

# The Nature & Actions of Justifying Faith

*Studies in Romans*

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**Bible Text:** Romans 4:17-22

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The passage tonight will be 17 to 22, verse 17 to verse 22.

Now I am accelerating in our treatment of Romans to try and finish the whole book. Tim will never believe this, but to try and finish the whole book somewhere between Christmas and Easter, but I didn't say which year.

But we are accelerating.

You will understand that though I am going to deal with all or most of this passage, I trust tonight it is going to be very difficult because every verse cries, "Stop a little while and preach me."

I will be saying things tonight that can be easily said in a sentence, but the more you stop to think of them they are the study of a lifetime. And so I would want you to realize that we are at least making the attempt to accelerate, but that there are really little more than headings here and I trust that you will take the time to ponder more deeply some of the material that we are looking at.

Let me try to put this portion in its context before we read it. Romans four, these with what I have called in our outline that many of you have, the principle of grace showing, first of all, justification is by faith apart from works. That was illustrated from the case of Abraham and then from the case of David.

Then from verse nine through verse 17 or 16, really, justification is by faith apart from circumcision, the whole ritual of the Mosaic law. We dealt with that showing how it applies, therefore, to Jews and Gentiles.

Now this final section of the chapter deals with the nature of justifying faith as it is illustrated from the case of Abraham, by the greatness Abraham's faith.

It is a vitally important passage for many reasons. The main reason is that here—and I want you to pay very strict attention to this—here you have what I will term a definitive description of the faith that justifies. This takes us beyond my opinions and your opinions. This is a God given, an inspired definitive description, not just a brief

definition, but an elongated description that is definitive in every part of what I will call the nature of the actions of justifying faith. So that makes this a very important passage. It is vitally important for another reason because in giving this description I think you will see that it sets the whole argument about faith and works in its true perspective.

The relation between faith and works in the doctrine of salvation is very little understood. Even great men at times have misstated the connection. Many have understood that there is a tension between Paul and James. Many have even gone so far as to say that there is a downright contradiction between Paul and James. You will probably be aware that at least for a time in his life even Martin Luther despised and rejected the epistle of James as an epistle of straw because he imagined that it opposed Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Some people without going that far imagine that the epistle of James sets out to give a corrective to an over emphasis on faith if not by Paul then by some of his more avid disciples.

Now on the surface, I have to confess that it is easy to see why people have imagined that Paul and James are on opposite sides of the fence when it comes to the way of salvation. Paul condemns the whole doctrine of justification by works and says in Romans 3:28, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law."<sup>1</sup>

Absolutely clear on that matter.

And he goes on immediately to give Abraham as an illustration of a man justified by faith without works.

James, on the other hand, says—and I quote him from chapter two verse 24, "...by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."<sup>2</sup>

And he proceeds to offer Abraham as an example of one justified by works as he calls it in chapter two verse 21. So there is the appearance of open conflict here. But it is more an appearance than reality.

Long, long ago the great American Presbyterian preacher J Gresham Machen pointed out that the works which Paul condemns are not the works which James commends. And the faith which Paul commends is not the faith that James condemns. There is only the appearance of controversy between them.

What I am saying is if you look at the context—and that is what we want to do tonight—if you look at the context, you will see that far from being in opposition, Paul and James are in complete agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 3:28.

<sup>2</sup> James 2:24.

The first thing always to remember when you come to this controversy is that neither apostle is correcting the other, nor, indeed, is either apostle correcting the views that other people have established upon the doctrine of either apostle. That is the first thing to remember. James is not correcting Paul nor is he correcting people who were carrying Paul's dogma or doctrine of faith alone to an extreme.

The second thing—and this is vital—and actually in all the books that are written on the subject you will very rarely ever come across this. I don't know why. It is certainly not original to me, but I wonder why it is not more emphasized. When you look at these two apostles each of them was writing to answer a specific Jewish objection. Each of them was facing head on a Jewish argument. But the argument that Paul was answering was not the argument that James was answering. And that is the reason for the difference in their wording. Paul was opposing the Jewish dogma of self righteous human merit. He was answering the argument of the Jews that he came across that by their life, by their obedience, especially simply by the fact of their being part of the circumcised covenant people they, therefore, were saved. There was merit in circumcision. There was merit in their works. That was the argument of the Jews. And Paul was answering that argument and saying it is not of works. It is all by grace through faith alone without works.

