

THE NATURE OF SAVING FAITH

ROMANS 4:18–25

INTRODUCTION

Do you believe?

Do you have saving faith?

There can scarcely be a **more important question**.

As we have learnt from the apostle Paul through his letter to Rome thus far, **the heart of the gospel** is the good news of justification by faith alone.

That is, God saves sinners by making them right with Him **through the instrument of their belief** in Jesus Christ.

It has been **Paul's burden** in both **chapters three and four** to explain that the good news of God's saving work in Christ is **received by those who believe**—we are justified by faith alone.

J. I. Packer captures the **essence of what we have learnt** when he writes—

“Justification is a judicial act of God pardoning sinners..., accepting them as just, and so putting permanently right their previously estranged relationship with himself.”¹

¹ J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1993), 164.

If faith is so important to our salvation—which is our right relationship with God and all the blessings that flow from it—then there is **nothing more important** than being **assured that you have the faith** by which you will receive this salvation.

Do you have saving faith?

In asking the question that way, it is clear that **there is a kind of faith** that **does NOT save**.

That is, there is a **false faith—a counterfeit faith**—that deceives those who profess to believe.

James, the brother of Jesus, made this point in a rather **sobering fashion** to those who claimed to believe but did not possess saving faith.

He wrote in **James 2:19**—

¹⁹ You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

In other words, saving faith is **more than simply believing—or intellectually affirming**—the fact of God's existence.

As James said, even the demons have that kind of faith and are **by no means saved** from the wrath of God.

So what does saving faith look like?

If you are to **avoid the deception** of a counterfeit faith and **enjoy the assurance** of a saving faith, then what is the nature of this saving faith by which we are made right with God?

The simplest way to answer that question is to say that saving faith is “**confident trust**.”²

As theologians have wrestled with the question and tried to **flesh out a fuller answer**, saving faith has typically been defined by **at least three elements**—

knowledge, conviction, and trust.³

Knowledge: This involves the **intellect** and emphasises that there are certain basic truths that must be believed for salvation.

Conviction: Conviction involves the **emotions**.

This element emphasises that the person has not only an intellectual awareness of the truths but that there is an **inner conviction** of their truthfulness.

Trust: As a result of knowledge about Christ and a conviction that these things are true there must also be a **settled trust**, a moving of the **will**—
a **decision** must be made as an act of the will.

Taken together, the three elements of knowledge, conviction, and trust describe the “**confident trust**” of saving faith.

² Shedd uses the older but equivalent terminology of “confiding trust.” William G. T. Shedd, *A Critical and Doctrinal Commentary upon the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1879), 92.

³ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, ed. Jim Vincent and Allan Sholes, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 345–346.

Indeed, confident trust is emphasised by the author of **Hebrews** when he writes on faith in **Hebrews 11:1-12**—

1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who draws near to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

He then uses **Abraham as an example** of this kind of saving faith, this kind of **confident trust in the promises of God**—

8 By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going.

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise,

10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

11 By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she regarded Him faithful who had promised.

12 Therefore there were born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, as many AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS BY THE SEASHORE.

So then, Abraham's example of faith allows us to **ask the question in a clearer way**—

Do you have a confident trust in God's saving work in Christ?

As much as that clarity helps us to understand the question, **it also raises a concern for many.**

The concern is **all the greater** when we understand the importance of faith to our salvation and right relationship with God.

For many, **their faith is not bold and strong and confident.**

Rather, **it is inconsistent and weak and plagued with many doubts.**

What does that mean for our salvation if we are limping along with weak faith not walking assuredly in confident trust?

For many, their faith is **less comparable to Abraham's** confident trust and **more comparable to the father** who was pleading with Jesus to deliver his son who was demon possessed.

Jesus said to him, **"All things are possible to him who believes."**

The father replied, as we read in **Mark 9:14-24**—

²⁴ **Immediately the boy's father cried out and was saying, "I do believe; help my unbelief."**

PROPOSITION

Since the heart of the gospel is the good news of justification by faith alone, **it is essential to evaluate** whether you have saving faith.

Since God is pleased to bring us into a right relationship with Himself **through the instrument of our faith, it is essential to have the “confident trust”** of genuine, saving faith.

Therefore, as we study **Romans 4:18–25** today, we’ll consider **the nature of Abraham’s faith in order to evaluate the nature of our own faith.**

As we evaluate Abraham’s faith in **its challenges and encouragements**, we’ll also learn **how to strengthen our faith so that we will glorify God** in our confident trust of His gospel promises **and be assured** of His salvation in Christ.

