

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this Bible study series two teachers will do Bible study from ROMANS 4:17-25.

In Romans 4:1-16, Paul proved that justification by faith has always been the only true method of salvation in the Bible. In Romans 4:17-22, he shows the character of Abraham's faith in order to show us what is genuine faith. And in Romans 4:23-25, he teaches the relevance of Abraham's faith for believers today.

(S) **STEP 1. READ**

Let us read Romans 4:17-25 together. When you are two or more people, take turns to read one verse each until you have completed the reading. Due to shortage of time, please read Romans 4:17-25 for yourself.

(T) **STEP 2. DISCOVER**

Let us discover and discuss some important truths in Romans 4:17-25. "Which truth in this passage is important for you?" or "Which truth in this passage touches your mind or heart?" Think and write your answer in your notebook. After a few minutes take turns to share your discoveries with one another.

(S) An important truth for me is in Romans 4:17-22 about the character of Abraham's faith. Abraham's faith had four characteristics:

The first characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:17. The *object* of Abraham's faith was the living God. Abraham did not just believe. He believed in *someone* and in *something*. He believed in the living God and in what God had said and promised to him. He believed that God was all-powerful and could give life to the dead. He also believed that God was faithful, and that God's promise was as good as its fulfilment.

The second characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:18. The *aim* of Abraham's faith was directly related to hope. Abraham's faith and hope worked together: His faith was *being sure of what he hoped for*. His faith was that he was very certain of the fulfilment of God's promise. Although Abraham knew that circumstances made it humanly impossible to have a child, he nevertheless believed in God's omnipotence and hoped unswervingly in the fulfilment of God's promise. While in verse 11, it was God's aim that Abraham should be the father of many nations, in verse 18, it was also Abraham's conscious aim. Abraham consciously made God's goal for his life his own goal! Abraham confidently believed in the certainty of hope, lest the promise that he would become the father of many nations should fail to go in fulfilment.

The third characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:19-21. The *strength* of Abraham's faith was determined by his view of God's character. God had promised Abraham that he and his wife would have a son, and that God would use that son to bless all the families of the world. But because both he and his wife were very old, humanly and scientifically speaking, it seemed impossible that such a promise could be fulfilled. Nevertheless, Abraham *did not allow his circumstances to determine his faith*. He faced his circumstances without weakening in his faith. How could he do that? Romans 4:20-21 says that *his view of God determined the character of his faith*. Because he viewed God as omnipotent and faithful, he did not give room to doubts. His faith was strengthened by God's repeated promises to him. His faith was strengthened every time he gave glory to God. And his faith was strengthened by holding on to the unswerving conviction that God had the power to do what he had promised.

The fourth characteristic of faith is from Romans 4:22. The *result* of Abraham's faith was that it was credited to him as righteousness. His faith was not merely an intellectual faith. It was also not the faith needed for miracles. Abraham's faith was salvation faith, that is, *faith that leads to salvation or justification*. His faith was directed to God's promise of the coming Messiah, who by his death and resurrection would bless all the families of the earth. His faith trusted God's words and depended wholly on God's righteousness in Christ for salvation and not on any kind of works.

(T) An important truth for me is in Romans 4:23-25 about the relevance of Abraham's faith for believers today. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul says that the things that happened to Israel "happened to them *by way of example*, and was written down *for our instruction*, on whom the fulfilment of the ages has come." Here in Romans 4:23-24, Paul says that what was written with respect to Abraham, was *not written for him alone, but also for us*. Faith was not only credited to Abraham as righteous, but faith will also be credited to all believers as righteousness.

Although the circumstances of Abraham's faith and the circumstances of the Christian faith are different, the similarities between Abraham's faith and the Christian faith show that *the faith in the Old Testament was essentially the same as the faith in the New Testament*.

The first similarity between Abraham's faith and the Christian faith today is that the God of the Bible is the object of faith. God himself was the object of Abraham's faith (4:3) and is also the object of the Christian faith today (4:24). Both Abraham and we believe in the God who credits faith for righteousness.

The second similarity between Abraham's faith and the Christian faith today is that the God of the Bible gives life to the dead. Abraham believed that God gives life to the dead, including his dead body (4:17). And Christians believe that God raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (4:24).

