...in [**God-given**] **hope against [human] hope** he still **believed**” in God and His promise.
 4. In this way **faith** and **hope** are inseparably linked. **Hebrews 11:1** says, “Now **faith** is the **assurance** of things **hoped** for, the **conviction** of things not seen.”
 5. And God’s **design** or **purpose** for Abraham’s faith is seen at the end of v. 18, “...**so that** he might become a **father** of **many nations** according to that which had been **spoken**, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE,” which is a quote from **Genesis 15:5** where God promises Abraham that his descendants will be as **countless** as the stars of heaven.
- C. Paul then shows what Abraham’s **obstacles** are in v. 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.
1. Abraham had **two great obstacles**: He was physically incapable to father a child since he was now **99 years old**, and **Sarah** was also physically incapable to conceive and bear a child since she was **89 year old**. Since he was **impotent** and she was

- barren** (Gen. 16:1-2; 18:11), they were totally **hopeless** and **helpless** in themselves to **fulfill** God's promise.
2. The "**father** of a **multitude**" was the **father** of **none** and there was now nothing he could do about. Imagine how **difficult** it must have been for Abraham to **wait** all those **years** from the time of God's **original promise** (Gen. 15:5) until its **fulfillment** (Gen. 21:5).
 3. **Why** does God often **allow** the circumstances in our lives to get where they are completely **beyond** our ability to **control** or **fix**? Remember in **John 11:6** when Jesus heard that **Lazarus** was **sick** He didn't rush to his side but stayed **two days longer** in the place where He was.
 4. When He finally did show up **after Lazarus** had **died** both of Lazarus' sisters **Mary** and **Martha** said to Jesus, "...Lord, if You had **been here**, my brother would **not** have died" (vv. 21, 32). But Jesus had a **different** plan.
 5. In v. **40** Jesus said to **Martha**, "Did I not say to you that if you **believe**, you will see the **glory** of God?" And Jesus **glorified** God by **raising Lazarus** from the dead.
 6. In the midst of his impossible circumstances, Abraham didn't **close his eyes** to reality and **pretend** that things were better than they really were. The word "**contemplated**" (katenoesen) here means that he seriously **considered** and carefully **evaluated** all the **facts** that made the fulfillment of the promise **impossible**.
 7. But despite his obstacles "**in hope against hope**" he did not become "**weak** (asthenesas—or **impotent**) in **faith**" but rather

still **believed** in God and His promise. **C.E.B Cranfield** rightly states, “...Abraham’s **believing** is a **defiance** of all human calculations: his **hope** is **contrary** to all human expectation.” (pg. 246)

8. Does that describe **your faith** in God and His promises to you this morning?

D. The **third characteristic** of Abraham’s faith is that He **believed** God without **doubting**. Look at **v. 20**: yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not **waver in unbelief**, but grew **strong in faith**, giving **glory** to God.

1. The word “**waver**” (diakrinomai) here means “to be **divided** in one’s own mind,” and is translated “**doubt**” in **James 1:6**.
2. But how can Paul say this when the story of Abraham in **Genesis 12-24** obviously shows him as **far from perfect** and experiencing **regressions** and **advances** in his faith? Because Paul is simply talking about the **overall pattern** and **direction** that **characterized** Abraham’s life—one of **faith in God** not **doubt**.
3. **Douglas Moo** states, “When Paul says that Abraham did not ‘**doubt...because of unbelief**,’ he means **not** that Abraham never had **momentary** hesitations, but that he **avoided a deep-seated and permanent attitude of distrust and inconsistency** in relationship to God and his promises. Unlike the ‘**double-souled**’ person who displays a **deeply rooted division** in his attitude toward God (Jas. 1:6-8), Abraham maintained a **single-minded trust** in the fulfillment of God’s promise.” (pg. 285)

4. **John MacArthur** said it like this, “...**struggling faith** is not **doubt**, just as **temptation** 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).” (pg. 265)
5. Therefore, when your faith is **challenged** by **trials** and the **harsh realities** of life **scream** out that God is **not** in control, that He has **forgotten** you and **doesn’t care**, even though you may be **struggling** to understand what God is doing, keep on **clinging** to God by **faith** and trusting in the **promises** of His Word that say otherwise.
6. Notice that Abraham “...did not **waver in unbelief**, but grew **strong in faith**.” The one Greek word translated “**grew strong**” (enedunamothe) is **passive** in the Greek, which means that it was **God Himself** who **strengthened** him in his faith.”
7. Beloved, God promises to **strengthen** and **empower** us as well when we **depend** on Him. Jesus said to Paul in **2 Corinthians 12:9**, “...My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