Therefore, our study will follow that simple outline of **two considerations**—

1. **The nature of Abraham’s faith (18–22)**
 - a. Its obstacles (18–19)
 - b. Its encouragements (20–22)
2. **The nature of our faith (23–25)**

1. THE NATURE OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH (18–22)

As we consider the nature of Abraham's faith, especially as an **example against which we can evaluate our own faith**, we must acknowledge that there are **many misconceptions of faith**.

Probably the **greatest misunderstanding** that we believe is **that faith is OUR part of the equation**.

We imagine it to be something like this—

God's promises + my faith = my salvation and blessing.

God's work + my work of faith = my salvation as God's reward for the righteousness of my faith.

So many professing believers have **misunderstood faith to be a righteous "work"** that merits God's favour.

They know that God doesn't reward works like circumcision, but have **subtly embraced the idea** that **God DOES reward works like believing in Him**,

as if faith is the **accomplishment that earns His favour**.

Nothing can be further from the biblical idea of what genuine, saving faith is.

All of our misconceptions of faith tend to **distort it** into something that is **man-centred**.

As we'll see, the **outstanding feature of Abraham's faith** is that it was **God-centred**.

Saving faith is a **God-centred faith**.

As we study the example of Abraham and the nature of his faith, Paul will **clarify that this kind of God-centred faith** should not be confused with **naive optimism, nor does it involve a denial of reality**.⁴

That is precisely what we learn as we look at the **obstacles to Abraham's faith**—

a. ITS OBSTACLES (18–19)

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 SEED BE."

Verse 18, of course, **continues Paul's thought** from **verse 17** where he wrote of **God as the object of Abraham's faith**.

If you look, you see that in the **second part of the verse** Paul writes of **Abraham believing in God**—

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

In **Genesis 15**, Abraham and Sarah were childless and Abraham was contemplating the prospect of a relative, **"Eliezer of Damascus,"** being his heir.

⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp, Second Edition, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 243.

But as Paul explains in **Romans 4:17**, Abraham believed that God who has the **power to resurrect the dead**—
the greatest display of His power towards human beings—
also has the power to “**call into being**” the **countless descendants that Yahweh promised him**.

What was remarkable is that Abraham believed God **before he had any tangible evidence** that God would fulfil His promise.

Even as Paul suggests, to give Abraham descendants as many as the innumerable stars would be to “**[call] into being that which does not exist.**”

From a human standpoint, there was no hope that Abraham he and Sarah would ever have children.

Abraham **was not naive or ignorant of this reality**.

That is why the **obstacles of his age and the age of Sarah**, his wife, made his confident trust in Yahweh **all the more remarkable**.

That is what Paul means when he says in **verse 18** that, “**In hope against hope he believed.**”

As we’ve previously noted, **hope is future-focussed faith** that is **confident in God’s future fulfilment of His promises**.

As Abraham **considered the evidence before him**, the confidence he had was not from the reality he faced but from **the God he knew and trusted**.

As a result, **Yahweh proved His faithfulness** by fulfilling His promise **in the people of God** who would constitute the spiritual descendants of Abraham.

Originally in the nation of Israel and then in the church, God's people **who are characterised by the faith** of Abraham become the **fulfilment of God's promise** to the patriarch—

...so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR SEED BE."

But as we have already said, saving faith is **not a naive optimism**, nor does it involve a denial of reality.

Paul confirms this by **elaborating on the obstacles** to Abraham's faith.

It is the **contradictory nature of the circumstances** that highlight the **God-centred focus of Abraham's faith**, as we see in **verse 19**—

19 And 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;

Paul emphasises that Abraham "**hoped upon hope**" in the **confident trust he had in God** because when he considered the likelihood of fathering a child through Sarah, he did not "**[become] weak in faith.**"

Now, Paul says that Abraham specifically “**contemplated**” **two things**—

the **deadness** of his body and the **deadness** of Sarah’s.

Abraham’s body was “**dead**” in the sense of it being far **beyond the normal age of procreation** for a man.

