

Believe Part 4: Faith of Abraham

Romans 4:13-25 ¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring--not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- **The problem of calling people to faith within Christendom.**
- **Familiarity.** Over Familiarity Can Create Difficulty to Deeply Believe – We may become so familiar with the absurdities of the faith that they seem common sense and logical to us. They begin to lose their cost and promise. We don't even see them as they exist; they become background to normal life. We might even begin to disdain those who point out their absurd character. Scandalous even. But it is not until we yield to God in the absurdity and impossibility of a genuine divine calling from the God who is there that we truly have the faith of Abraham.
- **Supernatural Faith.** You can't turn a theological system into technology that mechanically works with scientific accuracy. It's a relationship. We're talking about personal trust here! It's a genuine divine invitation!
- **The God of the Book.** Not simply believing that the Book of God is true, but rather relating to, *trusting in* the God of the Book.
- **Keirkegaard** (Danish – 1813-1855) saw the state and the church and the culture so aligned that to be "**reasonable and respectable**" was to affirm the mysteries of the faith as a matter of common sense and social decency. Faith was no longer spiritual and radical and supernatural and life-transforming. It was not so much a passionate commitment that one's life was based on as it was the calm detached assumptions everyone took for granted. Kierkegaard

provocatively wrote that he didn't even know a single Christian, and wasn't sure he was one either, since faith as it shows up in Scripture, was so different from what he observed.

- **“Contemporary Disciples” of Jesus.** He said that if Jesus were to show up “as a contemporary” in Denmark, no one would believe in Him, or at least – certainly not many of the people who assumed that they would.
- **The Point. Cultural Christianity is merely a set of doctrinal affirmations; often it can even take a posture of worldly wisdom.** Hence his claim was that the cultural version of Christianity practiced in his time was not authentic biblical Christian faith. It was not the faith of Abraham. On the contrary, ***faith is radical, supernatural, and personal surrender to God, living trust in the personal God who is there – faith is a posture of leaning in trust toward the invisible God of the Bible. Faith leans so hard into God’s promise that we will fall unless God is there to catch us.***
- Paul says, **“Not all Israel are Israel,” (Rom 9:6)** but only those who have the faith Abraham had. “Faith” - not meaning merely what they believe about God. “Faith” being their posture in relationship to God.
- **Paul’s distinctive contribution** is clarifying that humans obtain right relationship with God not through moral attainment, religious observation, nationality, heredity, or culture, but only “by faith.” In Paul’s argument, **this is what Abraham discovered**, and it is the basis of his understanding of how we come to know God. All who share in the response to God that Abraham demonstrated – faith – are right with God and considered the true children of Abraham. *True* Israel includes both Jews and Gentiles, but **only includes** those who are *righteous by faith*.
- **Hope against Hope – Absurdity.** “Hoping against hope, he believed” (**Romans 4:18**) the rational absurdity of faith. It is internally consistent, but it seems absurd from the outside. You must enter the circle of faith to see it as reasonable. Before the jump of trust is taken, it will remain absurd.
- **“By Faith” is a posture we take into all of life.** If we have grasped and yielded ourselves to the absurdity and impossibility of **the most central tenet of the Christian faith – the death and resurrection of Jesus for me** – then the shape of the whole rest of our lives will be oriented to the posture of this living faith.
 - Thankful – since I’ve received so much against the grain of what I deserve.
 - Prayerful because I have a lavish Father who makes himself available at all times for any reason, and He is the strongest causal agent in His universe.
 - Willing to enter the sufferings of others as God enters my suffering.
 - Willing to serve as Jesus serves me.
 - Willing to forgive others as I’m forgiven.
 - Surrendered to death in all manner of ways, trusting that the God who raised Jesus will also raise me and work some kind of redemption that remains to be seen.
 - Joyful – because the story has a happy ending that no worst case scenario can ever stop, and I’m sure that I’m securely in God’s love.

- **All faith will eventually be tested.** The question is, will it stand the test? Will we continue in Christian culture – inside the colony, but become functional atheists? Or will we have slightly more integrity and just admit that we no longer believe? Or will we enter into death and fall into the arms of the promise hoping for resurrection on the other side? All faith is tested. Will my faith stand the test?
- **Poker tell.** In poker games, a player often has subtle clues as to what kind of hand they're hiding. These are called a player's "tell." The **Israelites in the wilderness** were constantly impatient, ungrateful, and critical of the leadership God had appointed. These irritating behaviors were like a poker tell that pointed to their hearts – which were full of unbelief. They did not trust the God of the impossible promise to do what he said so they worried and complained and blamed and plotted and schemed and formed alliances and issued harsh criticisms against Moses. It was a poker tell that revealed their cards. Unbelief in the invisible God of the impossible promise. **So what does my ungrateful and anxious attitude reveal?** What does my need to slander and criticize others reveal? What does my anxious plotting and my being driven by a negative energy reveal about my cards? It's a tell. Unbelief in the invisible God of the impossible promise – I don't really trust him to work terrible things for good and to bring life from the dead as I surrender to doing His will, and it shows in my criticism, complaints, and talking other people down.
- **Romans 4:25.** Jesus died for me. Jesus was raised for me. It's personal. It defines me. *This event holds the very meaning of our lives.* And faith is the posture that receives God on the basis of it, through it, and relates to everything from it.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That's how sinful I am. 2. That's how much I'm loved. |
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- **The cross demands an earnest response.** The cross should either be ridiculous mythical immoral tragic stupidity – or it should be thrilling and amazing and humbling and empowering! But it should never be "boring and taken for granted." Mona Lisa guy – "I don't like it." "Sir, these paintings are no longer being judged. The viewers are."
- **Cynicism** is never of faith – but superlatives are.
- **Not triumphalism.** We don't ignore the calling to suffer and serve and be persecuted and lose. That's often where faith is tested the most clearly. We follow a crucified and risen pioneer, and so we must embrace death as well as resurrection. It's in the dna of the faith's saving core.
- **The love of God is scandalous in a broken world.** This is where choosing to walk by faith is radical and self-denying for people like Steve and Bobby or Lynette and Rusty (specify what happened to those who might now know) or Shirley Bryfogle. All kinds of questions about God's character are raised by these events that seem to contradict the meaning of the Christ-event. They ask, "How could God be good? How could the story ever possibly turn out okay in the end?" But faith says, "The God who gives life to the dead and calls things into being by the breath of his mouth will make it so. He raised Jesus from the dead as the first-fruits of what's ahead."
- **Faith Jumps into the loving arms of God as invited by the divine promise** – through darkness. We hear His voice, but we don't see His arms, and yet we jump. That's faith. Jumping out of the

tree in the Father's arms. The arms of the promise. Jumping into the arms of God's promise, trusting that they will catch you – though you know not how.

- **God is calling us to faith constantly, like music in the background. 1.)** He is calling us through the whole creation. God is calling in the sparrow's song. In the rain and thunder. In the foreboding skies and the peaceful stars. In children laughing – God is calling us to himself. He's calling in the sense of right and wrong that all people have. In the feeling that life's just too stinking short. He's calling in the unshakeable feeling that life and love and beauty matter. God is calling in the midst of the sense that the world is NOT as it should be. In the sense of loss. In the sense of promise. In the fear of death. In the joy of a new baby – born or adopted. God is calling through the things he has made – as they are crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy, the whole earth is filled with His glory!" Whoever has ear to hear, let them hear.
- **2.) God is also calling us to faith in a louder voice through humans (like me!) telling the message about Jesus. At this very moment.**