

• Faith makes our future inheritance certain

### Faith..

1. Takes notice of what is promised

2. Has to relate to God's word

3. Holds on to God's ability to raise the dead

4. Holds on to God's ability as creator

5. Can face hopelessness when it has a word from God

6. Is realistic; it is not afraid to face facts

7. Is able to overcome doubts

To relate to God by law makes inheritance uncertain, but faith makes our future inheritance certain. Inheritance must be pursued by faith, or (to put the same thing another way) by persistently trusting in God's grace. Then we shall 'inherit the promises'. At this point Paul inconspicuously glides into a new sub-section. <sup>17</sup>*Abraham is the father of many nations, in the presence of the one he believed, God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that have no existence so that they come into existence.* Faith-begun brings justification; faith-continued brings inheritance. Romans 4:17b–21 now puts before us a wonderful description of how faith works when it is persevering and laying hold of the promises of God despite great opposition and conflict.

1. **Faith takes notice of what is promised 'in the presence of God'**. Paul says, 'Abraham is the father of many nations, in the presence of the one he believed, God, who gives life to the dead . . .' When Abraham was before God he regarded himself as what God promised he would be. Faith sees what God sees and reveals will actually be the case one day. Faith is a conviction about things not seen<sup>□1</sup>.

2. **Faith has to relate to God's word.** Abraham was able to exercise faith because God had spoken. God had said to him: 'I have appointed you a father of many nations.'

3. **Faith holds on to God's ability to raise the dead.** Abraham believed God, 'who gives life to the dead'<sup>□1</sup>. Faith believes in resurrection. Abraham knew that 'his body was as good as dead'<sup>□2</sup> but that did not stop him believing. He knew that God could raise the dead. God asked Abraham on one occasion to put Isaac to death. Even that did not stop him believing. 'Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead!'<sup>□3</sup>

4. Another characteristic of faith is: **faith holds on to God's ability as creator.** Abraham believed God, 'who gives life to the dead, and calls into being things that have no existence so that they come into existence.' When God has given you a promise but you are in a situation of difficulty, the problem may be that something has died or that something you need does not exist. In Abraham's case, his body was as good as dead, and the possibility of conceiving a child through the elderly Sarah did not exist. And yet God had given a promise of worldwide blessing coming through the birth of a child. Abraham went on believing. His faith looked to God the Creator. Creation does not have to use pre-existing material. God's creating takes place by 'calling'. He 'calls' things that have no existence so that they come into existence. Abraham believed this. He reckoned that a mere word from God would call everything into being that Abraham had been promised.

5. Another characteristic of faith is: **faith can face hopelessness when it has a word from God.** Abraham was in a situation that seemed hopeless. How could such an elderly man and such an elderly woman expect a multitude of children? They had never been able to have even one child despite the decades that they had been together. But Paul says, <sup>18</sup>*Against hope but in hope Abraham believed in order that he would become a father of many nations, according to what had been spoken, 'So shall your seed be.'*

6. **Faith is realistic; it is not afraid to face facts.** Paul goes on to say: <sup>19</sup>*And without becoming weak in faith he considered his own body, already as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, and he considered the deadness of Sarah's womb.* (The 'King James' Version or 'Authorized' Version of 1611 reads 'he considered not his own body'. This is a mistake which arose from following inferior manuscripts.) Faith is not pretending. It is not shutting one's eyes to the facts. Faith considers the facts but is not intimidated by them. It is a bold confidence in what God has said.

7. **Faith is able to overcome doubts.** Paul says: <sup>20</sup>*Yet he did not waver in unbelief with regard to the promise of God but he was strengthened in faith, by giving glory to God . . .* Faith gets stronger by glorifying God. There is such a thing as weak faith, faith that needs strengthening. There may also be

□1 Hebrews 11:1

□1 4:17b

□2 4:19

□3 Hebrews 11:19

strong faith, faith that has grown strong. There is such a thing as growing faith, or faith being strengthened. What leads to the growth of faith is giving glory to God.

• *Faith grows as we give glory to God – looking outward away from ourselves to God and His promise*

**Justifying faith and inheriting faith are the same faith**

• *Abraham – a model for the entire world and for the rest of human history*

• *A summary containing all the major elements of his teaching concerning atonement and justification*

Abraham was strengthened in faith, by giving glory to God, <sup>21</sup>and by being persuaded that the one who promised was able also to perform. In **general**, he glorified God's power and graciousness. In **particular**, Abraham was convinced that God's word was serious ('the one who had **promised**') and that God had the power to keep his promise ('... was able also to perform'). Again we see how faith has to relate to God's word. Abraham was holding on to 'one who promised', one who had given a word. But we can note two other aspects of faith. Faith is totally outward-looking. Faith is not some virtue that we possess. It is not pretending or acting as though we believed something when we in fact do not believe it. Faith looks away from itself. It is an ever-intensifying persuasion of the heart about God and his will.

In Romans 4:22 Paul turns the argument around and makes the opposite point to the one he has been making so far. *So then it* – this faith of his – *was reckoned to him for righteousness*. Paul is linking the faith that he has been speaking of <sup>21</sup> with the faith that had been mentioned earlier in the Abraham story (Genesis 15:6 quoted in Romans 4:1–5). Justifying faith and inheriting faith are the same faith. Initially faith justifies; eventually faith inherits. But it is the same faith. This very faith that achieved so much in Abraham's life was the faith that had in its earliest beginnings been reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. So Paul says: <sup>22</sup>*So then it was reckoned to him for righteousness.* <sup>23</sup>*And it was not written on his account only that it was reckoned to him, but also it was written on our account.* God planned from the very beginning that Abraham might be a model for the entire world and for the rest of human history. Abraham is the classic example of how to be justified. Everything about the Abraham story is fitted to be a sample of what is and what is not the way of salvation.

<sup>24</sup>*It was written for us to whom it would be reckoned, to us who believe on the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,* <sup>25</sup>*Jesus who was delivered up because of our transgression and was raised because of our justification.* With these words Paul summarizes and brings to a close everything he has been saying since Romans 3:21, before proceeding to a major forward move in his letter, in Romans 5:1. All of the major elements of his teaching concerning atonement and justification are here in these few lines. (i) Salvation is a matter of 'justification', a matter of righteousness being 'reckoned' ours. (ii) Salvation becomes ours by faith and by faith only. (iii) Justification is through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We believe in what God was doing in and through his Son. (iv) Our faith knows who Jesus is. He is the Lord! When we put our trust in Jesus we are putting our trust in the entire message concerning Jesus. (v) What made this gospel-message necessary is 'our transgressions'. (vi) 'Justification' has been provided for the entire human race through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Christ's resurrection is the proof that justification has been achieved and is therefore available for the entire human race, ready to be received by faith. Justification is 'in Christ' <sup>26</sup>. He was raised because he had provided our justification.

<sup>21</sup> 4:17-21

<sup>21</sup> Galatians 2:17



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