We read in **Genesis 17:1** that when Yahweh renewed His covenant promises with Abraham, he was “**ninety-nine years old.**”

Therefore, Paul was spot on when he wrote that he was “**about a hundred years old.**”

Sarah, of course, was **younger, but not by much.**

At the age of ninety, she too was far **beyond normal childbearing years**, but Paul maintains that neither the deadness of her womb nor the deadness of Abraham’s body **made him weaken in his faith.**

Let’s turn to **Genesis 17** and read Moses’ account because the **apparent contradiction** with what Paul is saying actually **helps to clarify exactly what he means.**

We read in **Genesis 17:15-18**—

15 Then God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name.

16 And I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

17 **Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said in his heart, “Will a son be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a son?”**

18 **And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!”**

At first glance, we may think that Abraham’s **laughter in response** to Yahweh’s promise **indicates a lack of faith**.

However, a **careful reading** indicates that it was an expression of his **utter amazement**.

Contrast Abraham’s laughter with Sarah’s later in **Genesis 18:12-15**—

12 **And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?”**

13 **And Yahweh said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a son, when I am so old?’**

14 **Is anything too difficult for Yahweh? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”**

15 **Then Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh.”**

Sarah was clearly **rebuked by Yahweh for not trusting in His promise**, but what does that tell us about Abraham’s laughter in the **previous chapter**?

Abraham’s laughter in **Genesis 17** was evidently **NOT the same kind of laughter**—it did NOT demonstrate the same **heart condition**.

If Abraham was **NOT rebuked for his laughter**, then it was unlikely a laughter which **revealed a lack of faith**.

Rather, it seems not to reflect so much a lack of faith as it does a **limitation of his faith**.⁵

At this time, Abraham is not one whose faith in God has **reached full maturity**.

His faith **must be strengthened** if he is to continue to put his trust in God's promise.

As he clearly contemplated the deadness of his body and his wife's, he burst out with **the laughter of utter amazement, but trusted Yahweh's promise** when He clarified that the promised seed would indeed come through Sarah.

So how does this clarify what Paul means in saying that Abraham did not become weak in faith?

To begin, it **reinforces the point** that saving faith is not a naive optimism, nor does it involve a denial of reality.

More than that, though, it presents us with a picture of Abraham **facing a choice in his faith**—he could believe his own judgement of what he thought possible in his circumstances, or he could believe the promise of God.

Abraham chose, without weakening in faith, **to believe the promise of God**.

⁵ John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus* (Revised Edition), ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 182.

In other words, **Genesis 17** is **NOT an illustration** of the weakness of Abraham's faith, **but the God-centredness of it.**

Abraham's faith was **firmly focussed on God with whom all things are possible.**

That is, he continued to believe God's promise to him **even as he observed the physical condition** that made the fulfilment of that promise so unlikely.

There is a **marvellous lesson** for us even in that, as **Calvin** eloquently notes—

“Let us also remember, that the condition of us all is the same with that of Abraham.

All things around us are in opposition to the promises of God:

He promises immortality; we are surrounded with mortality and corruption:

He declares that He counts us just; we are covered with sins:

He testifies that He is propitious and kind to us; outward judgments threaten His wrath.

What then is to be done? We must with closed eyes pass by ourselves and all things connected with us, that nothing may hinder or prevent us from believing that God is true.”⁶

In other words, **we gain the confident trust** of Abraham's saving faith **when we focus our hearts on God**, not our circumstances or the obstacles that threaten His promises.

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 310.

As Paul argues, the obstacles and challenges of circumstance **did NOT weaken Abraham's faith** but were actually the **means by which his faith was strengthened.**

That is **precisely his point** as we consider the **encouragements of Abraham's faith**—

b. ITS ENCOURAGEMENTS (20–22)

²⁰ **yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,**

Paul **contrasts the obstacles** to Abraham's faith with the **response—instead of weakening, Abraham's faith grew stronger.**

The contrast **offers further clarity** that in whatever way Abraham's faith **was limited or immature**, he did not doubt **“the promise of God.”**

If Abraham **DIDN'T doubt God's promise**, then he could only have **doubted how God would fulfil it.**

In other words, Abraham struggled with **HOW** God would give him descendants, but never with **WHETHER** God would fulfil His promise.

When Paul writes that **“he did not waver in unbelief,”** he is referring to **“unbelief”** as the **opposite of faith.**

It is **settled, determined disbelief of God** in **hardened rebellion.**

James describes the one who **doubts** or “[wavers] in **unbelief**” when he writes in **James 1:6-8** of the one **who prays for wisdom**—

6 But he must ask in faith, doubting nothing, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.

7 For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord,

8 being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

That **double-mindedness** certainly **did NOT characterise** Abraham’s faith.

So what Paul means is that the **basic pattern and direction of Abraham’s life** was characterised by **confident trust in God**, not by doubt.