Now that was not the argument that James was facing. The Jews with whom he was dealing were people who were emphasizing we are followers of Moses who believe, according to Deuteronomy chapter six in one God. We believe that great statement of orthodox Judaism, "The LORD our God is one LORD."<sup>3</sup> And according to them that monotheistic faith was enough to save them even though they had no vital godliness.

James was saying, "That kind of faith is dead faith. Even the devil believes that much. He is not saved. This faith cannot save. The faith that saves," James says, "produces godly works."

But didn't Paul teach the same thing? Didn't he constantly call for holiness in life and obedience to God?

And in our portion tonight you will find that he minutely describes the actions and the nature of saving or justifying faith.

Now before we get into the details of this passage, what I want to do is read it with you and I am going to sum up verse by verse the argument that the apostle Paul is making here, for it is vital that you get the argument.

As I say, I am not going to be able to preach in every verse at length, so I want you to get the argument as we read from verse 17 to the end of verse 22.

"(As it is written..."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4.

<sup>4</sup> Romans 4:17.

This is carrying over from verse 16:

“Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.”<sup>5</sup>

When as yet Abraham and Sarah were alone and childless, God pronounced Abraham the father of many nations and Abraham believed that. Why? Because he believed that God is the God of life giving power. So he believed it.

That is why we go on in verse 18.

“Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.”<sup>6</sup>

So Abraham believed against hope. That is, against every appearance, when there was no human grounds for hope.

Now let's be realistic. When you are 99 years old, when your wife is 10 years younger and you are both as good as dead it is a wee bit late to start thinking that you are going to have a son through whom there will be multitudes and multitudes of your progeny. So it was all against hope. But he believed in hope.

Now that can mean he believed hopefully, expectantly as I will point out later. But I tend to like another emphasis. Against hope, that is all subjective. He believed in the hope that God had given him. That is the objective hope when there was no human ground for it. The aim of his faith was to gain the promise that he might become the father of many nations. And, as a result, that is exactly what happened as God had said.

Verse 19.

“And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb.”<sup>7</sup>

Faced with this natural inability of Sarah and himself to do anything to realize the promise, Abraham did not grow weak in faith.

There is a very interesting thing here. What we have is, I believe, the original of what Paul actually wrote. But very early in the history of the Church people had difficulties with that. And it is reflected in some of the early Greek manuscripts because there was a change in what was written.

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<sup>5</sup> Romans 4:16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Romans 4:18.

<sup>7</sup> Romans 4:19.

They couldn't come to terms with this. He considered not his body now dead, because when they went back to the book of Genesis it seemed to them that the evidence was that he did consider the impossibility of all this, the deadness of his body and the deadness of Sarah's womb. So, therefore, in some of the old manuscripts they made the change. It doesn't change the sense. But it really says, "Without weakening his faith he did consider the deadness of his body." The difference in words makes no difference to the meaning.

Abraham knew that his body was dead or as good as dead. He knew that, but he didn't consider that that was enough to disbelieve God. He didn't believe that that was ground enough to give up the hope that God had set before him, so he didn't become weak in faith.

Verse 20.

"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God."<sup>8</sup>

He didn't stagger in unbelief. He was strong in faith. How did he show the strength of his faith? By two things. First, he gave glory to God. He was praising God for the promise before it was fulfilled. That gives glory to God.

And then, secondly, in the next verse, verse 21:

"And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."<sup>9</sup>

He gave glory to God by his utter conviction that God can do everything that he had promised.

Then you have the key verse that leads to the great climax, verse 22.

"And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."<sup>10</sup>

Because Abraham had this kind of faith, we can say he was justified. It was justifying faith.

Now I want you to understand what Paul is saying here.

Verse 22.