8. And Paul declared in **Philippians 4:13**, “I can do all things through Him who **strengthens** me.”
 9. Now as a **result** of having his faith **strengthen**, notice that Abraham was “**giving glory** to God,” the very thing we saw in **1:21-23** that **unbelievers** fail to do.
 10. We give **glory to God** when we truly **believe** that He is who He said He is, **take** Him at His Word regardless of our circumstances, and **live** in complete dependence on Him. **Hebrews 11:6** says, “And without **faith** it is **impossible** to **please** Him, for he who comes to God must **believe** that He is and that He is a **rewarder** of those who seek Him.”
 11. **John Calvin** declared, “No greater **honour** can be given to God than by **sealing** His truth by our **faith**. On the other hand, no greater **insult** can be shown to Him than by **rejecting** the grace which He offers us, or by **detracting** from the authority of His Word. For this reason the **main thing** in the **worship of God** is to **embrace** His promises with **obedience**. True religion **begins** with **faith**.” (Schreiner pg. 238)
- E. The **fourth characteristic** of Abraham’s faith is that He **believed** God would **perform**. Look at **v. 21**: and being **fully assured** that **what** God had **promised**, He was **able** also to **perform**.”
1. Now it is one thing to say “I believe that God is **all-powerful**.” But it is another to be “**fully assured**” (plerophoretheis)—**totally confident** and **completely persuaded** that God **will do** what He has **promised**.
 2. It’s the **difference** in our minds between “**God can**” and “**God will**.” And Abraham could have this level of confidence because

he knew what God had promised him and he **believed** that God **would** make the **impossible possible**.

3. What God **promises**, He **performs**! God's **promises** always carry with them His **power** to perform them.
4. It's just a matter of **knowing** that this is a **promise** that we can **claim** and **trusting** God to do what He said. The words of **Charles Wesley** in one of his **hymns** say it well:

In hope, against all human hope,

Self-desperate, **I believe...**

Faith, mighty faith, the **promise** sees,

And looks to **that** alone;

Laughs at impossibilities,

And cries: It **shall** be **done**!

5. This was the kind of faith that Abraham had and in **God's time** the promise was **fulfilled**. **Hebrews 11:12** says, "Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as **good as dead** at that, as many **descendants** AS THE **STARS** OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE **SAND** WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE."
- F. Paul **concludes** his description of Abraham's God-given **saving faith** by once again referring to **Genesis 15:6** in **v. 22**: Therefore **IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS**.
1. Abraham's faith was **no** vague abstraction or some blind leap into the dark. He **fully trusted** in God and His promise, and his **faith** was "**credited** to him as **righteousness**."

2. In this chapter the words “**faith**” or “**believe**” occur **16 times**; the word “**credited**” (reckon or impute) occurs **11 times**; and the words “**righteousness**” or “**justified**” occurs **11 times**.
3. Therefore, Abraham is the **supreme example** of justification by faith alone. And the faith that **characterized** his life is to **characterize** ours as well.
4. We see this in the **sixth truth** about justification by faith alone, which in this:

VI. Abraham’s example Applies to all Believers

- A. Look at **vv. 23-24**: Now not for **his sake only** was it **written** that it was **credited** to **him**, but for **our sake** also, to whom it **will** be **credited**, as those who **believe in Him** who **raised** Jesus our Lord from the dead.
 1. Here we see that **faith credited** as **righteousness** was not **restricted** to Abraham, but also **applies** to all believers. It is “**for our sake also**, to whom it **will** be **credited**.”
 2. Paul then shows what believers **believe** at the end of **v. 24**, “...as those who **believe in Him** (i.e. God the Father) who **raised Jesus** our Lord from the dead.”
 3. First of all, although the New Testament mostly **directs** our faith to Jesus Christ, in reality it doesn’t make any difference because to believe in the **Father** is to believe in the **Son** because of the **unity** of the **Trinity**. For Jesus said in **John 12:44**, “...He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me.”
 4. Here we see that it was the **Father** who **raised Jesus our Lord** from the dead (Col. 2:12). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the very **heart** and **cornerstone** of the gospel message.