He didn’t “**waver**” in the sense that he **persevered and persisted in faith**.

Paul, then, DOESN’T mean that Abraham **never had momentary hesitations**, but that he **avoided a settled and permanent attitude of distrust** towards God and His promises.⁷

In other words, we see that Abraham’s faith was **NOT focussed on his circumstances**, and it was not focussed on himself—**as if he had faith in his own faith**.

Rather, Abraham’s **confident trust** was a **God-centred faith**.

⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Second Edition, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 310.

Therefore, he “**grew strong in faith.**”

This is where Paul’s explanation of **the nature of Abraham’s faith** is particularly **clarifying for our own.**

As we said earlier, probably the **greatest misunderstanding** that we believe is that **faith is our part of the equation.**

We imagine it to be something like this—

God’s promises + my faith = my salvation and blessing.

However, a **more literal translation** of Paul’s words clarifies the **passive nature** of Abraham’s experience—
he “**was strengthened in faith.**”

That is what we call a “**divine passive,**” which means that when Abraham was the one passively receiving the action of having his faith made stronger, it was **God doing the action** as He strengthened Abraham’s faith.

In **Ephesians 2:8**, Paul states that both the grace of God and the faith by which we receive it are given to us as a gift from God—

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

The apostle John makes the same point in **John 1:12-13**—

¹² But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,

¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

Since God is **the One who sovereignly gives the gift** of saving faith, it should not surprise us that He is also **the One who sovereignly strengthens saving faith** into mature, confident trust like Abraham's faith.

The point is that we **earn no merit with God** by our faith because the **power comes not from faith itself, but from God.**

God is the One who saves—not faith!

Too many people struggle because **they have faith in faith**, instead of faith in God.

You need a God-centred faith like Abraham, not a man-centred faith that **focuses on your strength and accomplishments.**

In fact, when Paul writes of “strong faith” he **DOESN'T mean** that **the larger the faith, the more power** it can wield.

Faith is not a muscle that you build by going to spiritual gym as if the more you “bulk up,” the bigger the weights you can lift.

When you think of faith as a muscle, you tend to think that its **strength lies in its size—its strength lies in faith itself.**

Strong faith is **NOT about size or volume**—it's not about how much faith you have—it is about the **consistency of your faith.**

Weak faith is **inconsistent**, filled with **fears and hesitations.**

Strong faith is **consistent, confident in the God** in whom we trust.

Faith is “strong” when it **consistently finds its strength in God.**

Strong, saving faith is God-centred because it is focussed on **God’s power and faithfulness**, not the obstacles of our circumstances.

But we must ask, **how does God strengthen faith?**

It is certainly **NOT through our inaction**, as if we can **“let go and let God.”**

Rather, Paul explains at the end of **verse 20** that **God strengthened** Abraham’s faith as as he was, **“giving glory to God.”**

We could **paraphrase** Paul as saying, “God strengthened Abraham’s faith as he kept his faith centred on God, which honoured God.”

You see, **to glorify God in his faith**, Abraham must have kept **the focus of his heart on God**, not on himself.

But in **relying on God’s power and faithfulness** instead of his own, Abraham’s response to the obstacles he faced **honoured God.**

If we depend on ourselves, we glorify ourselves in **what we accomplish** by our own might or power.

Instead, **if we depend on God**, we glorify God in **what He accomplishes** by His power.

That is why **strong faith is a humble, dependent faith** that acknowledges **our own weakness** and trusts in **God's strength and power**.

As the prophet taught the king of Judah in **Zechariah 4:6**—
⁶ **“This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel, saying, ‘Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says Yahweh of hosts.”**

That is exactly the point Paul makes next in **verse 21**—
²¹ **and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to do.**

Paul continues his explanation here of **how God strengthened Abraham's faith**.

First, it was by Abraham's focus on God.

Second, as Paul elaborates, it was specifically by focussing on **two aspects of the character of God**—

- i. **The faithfulness of God**
- ii. **The power of God**

If you look at **verse 21**, you'll see that Abraham was **“fully assured”** in the promise of God.

Clearly, **the promise Paul is referring to** is the one he has been referring to throughout **chapter four**, that God would give Abraham countless spiritual descendants in the people of God.

Now, I think that **“fully assured”** is a perfectly acceptable translation, but I think that Paul's idea is better conveyed with the more familiar language of, **“completely convinced.”**

Abraham has **completely convinced** “**that what God had promised, He was able also to do.**”

As Abraham **maintained his focus on God**, his **God-centred faith was made stronger** and more consistent as he was completely convinced of the faithfulness of God.