The third similarity between Abraham's faith and the Christian faith is the fulfilment of God's promise. Abraham believed that God had the power to fulfil his promise (4:21). But Christians know that God has already fulfilled his promise in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (4:25). However, we must not lose sight of God's progressive unfolding of his history of salvation. The main difference between Abraham's situation and the Christian situation is that Abraham *received a promise* and we *received the fulfilment of that promise!* Abraham's faith focused on God's promise that would certainly be fulfilled and our faith focuses on the accomplishment of God's salvation work through Jesus Christ. That is why Paul could write in 1 Corinthians 10:11, that "on us the fulfilment of the ages has come". And that is why the writer to the Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 9:26, that Jesus Christ has appeared once for all "at the end of the ages" to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Abraham lived in the beginning of the ages, while we live in the fulfilment or end of the ages.

(S) STEP 3. QUESTION

Let us try to understand all the truths in Romans 4:17-25 and ask our questions about the things we still do not understand. "Which question about anything in this passage would you like to ask to the group?" Think and write your question in your notebook. Then discuss the questions and try to find answers.

1st Question. (4:17). What is meant by God "who gives life to the dead" and "calls things that are not as though they were"?

(T) First, Abraham believed in God, "who gives life to the dead". Romans 4:17 describes the characteristics of God that were the specific object of Abraham's faith, when he believed in God and was justified. Abraham believed in the all-powerful God, who possesses life-power by which he can raise the dead to life. This distinguishes the living God from all other so-called gods in the world. He is not only the Creator and Sustainer of everything. He is also the One who resurrects the dead and judges everyone who has ever lived. Because he has life-power to raise the completely dead, he also has life-power to raise the half-dead. Abraham believed that God could enable both him and Sarah to beget and conceive a child, even though their bodies were very old.

Second, Abraham believed in the all-powerful God, who "calls things that are not as though they were." Paul does not say that God calls into being things that are not, as if God was still creating new realities out of possibilities. He says that God calls *things that do not yet exist* as existing! "The things that are not" refer to the things determined by God to come to pass in the future, but have not yet been fulfilled. These things do not yet exist, but since God determines them, God calls them as *having existence*. These things do not yet exist, but since God promised them and therefore determined that they should come to pass, the certainty of their realisation in the future was secure.

Thus, for Abraham, *God's promise was as good as its fulfilment!* "The things that were not" did not belong to the category of the possible, but belonged to the category of certainty! God had determined that it would happen and therefore it will certainly happen! This is also what Hebrews 11:1 is saying, "Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see." Abraham's faith was not a wish that God's promise might be fulfilled, but an absolute certainty that God's promise would be fulfilled!

2nd Question. (4:18). How did Abraham hope?

(S) Romans 4:18 says that Abraham believed against all hope in hope. The words "against hope" refer to his circumstances, described in verse 19. If he would only look at his circumstances, that his own body was as good as dead and Sarah's womb was dead, then his circumstances would destroy all his hope. If Abraham only looked at all the human resources, it would not be possible that he and Sarah would still have a son.

The words "believed in hope" do not mean that Abraham had faith in the contents of his hope, because not hope, but God was the object of his faith. Abraham's faith and hope were working together. *Abraham's faith was based on God's*

character and his hope was based on God's promise. His faith was directed to God's omnipotence and faithfulness, and his hope was directed to the fulfilment of what God promised.

3rd Question. (4:19-21). What made Abraham's faith strong?

(T) First, Abraham's view of God determined the character of his faith. Verse 19 says, "Without weakening in his faith, Abraham *considered* that his own body was dead and the deadness of Sarah's womb." Instead of trying to forget his circumstances, he deliberately faced his circumstances and was very much aware that both his own body as well as that of his wife Sarah was dead. Humanly speaking they were both much too old to have children (Genesis 17:17; 18:11). But in spite of considering his circumstances, Abraham was not weak in his faith. The reason why Abraham was not weak in his faith was because he fixed his attention on the promises of God and because he did not waver in unbelief. Verse 20 explains why Abraham was not weak in his faith. It says that Abraham did not waver (or stagger) by entertaining doubting thoughts with reference to God's promise. Abraham did not give room to doubts concerning God's promises, because he believed in the faithfulness and omnipotence of God. Verse 21 says that Abraham was fully convinced that God had power to do what he had promised. That was the strength of Abraham's faith. *His view of God determined the character of his faith in God.* Because he viewed God as faithful and all-powerful, his faith in God was strong and unwavering.