5. And notice that it was as “**Lord**” that God **raised** Jesus not merely as **Savior**. Jesus **came** as Lord, **died** as Lord, was **raised** as Lord, and **reigns** as Lord forever.
 6. Jesus Christ is **Lord!** This is what believers **believe**.
 7. And because He is **already Lord**, we don’t **make** Him Lord of our lives but **humbly submit** to His Lordship by faith or **regretfully suffer** the consequences—loving discipline for believers and ultimate judgment for unbelievers.
 8. Now because of **progressive revelation** the **circumstances** and **content** of faith has changed, however, **Christians** share with Abraham the **same basis** for justification, which is **faith**, and the **same God** as the **object** of that faith.
 9. God’s **promise** to Abraham was ultimately **fulfilled** in Jesus Christ, the **Messiah**, who was a descendant of Abraham (v. 16; Jn. 8:56; Gal. 3:14, 16). Now **saving faith** involves **belief** in Jesus’ **death** and **resurrection** for the forgiveness of sins.
 10. **Thomas Schreiner** said it this way, “Surely those who lived **before** the **cross** and **resurrection** were righteous if they had **faith** in a resurrecting and sovereign God who **fulfills** his saving promises. **But now** that the **Messiah** has come this faith must be **specifically** placed in Jesus of Nazareth, and one must believe that he **died** for our sins and was **raised** for our justification.” (pg. 243)
- B. And this is how Paul **concludes** this chapter in **v. 25**: He who was **delivered over** because of our **transgressions**, and was **raised** because of our **justification**.

1. **Charles Hodge** said that, “This verse is a **comprehensive** statement of the **gospel**.” (pg. 129) Here we see that both Christ’s **death** and **resurrection** are **essential** to the work of justification.
2. In the **first statement** Paul says, “He who was **delivered over** because of our **transgressions**...” Though not a direct quotation, these words in substance are taken from **Isaiah 53** regarding the **Suffering Servant** (vv. 5, 10-12).
3. The one Greek word translated “**delivered over**” (paredothe) is a judicial term that refers to a criminal being handed over for punishment. Since the words “**delivered over**” and “**raised**” (egerthe) are both **passive** this shows that the **death** and **resurrection** of Jesus was **initiated** by God the Father.
4. **Romans 8:32** says, “He who did not **spare** His own Son, but **delivered Him over** for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?”
5. The **same God** who **poured out** His holy wrath upon Jesus, turned His back on Him, and forsook Him on the cross to satisfy His divine justice also **raised** Him up the third day. God the Father was behind it all (Acts 2:23-24; 4:27-28).
6. And it was **all** “because of **our transgressions**” that God did this. The word “**transgressions**” (paraptomata) means to step over the line and refers to high-handed sin and rebellion against God.
7. As believers we **know** that God **delivered over** Jesus to death because of our sins, so that in receiving Him as **Savior** and **Lord** we are **declared righteous** before God, have our sins

forgiven, and are **clothed** in the righteousness of Christ, **treated** as if we have never sinned.

- C. In the **second statement** Paul says, “...and was **raised** because of our justification.”
1. **Thomas Schreiner** accurately states, “To say that Jesus was raised **because of** our justification is to say that His resurrection **authenticates** and **confirms** that our justification has been **secured**....The resurrection of Christ constitutes **evidence** that his work on our behalf has been **completed**. The **death** and **resurrection** of Christ **fulfills** the promise of **universal blessing** made to Abraham, for they are the **means** by which **all peoples** enter into the **new people** of God.” (pg. 244)
 2. Christ’s resurrection was the **proof** of God’s **acceptance** of Jesus atoning sacrifice and **secured** for us **all** of the benefits of His redemption. Without it all of the Christian faith would collapse, for Jesus would not be **God** who He **claimed** to be and His **death** would have availed us **nothing**.
 3. We would **still** be in our **sins** (1 Cor. 15:17) and under the **condemnation** of God. Therefore, Jesus’ **death** and **resurrection** are **one** and **inseparable** concerning justification.

Conclusion:

In closing, Abraham is the **supreme example** of justification by faith alone apart from works, circumcision, and the Law. Therefore, there isn’t **anything** anyone can do in themselves to be **declared righteous**

before God except to have **saving faith** in Jesus Christ and **receive** Him as **Savior** and **Lord**.

This is God's **only way** of salvation. **Romans 10:9** promises that, "...if you **confess** with your **mouth** Jesus as **Lord**, and **believe** in your **heart** that God **raised** Him from the dead, you will be **saved**."

Have you **taken** God at His Word and **believed** this promise for your salvation? And for those of us who are **believers**, is our faith **characterized** as the **same kind** of faith that Abraham had? By God's grace it can be.