For Abraham, **the promise of God** was **only as secure as the faithfulness of God’s character.**

Being **convinced that God is a promise-keeping God** will strengthen your faith, just as it did Abraham’s.

The author of **Hebrews** makes the same point in **Hebrews 6:13-18**—

13 For when God made the promise to Abraham, since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself,

14 saying, “I WILL GREATLY BLESS YOU AND I WILL GREATLY MULTIPLY YOU.”

15 And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

16 For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute.

17 In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of His purpose, guaranteed it with an oath,

18 so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.

So as Abraham was **convinced of God's faithfulness**, **God strengthened his faith** to make it more consistent and steadfast in the face of challenges and obstacles.

But Paul continues in **verse 21** to say that as Abraham **maintained his focus on God**, his God-centred faith was made stronger and more consistent as he grew completely **convinced of the power of God**.

That is what he is referring to as God being “**able also to do**” what He had promised.

In other words, Abraham was convinced that God had both **the inclination and the ability** to keep His promise.

Here again we see that the **focus of genuine, saving faith** is not on the power of the believer but **the power of God**.

The point is not the power of your faith, but the power of your God.

In other words, what **distinguishes** saving faith from counterfeit faith is **the object of faith**.⁸

So if we **step back from the details** and look at the big picture, we see that Paul has made a simple but profound argument about **the nature of saving faith**.

Faith doesn't turn a blind eye toward human weakness—

⁸ Cf. Thomas Schreiner, *Faith Alone—The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught ... and Why It Still Matters*, ed. Matthew Barrett, The Five Solas Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 122.

it faces the facts and acknowledges that **humanly speaking**, the fulfilment of the promise is impossible.

Faith puts its hope and **confident trust in God instead of self.**

Therefore, **faith glorifies and honours God** by confessing that God will do what He has promised
because He is faithful and powerful.

That is what saving faith looks like.

Paul confirms that Abraham's faith was genuine, saving faith when he writes in **verse 22**—

22 Therefore IT WAS ALSO COUNTED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Once again, Paul refers to **Genesis 15:6** so that we can see the **consistency of this New Testament gospel message** with the **Old Testament plan of salvation.**

By expounding upon this foundational OT text, Paul is making it plain that God has always saved His people **by grace alone through faith alone.**

Therefore, **it is essential to evaluate whether you have saving faith.**

Having provided us with the **compelling example of Abraham's faith**, he turns now to his readers in **direct application.**

From **the nature of Abraham's faith**, we consider now **the nature of our faith.**

2. THE NATURE OF OUR FAITH (23–25)

Paul's explanation of the nature of Abraham's faith was clearly **NOT intended** to be an **academic matter**.

With great pastoral concern, Paul presents the nature of saving faith as an **essential matter of personal application**.

Since God is pleased to bring us into a right relationship with Himself **through the instrument of our faith**, it is essential to have **the “confident trust” of genuine, saving faith**.

Therefore, Paul transitions **from explanation to application** when he writes in **verse 23**—

²³ Now not for his sake only was it written THAT IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM,

Referring again to **Genesis 15:6**, Paul says that the **theological truth** expressed **does not only serve Abraham, but us too**.

God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness through faith alone **announces His universal and unchanging plan** to save all His chosen people—all those He is drawing into the new people of God—by **imputing the righteousness of God** to them through faith alone.

As Paul says in **verse 24**, that is **God's plan for all believers**—
²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be counted, as those who believe upon Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead

Paul is comparing the nature of Abraham's faith with the nature of our faith as believers and arguing that if we are to experience the same justification, then we need the same faith.

That is why Paul puts his statement, “**for our sake also, to whom it will be counted**” in a **future tense**.

The justification of New Testament believers is future from the perspective of the Old Testament.

Paul is arguing that **Genesis 15:6** was written for the sake of **those who in the future** would be counted righteous by faith, **according to the gospel of Jesus Christ** which had not yet been revealed in Abraham's lifetime.⁹

So, we need to have the **confident trust in God** of a **God-centred faith like Abraham** that is strengthened by God as we focus on His faithfulness and power.

We need the consistency of faith that comes **NOT from self-sufficiency NOR from hesitation** in the face of obstacles and challenging circumstances, but **from a whole-hearted conviction** that God's character makes God's promises sure.

But make sure you pay attention to what Paul is saying!