This is the faith that justifies. Any other kind of faith is less than justifying faith. It is dead faith and it is useless faith. So it is very important for you and me to give close

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<sup>8</sup> Romans 4:20.

<sup>9</sup> Romans 4:21.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 4:22.

attention as we examine the nature and the action of justifying faith as we see it in the case of Abraham.

Now what we are going to do tonight is very simple. We are going to answer some questions about believing. Whom did Abraham believe? What did Abraham believe? How did Abraham believe? And why did Abraham believe?

The questions, at least, are brief. I don't think that what follows will necessarily be brief as well. But we are going to try.

First of all, then, we are going to look at the object of saving faith. Whom do we believe?

Now verse 17 gives you the answer.

He believed "God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."<sup>11</sup>

The object of his faith was God, omnipotent, sovereign and gracious. He is always the object of justifying faith. I want you to understand this. By its essential nature, the faith that justifies is always God centered. It gets the eyes off man and man's resources. It recognizes some essential truth about God. And I want you to notice what that essential truth is. First and foremost he quickens the dead. He is the life giving one. He is the God of resurrection power.

That was the thing that filled the mind of Abraham. Abraham looked at his own body. And he says, "It is dead." He looked at his wife. He said, "She is dead. There is no way we can ever produce a son. There is no way we can ever do anything to bring this gracious promise to pass. Here we are and we are dead, but I believe in the God who raises the dead."

That is the very first thing about justifying faith. And you will notice that this was not a flash in the pan for Abraham. This is the nature of the faith that sustained him through his life. Later on we read in the 22<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Genesis, later on in his life God challenged him to take Isaac who was given in fulfillment of this covenant promise and put him on an altar and kill him. And Abraham took him to Mount Moriah and he bound him and he put him on the altar and he lifted the knife to plunge it into him to kill him.

Why would he do it?

The Bible leaves us in no doubt. Because he believed that God would raise him again from the dead.

Abraham's faith was a faith in the God of resurrection power. And I want to tell you. That is always the first action of justifying faith. It goes out to the God of resurrection power.

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 4:7.

We will alter see when we come to verse 24 and 25 the apostle Paul goes into this in some detail. This trust in God to raise us from the dead, to give us an experience of resurrection power is because we believe he raised Christ from the dead.

You see, this doctrine of the resurrection is not peripheral to Christianity. This doctrine of the resurrection is of the very essence of Christianity. Taken it away and it doesn't matter whether Jesus was virgin born. Take away the resurrection it doesn't matter how he died. It doesn't matter about the shedding of his blood. It doesn't matter about the doing of his miracles. It doesn't matter about anything unless Jesus rose from the dead.

Thank God he did. God raised him from the dead. And when you realize that then I am dealing with the God of resurrection power. I am dead spiritually in trespasses and sin. I can't raise myself. I can't save myself. All the waters of all the baptismal pools, fonts, tanks or oceans in the world can never give me life. But God can raise me from the dead.

I believe in the God of resurrection power, for he has raised Christ from the dead.

Paul loved to bring those two things together, our faith and the fact that God raised Christ from the dead.

In Ephesians 1:19 and 20 he says, “[We] believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.”<sup>12</sup>

Do you see what he is saying? That power which raised Jesus from the dead is the power that gives me faith in him. The power that raised him from the dead physically is the power that raises me from the dead spiritually. I believe in the power of resurrection and God's power to do it.

And then he says this object of faith is God who quickens the dead, but he is also the one... this is a fascinating statement of the apostles, who calls things that are not, non-existent things, he calls them as though they are.

Now, again, remember the context. Here is Abraham. Before men what was Abraham? He was an old man in a childless marriage. And that is the way he would live and that is the way he would die. Before men that is what he was. But before God he was the father of many nations.

Now those nations had not yet been born. In fact, Isaac the single son, had not yet been born. But God spoke of those nations as if they already existed, the Jewish nation and then the believers in Christ out of all the tribes and kindreds and tongues of the world. And Abraham believed in the reality that God spoke.

