

Romans 4:18-25 by Wayne Barber

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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work " Jensen's Survey of the NT "				

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Romans 4:13-25

Romans 4:18-25:
The Detail of God's Good News, Part 6
by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

In Romans 4:18-25, Paul is referring to a time when Abraham had nothing he could do in his own human effort to help God out. When God's time came for him to have a child, he was past that age, as far as procreation goes. He is way beyond that age and Sarah was way beyond childbearing age. God had purified his faith and gives us the example of what He expects from you and me. It is not the kind of faith that helps Him out. It is not the kind of faith that acts blindly. It is the kind of faith that just steps out when God speaks. That is all you have. That is what God wants from you and me.

As we look at this, we are also going to see a definition of faith. If you tell somebody to put his or her faith into the Lord Jesus Christ, what do you mean? What do we mean by faith? It comes out in verses 18-25 as clearly as I believe you can see it anywhere in the New Testament. So let's look at that.

There are four things that I want you to see about faith. First of all, in verse 18 we find that pure faith rests only on what God says. Look at the verse: "In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'"

Hope against hope. That is not bad. That is a pretty good translation. I think the idea he is trying to bring out is that with everything around him, it was just impossible for anything to happen that God said would happen. In other words, God said, "It is going to be through you and Sarah." "But God, you don't understand. I am too old." Yet he didn't hang on to that kind of logic. He believed God. The promise is restated here: "in order that he might become a father of many nations" That refers to the spiritual descendants. That is what God had promised him.

Then it goes on to say, "according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.'" We will see another verse in Romans that says faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. Pure faith begins when you believe God to the point that you are willing to rest everything on what He says. That is what pure faith is. Sometimes there is a wall in front of you. There is an impossible situation around you. But God speaks and you step out on what God says.

Faith is when God speaks. You exercise your faith, not in just what He said, but in who He is—the One who stands behind what He says. If you say you believe God, then you've got to believe what He says. It all rests upon what God says. That is what pure faith is. Abraham had all kinds of logic that could have attacked him and it probably did. He probably had people say, "That is the most ridiculous thing I have ever heard. You are too old to have a child." But God said he would and that is where faith starts. When God speaks, what we do rests upon what He says, not what our minds tell us.

Secondly, real faith knows no plan B. There are no other options. How many times in our lives does God say something and we say, "Well, we are not really sure so we will have this ready in case God fails"? There is no plan B when pure faith is exercised. Verse 19 reads, "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."

Abraham believed God, but he didn't believe God blindly. Abraham contemplated his own body. "Contemplated" comes from the word "mind," which has the idea of understanding. Abraham fully understood what he was up against. What did he understand? In the Scripture it says, first of all, that he was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old. Now, a hundred years old in their day was not that old, but when it comes to procreation, yes, it is old. I think that is what he is referring to. God said, "Through you and Sarah." "Oh, come on, Lord, use Ishmael. I am not capable anymore. Take Ishmael. He is from my body. Why won't that work?" "Because it is not based on solely what I say. You have 'helped me out' with Ishmael. This time you are going to have to believe that I can do what I say I am going to do."

He understood his body was as good as dead, but not only his body, he also knew the deadness of Sarah's womb. In other words, she was past the childbearing age. We certainly have enough knowledge about biology to understand that. You get to a certain point, and you don't bear children. He contemplated this. He understood it. He realized what he was up against and yet he clung to what God said. Real faith does not have a plan B. It has no option whatsoever. When you contemplate what you are up against, you have to decide, "Do I believe God or do I believe what I see? I don't walk by sight, I walk by faith. God said it, I am going to stand upon it."

Thirdly, faith is plugged into God's power, not into man's. In other words, something happens when faith is activated into what God says. It gives us an ability we don't have of ourselves. It says in Ephesians that you will be strengthened in the inner man by the Spirit of God. How? By letting Christ dwell in your hearts. How? By faith. It is by your faith you enact the power of God that is within you. "There is nothing I can do, but God, I believe You can. I believe You will, because You said You would. I act upon You and what You said."

Although Abraham knew logically that it wouldn't work, he believed God could and he believed God would because God said He would. It was obvious what Abraham could not do in his own strength. Yet, God said, "It will be through you and Sarah." Abraham trusted God and plugged himself into the power of what God can do that a man could never even think about doing. You see, faith is plugged into what God can do. If you are not living by faith, you are missing out on what God is up to and what God is doing. You can plug yourself into it by surrendering to Him, standing and believing on His word, and doing what He has asked you to do.

Not only did it produce something in Abraham, he did not at all waiver in his promise because he grew strong. The word "grew strong" would be better translated as "he was empowered by his faith." It comes from the word *dunamis*. *Dunamis* is the word that means ability, power, capability. He had no capability until he put his faith into what God said. Then the capability came. Then the power came. But it also happened to Sarah. You might want to look in Hebrews 11:11-12. It says, "By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him [God] faithful who had promised; therefore, also, there was born of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants* as the stars of heaven in number, and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore."