The promise of salvation through the gospel is **NOT for everyone**—it is **only for those who have a genuine, saving faith**.

⁹ Cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 250.

That is why Paul **excludes those with a false, counterfeit faith** by defining **who is included in the “us”** to whom God counts righteousness by faith alone.

The salvation offered by God in the good news message of Jesus Christ is only for **“those who believe upon Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”**

The **“Him”** here is **God the Father, not Jesus Christ His Son.**

That is because Paul is **a clear-minded Trinitarian** who understands that the relationship we are invited into through the gospel is **a relationship with the Father, through the Son, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.**

Therefore, **our faith is a Trinitarian faith** that comes to focus **on the Father, through the Son, by the enabling of the Holy Spirit.**

Here Paul refers again to the **resurrection**, as he has a number of times in **chapter four.**

He does so, however, **for a further reason** than to highlight the omnipotence, or greatness of God’s power, displayed in the resurrection.

Since his focus has been on the **justification of all those who have saving faith**, he highlights **the importance of the resurrection** to God’s work of making us right with Him—

²⁵ He who was delivered over on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justification.

As we have learnt before in this series, **we tend to focus on the cross and Jesus' death** as the work by which God **accomplished our justification.**

Paul himself highlighted **Jesus' atoning work on the cross** when he explained the heart of the gospel in **chapter 3:21–26.**

However, we should **NOT overlook the equal importance of the resurrection for our salvation.**

So Paul explains here that **when Jesus died for believers,** He took care of **their trespasses by removing them,** and **when He was resurrected for believers,** He took care of **their justification by confirming it.**¹⁰

The resurrection is essential to our salvation because it **confirms that Jesus' atoning sacrifice was accepted** by the Father and was thereby **effectual** in securing our justification.

Therefore, **if your faith needs to be made stronger** and more consistent, **there is no better place to consider the faithfulness and power of God.**

The greatest display of God's faithfulness to His promise is His willingness to send His own Son, in the greatest act of love for His chosen people, to die for their sins.

God's faithfulness was **further demonstrated** by not leaving His Son in the grave.

¹⁰ Andrew David Naselli, *Romans: A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 64.

According to His promise, He raised Jesus from the dead on the third day, demonstrating not only **His promise-keeping character** but **His power to accomplish** all that He has promised to His people in the gospel.

Therefore, **if your faith needs to be made stronger** and more consistent, **there is no better place to consider the faithfulness and power of God** than the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

With your faith **focused on God's faithfulness and power**, you can follow Abraham's example of a **confident trust** in God.

Such God-centred faith is what genuine, saving faith looks like.

So it is **through a strengthened, God-centred faith** that you **can be assured of your salvation** in Jesus Christ, according to the good news of the gospel.

CONCLUSION

Friends, do you believe?

Do you have genuine, saving faith?

Since we are justified by faith alone, **it is essential to evaluate whether you have saving faith.**

Since God is pleased to bring us into a right relationship with Himself **through the instrument of our faith**, it is essential to have **the "confident trust" of genuine, saving faith.**

As Paul has elaborated on **both the obstacles and encouragements** of Abraham's faith, we found in his faith an **example by which to evaluate** the nature of our own.

If your heart is hardened in unbelief, then Abraham's faith is **a call to repent and trust in God's promise** to justify you by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The invitation is **surely made all the more compelling** when you **think of the faithfulness and power of God** displayed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If you will **believe with the confident trust of saving faith**, then you can be **assured of your salvation** because

“He was delivered over on account of [your] transgressions, and was raised on account of [your] justification.”

If your faith is weak and inconsistent, then Abraham's faith is **a call to focus on the faithfulness and power of God** in God-centred faith.

Leave your misconceptions about faith behind and learn that, as **one author** said—

“Paul did not believe in faith. He believed in God and emphasised faith—not because faith is powerful but because God is.”

As you focus on the character of God for the **strengthening of your faith**, know also that it is by looking to God as Abraham did **that you will glorify God.**

As his example shows us, **the supreme way to worship God** is **NOT to work for Him** as if He was glorified by our religious efforts and accomplishments.

The supreme way to worship God is to **confidently trust that He will fulfil His promises.**

God has given us those precious promises in His Son, Jesus Christ, according to the good news of the gospel.

Therefore, let us all believe with God-centred faith as **Charles Wesley** wrote in his hymn, "**Father of Jesus Christ, My Lord**":

*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!*

BENEDICTION

2 Corinthians 13:14

**The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with you all.**