Because he believed that God's sovereign Word—and this is one of those things that I am really only going to have time to give us a banner headline. You have got to think it

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<sup>12</sup> Ephesians 1:19-20.

through—God’s sovereign Word is what theologians call a created Word and a constitutive Word. Now that sounds very learned, doesn’t it? This is where I need to step back and let somebody come and explain what it all mean, a creative word and a constitutive word.

What God commands by his commanding he creates. “Let there be light,”<sup>13</sup> that is the command. There was light.

Same in salvation.

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”<sup>14</sup>

But take it a step further. God commands us to be perfectly righteous. Now where is the righteousness in you or in me? You will look far and long. You will never find it. But in creating us, his people in Christ, he constitutes us righteous by imputation of the righteousness of Christ to us.

You see, Abraham had got a hold of something here. God speaks and it is done. There is power in the saving Word of the Lord Jehovah. There is power in that Word.

And Abraham says, “When God calls me the father of many nations, I believe him. That is what I am.”

And that is how faith operates.

There are many profound truths here that faith has to take hold of. And, again, I have time only to indicate them.

Abraham’s children when they first appear here they don’t exist. But God speaks of them as if they did exist and in God’s decree and God’s plan they certainly did exist. But he speaks of these non existent people as existing.

Abraham’s children, the believers, the justified, first appear in the promise as nothing. They have no existence never mind merit. So there is no good talking about being saved by merit. They have no life, never mind merit.

Think again. God speaks of the non existent believers, the children of Abraham as if they already were. By nature spiritually dead, non existent, can offer God nothing. There is no work of merit that they can bring to him. What do they need? They need a creative miracle. And that is exactly what God provides in Christ.

Now let me show you how faith grasps this. This justifying faith, therefore, sees salvation as a miracle of divine grace.

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 1:3.

<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:6.



Other people can talk about a joint effort between God and man, but the man who has justifying faith realizes, “I bring nothing to the table, nothing.”

Toplady put it, “Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling.”

And I want to nail this good and proper tonight. Away with the pseudo gospel and the pseudo evangelism that is calling sinners around the world to come and give something to Jesus. Man, you have nothing to give him but your sin and your guilt and your wickedness and your evil deserts. You have nothing to give him but the condemnation of hell. Away with this evangelism that tells sinners that Jesus wants to take them and incorporate them into this great plan because they have so much to give him. Not a thing have you to give him.

Saving faith sees salvation not as a matter of divine help. God doesn't help me to be saved. God help us if that were the gospel. Salvation is not divine help to get us to heaven. Salvation is a divine miracle that raises us from the death of sin, that lifts us out of the condemnation and the guilt of sin, that creates us in life and Christ, that constitutes us righteous in Christ and ready for heaven. That is the miracle.

Saving faith realizing and recognizing the depths of human need and feeling the depths of human inability throws the soul entirely upon the omnipotent grace of a holy God and it confesses that the success of that grace depends on its sovereign power that can call things that be not as though they are.

Notice the word “call.” It is a very important word in the gospel. You see, faith believes that it is God's call that creates men as his believing people. It is God's call that constitutes them his righteous and justified people.

When Paul uses this particular verb in the Greek New Testament usually he is speaking of God's effective call. It is not just the general call of the gospel. This is the effectual call of grace.

What is the effectual call? Let me show you this. We will get here in due course in Romans, but chapter eight we will read tonight and verse 29.

“Whom he did foreknow...”<sup>15</sup>

Notice it is, whom he foreknew, not what he foreknew. The dogma that God's foreknowledge is a prescience or foresight of things that we would do apart from his divine and sovereign purpose is foreign to Scripture. I am not going to expound this verse tonight. We will wait until we get there in the will of God. But it is people whom God foreknew.

“Whom he did foreknow...”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Romans 8:29.

If you want it, foreordain, predetermine according to his sovereign counsel. And that is not my explanation. That is the explanation of Acts two verse 23 for the meaning of the word.

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called.”<sup>17</sup>

Now watch this carefully.