Verse 20 of Romans 4 says they were "giving glory to God." The word "glory," *doxa*, means recognition, proper estimate. How can God get the proper recognition in your life and in my life? Only when we step out on what He says. Because when we step out on what He says, we are stepping into his power, not our power. And God, when He does it, brings the glory back to Himself, not to us. That is what faith is all about.

If a man can save himself, who needs God? If a man can save himself, why did Jesus ever come? If any man would ever stand up and boast that he is good enough to be in the kingdom of God, he is a fool! The only thing that we boast in is God, for what He has done for us in Jesus Christ. He empowered us to be saved. We plug in to God's power. Faith rests on what God says. Faith has no Plan B. Faith is plugged into God's power.

Fourth, faith always is evidenced by obedience. Look at verse 21: "and being fully assured that what He had promised, He [God] was able also to perform." The word "fully assured" gives us a beautiful understanding of faith. It has the idea of being totally convinced. The word faith, *pistis*, comes from the word *pisteuo*, believe. It comes from the word *peitho*, which means to be so fully convinced and persuaded you are willing to act on what you say you believe. So you can't separate obedience and faith because they are two sides of the same coin. For me to tell you I have faith means nothing. The way I live shows whether I have faith or not: whether I am willing to trust what God says against what my logic is telling me. Real faith always is evidenced by obedience.

I get this picture: God spoke, Abraham believed and at 99 years old walked up to Sarah and said, "Honey, paint the nursery. We have to get busy here." He acted on what God said. How else can you look at it? Both of them were beyond the time that kind of thing was supposed to happen. But they did what God said, based on what? Nothing except what God had said, believing that God would because God said that He would. Not only could He, He would. So they acted in faith. A year later Isaac was born.

What is faith? Faith rests solely on God's Word. Faith has no Plan B. Faith is plugged into God's power. When it is exercised, you begin to experience a dimension you didn't know about. It is what God can do through you and in you. Not only that, faith is not faith until obedience has taken place.

Now put this into context with justification by faith alone. Fit it into that and let me show you what I believe Paul is doing here in the divine logic, because it is the Holy Spirit empowering Paul to write this. Paul is saying, "Hey, do you want to know what faith is? Number one, faith is resting solely upon what God's Word says."

What does His Word say? If you think there is another way of salvation, find it in His Word. You can't find any other way. From Abraham on, it is justification by faith and faith alone. You have to make up your mind. Do you believe baptism saves you? Find it in the Book. You can't do it. Baptism is a work, just like circumcision. It comes afterward, as it did in Abraham's life. It is not something that saves you. No work of man measures up, only putting your faith into Jesus Christ.

At some point you have to stand firm and say, "That is what God says and that is what I believe. I am not going any other route. I have no other route. God said it. I accept it."

Second, there is no Plan B. The gospel tells you to put your faith into Jesus Christ and believe what God's Word says. That involves understanding you can't save yourself. It involves understanding that God had to come down in His Son to die on the cross. A lot of people say, "Oh, I can't do that. I have to clean myself up before I come to God." Where is that? "Well, I have to join a church and make sure I have a good contact there." There is no Plan B. God cleans you up when you come to Him. You don't clean yourself up to come to God. You do it exactly the way He says it. There is no other option. There is no other way. Don't make it harder than it is.

Third, it is plugged into God's power. That is one of the things you've got to understand. Justification by faith alone. In other words, my faith in Jesus Christ can save me. This is why Paul said in 1:16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of God, the good news, because it is the power of God unto salvation." It is not the power of man to save himself. It is the ability God has to save a man. You have to believe when you do what God says God will do what He says. You will experience the power that He gives you to be birthed into the kingdom of God.

The final point is that obedience is the key. You haven't exercised your faith until you have done what the Bible tells you to do. When I am witnessing to people I want so badly to pray for them; I want so badly to make the decision for them, but I can't do that. Every man is responsible for himself. You have to make that choice yourself. Trust that He did what He said He would do. You have to believe. Obedience is acting upon that which you know God has said.

Well, in verse 22 Paul says, "Therefore also it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Paul has taken a lot of pains to zero in on a particular part of Abraham's life to show you what pure faith really is. But look at verses 23-25: "Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, **but for our sake also**, to whom it will be reckoned, as those who believe in Him [God] who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He who was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification." There it is. Jesus came for what reason? He came to live on this earth as a man, to take our sin upon Himself, to die, to be lifted up and then to be raised from the dead so that we now can be justified, just as Abraham was justified. It is by putting our faith into Him and what He did for you and me.

Does it stop once we are saved? If I am saved by faith, and that faith is pure, it has no Plan B, it is plugged into God's power, it is evidenced by obedience, if that is how Christ came into my life, how am I supposed to live once He comes into my life? Remember 1:17? Go back there for just a second: "For in it [the good news] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, 'But the righteous man shall live by faith.'"