Second, God's repeated promises made Abraham's faith strong. Verse 20 also says that Abraham was "strengthened in his faith". The meaning is that he was empowered by his faith (instrumental). The question is *what* with respect to his faith empowered Abraham? He was empowered by God's repeated promises to him. Again and again God renewed his promise to him (Gen 12:1-3; 15:4-6,18-21; 17:1-21). His faith in God's repeated promises empowered him.

Third, Giving glory to God made Abraham's faith strong. Verse 20-21 says that Abraham was "strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised". To give glory to God is to reckon that *God is what he is* and that *God will do what he says*. To *trust* God is to give glory to God, just as to *doubt* God is to dishonour God. The strength of Abraham's faith was not based on something in Abraham's personality or on something Abraham did, but only on God's character and on what God had promised and done! That is why Abraham continually gave glory to God.

4th Question. (4:22). What is the exact meaning of the words "it was credited to him as righteousness"?

(S) Abraham's faith was credited to his account as righteousness. This does not mean that Abraham's *faith itself* was regarded *as some kind of work* and that it was credited to his account *as his own righteous deed*. Then Abraham would have been able to boast before God (4:2).

Abraham's faith can never be regarded as some kind of righteous work, because it was credited to his account by God's grace, as a gift from God (4:16) and never as an obligation on the part of God (4:4)! The word *to credit* does not have anything to do with compensation or a reward. It is a legal technical term meaning *to impute, to ascribe, to reckon*, in the sense of *to regard and to treat*. Therefore, lest we begin to regard the word *to credit* as a compensation or a reward, it would be better to say that Abraham's "faith was *ascribed or imputed* to him for righteousness". It means that God's response to Abraham's faith was *to declare him 100% righteous* and thereafter *to regard and treat him as 100% righteous in his eyes!*

The words "it was credited to him as righteousness" mean exactly the same as "he was justified by faith only". While *righteousness* is God's undeserved gift to us, our *faith* is the instrument by which we personally receive God's gift.

Moreover, it is not any kind of faith that justifies. Abraham's faith was not a general kind of faith in any god, but a very specific faith with a very specific content. His faith was directed to God's promise of the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, who by his death and resurrection would bless all the families of the earth. And his faith aimed at bringing glory to God.

5th Question. (4:25). Why is our justification dependent on both the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ?

(T) Verse 25 says that Jesus was delivered over to death for our trespasses and was raised to life for our justification. Jesus Christ was delivered over to death in order *to enable our justification*, that is, to deal effectively with our sins, to atone for our sins so that God may justify us.

And Jesus Christ was raised from the dead in order *to guarantee our justification*. While Romans 3:24 and 5:9 say that we were *justified by the death* of Jesus Christ, and Romans 3:22 says that we are *justified by faith*, Romans 4:25 says that we are *justified by the resurrection* of Jesus Christ. Justification will only have an effect when Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead and is alive forever more! Therefore, the death of Christ for our justification cannot have any effect apart from his resurrection. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are inseparable.

(S) **STEP 4. APPLY**

After brainstorming with one another and recording a list of *possible applications*, consider which possible application God wants you to turn into a *personal application*.

I realise that the strength of my faith is determined by my view of God. Therefore, I want to hold on to the view that God is faithful and *will do* what he has promised, and to the view that God is all-powerful and *can do* what he has promised. I also realise that I can be empowered by my faith. I receive strength when I hold on to all the promises God has made to me in the Bible. And I receive strength when I continue to give glory to God by trusting him and his words.

(T) I realise that my faith has much similarities to Abraham's faith. I too believe in the living God. I too believe in the God who raises the dead: He raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And I too believe in God's promise to Abraham, that through Jesus Christ, who died and was resurrected, God is now already blessing all the families of the earth!

(S) **STEP 5. PRAY**

Let us take turns to pray about one truth that God has taught us in Romans 4:17-25.

Dear Father in heaven, help me to grow stronger in my faith by growing in my knowledge of you. Help me to grow stronger in my faith by giving glory to you.

(T) Dear Father in heaven, thank you for showing me that the faith of believers in the Old Testament was exactly like the faith of believers in the New Testament. Thank you for showing me that the message of the Bible is definitely a unity. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Join a house fellowship that does Bible study. Use "the five steps" Bible study method to prepare Romans 5:1-11.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".