“...and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”<sup>18</sup>

It is interesting to read John Wesley’s note on his New Testament notes on that passage of Scripture where vainly, because his theology can’t accept this, well, it can now, thank God, couldn’t then. He has been taken to heaven and it can now. But when he was in earth he was bigoted and blinded in this area, great man as he was, admirable in many ways, greatly used, but blinded and bigoted in this area. And his note here simply denies that there is this chain of grace, that there is this, if I could use the word, inevitable progression. The very people he foreknew are the very people that he predestinated and they are the very people that he called and they are the very people that he justified and they are very people that he glorified.

Do you see this? Every single one of these called people is justified. Why? Why? That is what Paul is dealing with here in Romans chapter four.

Because faith is focusing on the one whose calling is effectual. And when God calls us to Christ, oh, understand this, believer, when God calls us to Christ we are as certain of heaven as if we were in it.

Why? Because he speaks of things that are not. We are not yet in heaven physically or even in our souls. We are still here on earth. But his call deals with reality.

Just as Isaac wasn’t born when God called Abraham the father of the nations, the father of all believers, Isaac hadn’t yet been born. But yet it was true.

We haven’t yet reached heaven, but such is the sovereign grace and power of the call of God. When God calls you into Christ then everything else, even though yet they are not in existence as far as we are concerned in our experience. They are certain.

Heaven, being with Christ, eternal glorification, sinless joy all those things are not maybes for the believer in Christ. I want you to understand this. The God who raised

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Romans 8:29-30.

<sup>18</sup> Romans 8:30.

Christ from the dead and put him in heaven at his own right hand has by the very same word that raised him from the dead given us believing faith and he guarantees us to raise us and put us in heaven, too, our place in heaven by the executive call of God is as certain as Christ's place at his right hand.

This is the object of our faith. We serve a great God.

I want you to take that away with you tonight. We are trusting a great God, a glorious God, a mighty God before whom death must fade away, before whom non-existent burst into the existence of his decree and his commands. We serve a great God. We are trusting a glorious God.

Away with the notions of poor little God who wants to do so much and almighty man and terrible Satan won't let him. Away with this notion of a limited deity. Our trust is in the Lord. He raises the dead and he calls that which is not as though it were.

So the object of faith is the God of life giving power, of the effectual call and of omnipotent grace. My faith has found its resting place in this God.

Now, to verse 18, the content of justifying faith. What does it believe?

Notice the—and we will deal with the other parts of verse 18 in due course—but notice the last line, “So shall thy seed be.”<sup>19</sup>

Abraham believed what God revealed to him about his seed and about his being the father of many nations. Many people see this as a reference to the Jewish tribes and that is all. Well, it includes the Jewish tribes, but that is a very small part of the promise, actually. Paul tells the Galatians the Scripture in this instance preached the gospel before unto Abraham. The Lord Jesus tells us in John chapter eight that Abraham rejoiced to see his day.

In other words, in some way—and I can't tell you in how much detail, though, mind you, I have a sneaking suspicion it is a whole lot more than most commentators will admit—I can't tell you the details because the Bible doesn't tell me, but Abraham saw not just vaguely that there would be someone who would be his seed, who would be the Messiah, the Savior and the deliverer. He did see that. But he saw Christ's day. I can't tell you all that that entails, but I have to say that to me that speaks of some particularity, some detail. He saw the day of Jesus Christ. He saw something of what Christ would be, something of what Christ would do.

So the real content of Abraham's justifying faith was to believe what God revealed regarding the way of salvation in the person and through the work of Jesus Christ. That is always, always, always the central action of justifying faith.

Abraham well understood that both he and his descendants could be saved only one way

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<sup>19</sup> Romans 4:18.

and that would be through Jesus Christ, no other way. Abraham knew that. And we who trust Christ always must come to the same knowledge.

What is the content of justifying faith? It is the gospel. It is God's way of saving sinners. The faith that justifies focuses upon Jesus Christ.

I have said justifying faith is first God centered. But I want you to see this. It therefore—and this is not additional. This is just narrowing the focus to get it more clear in our minds—it is therefore Christ centered. You cannot have faith in God, a saving faith in God, without having faith in Jesus Christ. Now that is a very exclusive statement, but no more exclusive than the statements of the Lord Jesus himself, of Peter, of Paul.

