

The Faith of Abraham

Genesis 15

INTRO – We are clearly taught that we are sons of Abraham if we have the faith of Abraham. But this word ‘faith’ gets thrown around in all sorts of circles these days, meaning all kinds of things. Understanding what Abraham’s faith is can be a source of great comfort, or it can be a great stumbling block. What is the nature of the faith of Abraham, and do you have that faith?

TEXT – “And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.” Gen 15:6

Faith that Justifies – Abraham was already saved before this account in Genesis 15. This is clear from his obedience in the previous chapters, and directly from the testimony in Hebrews 11:8-10. Faith always justifies whenever it exists. It does not take weeks or months of testing. A young fruit tree is still a fruit tree even before it is producing fruit. Some of you may already be saved, but still need to hear today that you are perfect in Christ, accepted in the Beloved. This is the nature of Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:14ff.

Count the Stars – So why is verse 6 here? Abraham brings his complaints (vv2-3) and God takes him outside (vv4-5). Abraham believes in the Lord for seeds, for descendants, and particularly in a Descendant, a Seed (John 8:56). Abraham was a Christian. There are several New Testament passages which bring great significance and broad application for us from Gen 15:6.

Five New Testament Passages:

Rom 4:1-8. There is only one way to be saved. It is the same way both in the OT and the NT. Abraham was saved by grace through faith.

Rom 4:13-18. Our faith must be in the same promises that were given to Abraham. We do not have the right to simply ‘have faith’ in whatever we want. “I have made you a father of many nations”, “so shall your descendants be”. The resurrection of Christ *is* the salvation of the world.

Rom 4:20-25. The result of this kind of faith is always imputed righteousness. It was for Abraham and it is for us. The same faith produces the same results.

Gal 3:5-6. Galatians 3 is an argument from Paul that the Christian life is lived the same way it is begun – by faith. In vv5-6 we see that the supplying of the Spirit to the Galatians and the promise to Abraham are not two detached things. Instead we can think of them as promise and fulfillment. So, believing in the Spirit is believing the promise of His work. The promise of many descendants *is* the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

James 2:20-24. Salvation is not by works. But salvation, once given, certainly produces works. Vv20-24. Faith by itself is a dead faith. This is not the faith of Abraham – this is not saving faith. Faith plus human effort is another gospel. Faith without manifestation of works is another gospel. Faith which lives, hopes, prays, and works until death is saving faith.

The Nature of Saving Faith: Observations from Genesis 15

Saving Faith is Imperfect – Abraham’s trust will waver in the following chapter, 16, where he will take Hagar as a wife. We are told that we can move mountains with faith the size of a mustard seed, and that the faith of a little child saves. The focus should be on the object of our faith, and not by trying to measure the amount. We also see that we are to pray that God would increase our faith (Luke 17:5, Rom 4:20).

Saving Faith is not its Own Righteousness - Abraham believed in the Lord. Our multicultural, politically-correct world, the church included, continues to talk about the importance of ‘faith’ and ‘values’. But that kind of talk is an abomination to the Lord. He is the object of the faith. Jesus Christ is our salvation, not our sincere, faceless, impersonal faith.

Saving Faith Rests Upon Promise, not Rhetoric - We must be persuaded by God, not by some dog-and-pony show. It is all too easy to arouse the emotions, to grab attention, to convince you to make a decision. What is impossible to do is to raise the dead. I cannot convince dead men to get up. That takes the word of God. In days of providential leanness, we must avoid covering it up with emotional fervor or market tricks. We must cry out to the Lord to bring in the harvest and we must preach the gospel. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

Saving Faith Sees the Impossible - Abraham believed in the Lord for an heir, a descendant. He believed for a nation innumerable. He believed he would be heir of the world (Rom 4:13). We are to believe that our sins are forgiven. We are to believe that we are co-heirs of the world. We are to believe that the world will be saved. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. These look impossible. But nothing is impossible for God.

Saving Faith Deals with Sin – (vv9-11) Abraham spends all day looking upon the sacrifice, chasing away vultures as we are to chase away all disturbing and distracting thoughts. So, we must study the Lord Jesus Christ and apprehend His sacrifice by faith. We read, we pray, we gather at the Lord’s Table. We learn and remember that our covenant is a covenant in blood. It is because we must deal with sin. It is not enough to ‘have faith’. We must get rid of our sin. (1 John 1:8-10, 5:11).

Saving Faith Embraces Trials, Anticipates Deliverance - Right on the heels of the promise, God also promises trials (vv 13ff). We see the same pattern in Romans 5:1-5, James 1 and other passages. But we are also promised deliverance and an eternal weight of glory far surpassing all the tribulations. We are to embrace them in this way, and we can only do so by faith. Martin Luther: “Strike, Lord, now my sins are gone; strike Lord as Thou wilt if transgression be covered.”

Saving Faith is Extended Through Gospel Preaching - Romans 10:17. This teaches us how this faith is extended: by the effectual calling of the Spirit in the preaching of the gospel. The question remains – do you have this faith?