I want to encourage you that faith starts the process, but it also continues the process. Our salvation begins with faith, continues in faith, and always involves faith. What is faith? I just told you. "You mean to tell me that every day I am to live under the light of

God's will and God's Word?" Yes. "You mean every day when I go to work, God has told me to go to work but I can go in the energy and the power of the Holy Spirit of God? Everything I do is based on His power in Me? Everything I do is based on His will and His Word for me?" Yes. By trusting Him daily, by putting all of my weight upon Him and what He alone can do and has commanded me to do in the strength of His Word, righteousness is revealed from faith to faith. We begin to see God in a man instead of a man for God. The Christian life is walking by faith.

I want to ask you a question. Are you walking by faith? What is the difference in walking by faith and walking in unbelief? What I have been saying all the way through Romans is, the good news of justification by faith alone is not just for the lost. It also needs to be heard by the saved. We must remember how we got in. We must remember that determines how we continue to walk once we are in, once we are a part of God's family. We don't change anything. We continue to live on the Word, to trust God and only God. What we can do? Abraham was 99 years old and could do nothing to help God except trust and obey Him. That is where we are to live every day of our life. If you are not living that way, it will show.

Let me show you something I found written by John Bunyan a long time ago in a book called *Come and Welcome To Jesus Christ*. He contrasts belief and unbelief. First of all, Bunyan says faith believes in the Word of God, but unbelief questions the word.

Did you hear about the lady praying for food and trusting God? She knew He would provide. Her landlord was an atheist. He knew of this lady's predicament, so he went out and bought her some food just to see what she would say. She came in and saw all the food and she just started praising God. He stepped out and said, "You Christians are all alike. You believe God got the food. I got the food." She said, "Listen, friend. I believed God for the food because He promised me in His Word that He would take care of me. I don't care if He used the devil to bring them. I still got the food."

The second thing John Bunyan says is that faith believes the Word because it is true. Unbelief doubts it even though it is true. Faith sees more in a promise of God to help than all the things that are hindering. In other words, when you are going through difficult times and you look at God's Word, it speaks fresh to you and you say, "God is going to do it." Unbelief ignores God's promises and questions everything bad that happens in your life.

Are you living by faith or unbelief?

- Faith will make one see love in the heart of Christ even when he is being reproved by Him. Unbelief will imagine wrath in God's heart, even when His Word says He loves him. He still thinks God is mad at him.
- Faith will help the soul to wait, even when God does not seem to be doing anything. But unbelief will give up when God tarries just a little bit.
- Faith will give comfort in the midst of fears and tears. But unbelief causes fears and tears in the midst of comfort.
- Faith will suck sweetness out of God's rod of chastisement. But unbelief can find no comfort in the greatest of God's mercies.
- Faith makes great burdens light. But unbelief makes light burdens intolerably heavy.
- Faith helps us when we are down, but unbelief throws us down when we are up.
- Faith brings us near to God when we seem to be far from Him, but unbelief puts us far from God when in reality we are near to Him.
- Faith purifies the heart, but unbelief keeps the heart polluted and impure.
- Faith makes our work acceptable to God through Christ, but all the works of unbelief are sin in God's eyes for without faith it is impossible to please God.
- Faith gives us peace and comfort in our souls, but unbelief works turmoil and trouble like the restless waves of the sea.
- Faith makes us see the preciousness in Christ, but unbelief sees nothing beautiful in Him.
- By faith we have our life in Christ's fullness, but unbelief causes us to realize none of this.
- Faith gives us the victory over sin, the law, sin, death, the devil and all evils, but unbelief leaves us conquered by them all.

Are you walking by faith or are you walking in unbelief? We have a choice to make, and that is to walk by faith, to believe the God who said it and step out on it. There is no Plan B. We need to say, "God, you are God and we so love You and so trust You, we are going to stand on Your Word, we are going to obey Your Word, and even when it doesn't come through, that is alright. We know You love us. Romans 5 says we are eternally standing in Your favor. The Old Testament would say, His face is always towards us. So I can handle anything."

Just trust in Him and trust in His Word. That is too simple for some folks. That is why Paul told Timothy, "Avoid these vain arguings or you will overlook the very simplicity of your faith." It is very simple, but because we are so smart, because we are so educated, we just can't seem to live that way. God said it, act upon it, and believe Him to do what He said He would do. That is faith. That is the way we walk. That is the way we live.

Well, faith rests on what God says. Faith has no Plan B. Faith is plugged into God's ability, not man's. Faith is always evidenced by obedience. That is the way we are justified and that is the way we live once we are justified. This isn't a message on faith. I just was trying to show you something about faith out of Romans 4. I didn't talk about the testing of your faith. I didn't talk about the way to faith. That is another passage. That is not what Romans is talking about. I am just trying to show you what Paul brings out about Abraham's faith that might encourage your heart.

Hear God. Get in the Word. Find out what God wants in your life. You say, "How can I hear from God?" Jesus said, "My sheep know My voice. My sheep hear My voice. My sheep follow Me." Once we hear Him, step out on that. When you step out on it, don't step out with conditions or time frames. You step out into the reality that God said it and God is going to do what He said He would do. Trust Him. That is the walk of faith.

I wonder where we are as individuals. The just shall live by faith. You don't figure out faith. You just do what God says to do