We live in a day when more than ever we are being inundated with syncretism, ecumenism taken to the nth degree, that there is a central core of truth in all religion, that there is only one God and therefore it doesn't matter whether you call him Allah and worship him through his prophet Mohammed or whether you call him Buddha or take the Buddha as the way to him or whether you follow the Confucian philosophy or the Taoist philosophy or any other religious or philosophical system. When you are looking for truth there is only one God and there is only one truth. And however you term it, it doesn't really matter as long as you are seeking him.

Let me tell you. That is the doctrine of devils. There is no surer way to damn a soul than to make him believe that he can have faith in God while rejecting Jesus Christ. It can't be done.

Abraham's saving faith, his justifying faith believed what God revealed about the way of salvation in him who is preeminently Abraham's seed. Paul says that seed was Christ.

Saving faith always recognizes there is one way, one Mediator, one Redeemer, one sacrifice. It is all in Christ.

Do you realize today that to be without Christ is to be without God and without hope? Here is the content of justifying faith. Believes in the Lord Jesus Christ.

A word about its character. How did Abraham believe?

This is obviously the biggest part of our portion and time will only allow me to skip through it, but the essential characteristics of Abraham's faith are seen in verses 18 through 22.

Let me make this first very important, but necessarily brief comment. Faith is an essential response to God. Notice the word "essential." Not only because it is necessary to salvation—you can't be saved without faith—but because faith is the motion of the human soul toward God in response to what God has said in the gospel.

You see, people speak about faith as if it were a substance, an objectively real substance that existed apart from us and somehow is put into us.

What is faith? It is not a substance added to the soul at all.

As one great Scottish theologian and preacher put it, “Faith is simply a man believing.” That is all. It is man believing.

And I say that for many reasons, but preeminently because we have people who are sitting on the edge of hell twiddling their thumbs, as it were, on the verge of destruction and they tell themselves, I am just waiting for God to come and implant this substance that I think of, this faith within my heart.

Now I understand faith is the gift of God, but remember faith is the motion of the human soul. It is the human soul believing.

Mr. Brame prayed at the beginning of the meeting that we would not dishonor God by doing anything but believing what he says.

Faith, therefore, is this essential response, the whole man believing what God reveals in Christ.

You will notice it is an established faith, for it is standing on the Word of God. It believes. Why? Because God said it. That is why we started verse 17 with the kind of God who making the statements. When you understand the greatness of God then believing in him, if I may say so, then, is easy. You can only disbelieve as long as you don’t know the one who is making the promise. That is why in 2 Corinthians chapter four we read that “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”<sup>20</sup>

Blind their mind. Don’t let them know anything of the true greatness and glory and character of God. Otherwise they will believe.

You see, faith is established. God said it. God said it. Man, when you understand that, God said it, that is the basis, the establishment of your faith.

It is an expectant faith, this justifying faith, for you will see in verse 18 it hopes. The word “hope” is the idea of patient waiting and expectation, waiting for God’s time to fulfill his Word and fulfill his will.

It is interesting in Scripture how often the Bible speaks of waiting. There is nothing harder on you or me than to wait. There is nothing tries faith more than waiting. But, you see, true faith hopes. It waits not in depression. It doesn’t sit back and wait in lethargy. Waiting in Scripture, if I may use something that sounds contradictory, is always active.

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<sup>20</sup> 2 Corinthians 4:4.

It is not a passive behavior. It is an active behavior. Waiting in Scripture is expecting God to do what he has promised.

And it is an enduring faith. It keeps believing, verse 18, even when all earthly appearances contradict it.

I want you to see something that is vital to the Christian life. True faith in Jesus Christ interprets appearances and circumstances in the light of God's promise. It does not interpret God's promise in the light of appearances and circumstances. That is a vital distinction.

You look out today, out on your life, you own circumstances, you look in this world of suffering and shame and sin. You have heard the question, "Where was God on 9/11?"

What a blasphemous question. Where was God on 9/11? Where he always is. A bigger question is: Where was America on 9/11? Where were the hearts of the people in 9/11? And where are their hearts today? God is where he always is. God is on his throne working all things according to the pleasure of his will and doing only that which is worthy of his name.

But you look at the appearances and what do you do? I believe God. Therefore, I must interpret those appearances in the light of who God is and what God has promised.

I do not start changing the promise in the light of circumstances.

Against hope we keep our eyes on the objective hope.

For example, we believe the great hope of the Church is Jesus Christ is coming again. Now 2 Peter chapter three tells me that ungodly men are going to say, "Where is the hope of his coming? Where is... I mean, you have been talking about this for 2000 years now."

Every generation has expected Christ in their day. Around the year 1000 the whole world was in a flurry because messianic prophecies were driving people mad and they had the idea when it comes to the year 1000 Jesus must come.

We can understand that, can't we? For we had similar head cases running around around the year 2000 saying the same thing.

And then the enemy comes and says, "Well, now, after all these years he still hasn't come. Look at the world. It is getting worse. Look at what science is doing. It is undermining everything that you believe."

Don't you believe it. It is doing no such thing.

But let me tell you. We have the hope. The hope is objective and against all the appearances and against all the circumstances we believe in that hope. Not only so on a

personal level, what is the hope of the gospel? Christ is our hope. We have the hope, the expectation that shall not be cut off, that will never make us ashamed as will see when we get into chapter five of this epistle, that will never let us down. We have the hope of eternal glory.

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”<sup>21</sup>

We know we are going home to glory. We know God loves us and he will love us forever. Christ died for us. But he will keep us close to him forever. He would be incomplete without us in heaven. We know that. That is our hope.

But then you hit pain and suffering and the devil whispers, “God doesn’t love you. God hates you. Where is the grace of God now? If God is so good and kind, why all this?”

But, against all human grounds for hope, we get our eyes on the hope, Jesus Christ.

As I have often said, after Calvary God needs to do nothing to convince us of his love. So this enduring faith keeps believing and it repudiates the arguments and the logic of unbelief, verse 19.

And those arguments to Abraham were obvious. Look at your body. It is dead. And the Greek that is also used in Hebrews 11 verse 12. There it is translated, “As good as dead.”

The devil would say, “Look at your body, Abraham. You are as good as dead. Look at Sarah. She is as good as dead.”

That is the logic of unbelief. Abraham rejected it and he says, in effect, “I believe in the God who calls the things that aren’t as though they were. If God calls my body and Sarah’s womb alive, I believe God. That is it. I believe God and I refuse to believe that we are dead. We may be as good as dead, but I reject the logic unbelief.”

And that is what faith does. It focuses on the promise. It refuses to doubt God’s Word because of the conventional notion of what is possible or probable.

I was looking for a hymn. I don’t think we have it in our book. I don’t now how I ever overlooked it if we didn’t, but anyway. Looking for the verse, “Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees and looks to God alone, laughs at impossibilities and cries, ‘It shall be done.’”

This is enduring faith. And it is energizing verse faith, verse 20 and verse 21.

He staggered not. He was strong.

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<sup>21</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:1.

Now when you think of this, it says, first, he was not weak in faith. That means he was not moved to unbelief by contrary circumstances. Then it says he staggered not in unbelief. So what is the difference?

The word “staggered not” means that he didn’t... it is a verb that has the idea of disputing with yourself, fighting with yourself, doubting. He didn’t stagger in unbelief.

What is the difference between that and not being weak? I think it is this. This said not being weak means outside circumstances didn’t weaken his faith. When he looked at the greatness of the promise, the promise was so big, so vast, so great that they old devil would come and say, “Abraham, come on. I mean, you? Man, something so majestically, wonderfully, eternally great, you really believe that is for you?”

And Abraham said, “I believe it.” He didn’t stagger at the greatness of the promise.

Now stop and think. Here is justifying faith. Where were you when Jesus found you? You were in the dunghill of sin. That is where you were.

Where does he promise to put you? Among the princes of glory. What does Jesus promise concerning you? What is God’s Word in his dear Son? It is that you are redeemed by blood. You are saved by the Holy Spirit. You are united to Jesus Christ. You are invested with all the perfect righteousness of Christ. God looks at you in Christ as being as worthy of heaven as Jesus Christ himself is. He promises that as he has set Christ beside him on his throne, you will sit with Christ in his throne. That is the promise.

And the old devil comes and says, “What, you? You of all people? Who on earth are you ever to aspire to such majestic and glorious greatness?”

Well, I am nobody except a sinner Jesus came to save.

He did not stagger because of the greatness of the promise. No, he was then strong in faith. This energetic faith, this strength of faith was seen in that he could give God praise, giving God the glory. There is the mark of faith.

Religion takes glory to man. Self righteousness will tell God how good we are. Saving faith will lift up its voice and sing how great our God is, gives him glory.

“He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”<sup>22</sup>

“God forbid,” says Paul, “that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>23</sup>

And then the energy of this faith is seen in the persuasion of verse 21, this full assurance, this full conviction, this full confidence. And this assurance is rooted in a full... in a

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<sup>22</sup> 2 Corinthians 10:17.

<sup>23</sup> Galatians 6:14.



vision of the full and the free ability of our God to do what he wants, what he purposes and what he promises. And then it becomes the assurance of our own good standing before him.

This is saving faith.

Now what is the ground of it? Why do we believe? This is where it all comes home. What is the warrant for me to believe this?

Ok, God is the God of resurrection power. God calls things that are not as though they are. But, Abraham, what right have you to believe it? For you... how does it become personal?

Well, Abraham believed because God spoke. It is as simple as that.

Verse 20, 21.

What God spoke was a promise. And that is the ground in which Abraham exercised faith. And there could be no other ground. And let me make this statement tonight and I trust you will learn it in experience. Faith does not stand in moods or feelings or dreams or omens or circumstances. Faith does not calculate possibilities or probabilities. God speaks and faith without understanding how. God does, it simply says. God's Word is good enough for me.

Faith responds by accepting and trusting what he says.

In other words, the only ground of faith is the Word of God. The only warrant of faith is the promise of God. And the only assurance of faith is that the unchangeable promise of God and the unconquerable power of God unite to assure us that he will fulfill all his will.

And now we come back to verse 22.

“And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.”<sup>24</sup>

This is the kind of faith that justifies.

How can I sum it all up? This faith has an intellectual component. It [?], but therefore justifying faith is a momentary decision. It is not. You can't encapsulate, you can't imprison justifying faith in a moment of past time. If you ever exercise saving faith in Christ let me tell you that same faith is yours today. For this is a living knowledge of God and his saving truth which it accepts in such a way as to cast the soul entirely upon God's mercy and Christ's merit and to govern every aspect of life in the light of the gospel. That is Abraham's faith. That is the faith that justifies.

Let me give you five phrases that will bring it all together.

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<sup>24</sup> Romans 4:22.

Justifying faith is a conscious response to God's revelation of grace. It is a conscious response of believing. It is a complete reliance on God's promise in Christ. It is a constant relation to God and the gospel that regulates every part of your life. It is a confident rest in the Lord and his gospel promise in life and in death. And it is a convincing realization that God's promise and God's performance perfectly coincide that what he has promised he always performs.

As Solomon said, 1 Kings eight and verse 56, "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant."<sup>25</sup>

You think of the souls who have died and gone to heaven. Do you not think that is what they are saying? When I think of the times I have perplexed my puny little brain about the circumstances of life and I wondered why this was happening and the other thing, why I wasn't seeing what the promise fulfilled as I thought I should see it fulfilled? Now I get to glory and I see the finished product. I realize there hasn't failed one Word.

That is the assurance of faith.

I hope tonight that you understand something personally. This is not theory. This is truth. There is a world of difference.

My faith hath found a resting place not in device nor creed, I trust the ever living one, his wounds, his blood, for me shall plead.

That is the voice of faith. Is that your testimony? I trust it is, because that is the only faith that will save a soul.

May God grant you tonight to know what it is to say, "My faith, as surely as Abraham's, is fixed in God's Christ."

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Let's all pray.

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<sup>25</sup> 1 Kings 8:56.