

Abrahamic Faith: Studies & Principles In The Life of Abraham

Eastside Church of Christ • Adult VBS • June 1-15, 2015

Monday: Abraham & The Covenant Promise

Tuesday: Abraham & The Faith

Wednesday: Abraham & The Law

Thursday: Abraham & The Seedline

Friday: Abraham & The Covenant of Righteousness

1. The Purpose of Revelation: John 20:30-31
 - Signs > faith > eternal life
 - John's signs/miracles indicated principles/truths greater than the signs themselves
 - Nicodemus recognized this (Jn 3:1ff)
 - Signs/miracles are subordinate to truth/revelation/word (Heb 2:1ff)
 - Point: The revelation of God's word is intended to function in an auto-pistic (self-authenticating way)
 - This is the focus of John's statement and John 20:30-31. It is also reflected in the life of Luke (cf. next point)
2. The Faith of Luke
 - Luke 1:1-4
 - Luke was not an eyewitness
 - Luke was a second generation believer
 - Luke's faith was equal to first generation believers
 - John 20:20
 - Mark 16:9-20
 - The witness of the two women
 - The witness of the Emmaus walkers
 - The witness of the eleven (who failed to believe 1. The women, 2. The Emmaus walkers, 3. The initial appearance of Christ (cf. Luke 24))
 - 1 Peter 1:5ff - didn't see yet believe/didn't see yet love
 - 2 Peter 1:1ff - like precious faith
 - Legitimacy of evidence, logical argument, conclusions transcends distance in time and geography
3. Faith In Faith (see material below)
4. Abraham's Faith
 - Genesis: Abraham's faith was predicated on
 - God's character (trustworthy, faithful)
 - God's promises (what God said, predicted, foretold)
 - God's actions (consistent with his promises)
 - Romans 4: Abraham was saved on the basis of faith, not law (see Wednesday night's class)
 - Galatians 3: Abraham's faith anticipates/modeled NT faith
 - Though based in his personal convictions ... (subjective element)

- Abraham's faith was rooted in something greater (objective element)
- The legitimacy of Abraham's faith was only as good as what it was rooted in
- The legitimacy of our faith is only as good as what it is rooted in
- Note the distinctive elements of "the faith" in context of Galatians 3
 - Galatians 3:23 "the faith"
 - Galatians 3:24 "the law"
 - Galatians 3:24 "faith"
 - Galatians 3:25 "the faith"
 - Galatians 3:26 "the faith"
 - cf. Acts 6:7; Jude 3 πίστις (G4411) faith. The word here indicates the body or truth. The dat. here is to be related to the vb. ἐπαγωνίζεσθαι (Kelly). [The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament, Cleon L. Rogers, Jr. & Cleon L Rogers III]
- Hebrews 11: Abraham's faith
 - 11:8 "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, **not knowing where he was going.**" - *He left Haran and went to Canaan.*
 - 11:9 "By faith he **dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country**, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise;" - *He lived in Canaan.*
 - 11:10 "for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." *He waited, and looked for something better."*
 - 11:11 "By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." *Note: She judged God to be faithful.*
 - 11:12 "Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude--innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore." *The consequences/blessings of faith.*
 - 11:13 "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, **but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.**" *Perfect summary statement of Abrahamic faith: διδ not see, yet was assured; διδ not see, yet embraced (had hope), διδ not see, yet professed they were in transit to a better place. (Cf. 11:14-16 re seeking a homeland, better/heavenly country, prepared city)*
 - 11:17 "By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18 of whom it was said, "In Isaac your seed shall be called," 19 concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense." *Abraham's faith at its best: He was willing to offer his son, believing so strongly in the promise of God that Isaac was the child of promise that God would restore him to life if Abraham actually sacrificed him.*

There are numerous passages in scripture that teach that faith is necessary for salvation. John 1:12-13, for example, affirms that those who believe (or receive) Christ are given the right to become the sons of God. Likewise, John 3:16 declares that belief is essential to obtain everlasting life. Both Romans 1:17 and 5:1 plainly teach that we are justified by faith. Should we choose to, we might compile a rather lengthy and impressive list of biblical passages that reflect this salient principle.

A problem arises, however, when Bible students make incorrect assumptions about the meaning of these texts. Because of: (1) the sheer number of these verses, (2) the seemingly simple nature of faith taught in them, (3) a failure to study the totality of God's word relating to faith and (4) a failure to properly consider their immediate context, many students assume that the Bible teaches we are saved by faith alone. In so doing they make false assumptions about the mechanics of faith and salvation.

None of the passages alluded to above teach justification occurs only by faith. They simply indicate that faith is a prerequisite for justification. In fact, eight verses after Paul affirms that justification occurs by faith (Romans 5:1), he informs us that we are justified by the blood of Christ (Romans 5:9). Either faith and the blood of Christ procure salvation independently, or they function in a way complementary to each other. Even a cursory examination of this passage yields the conclusion that both are essential.

But even this is an oversimplification of the matter. Romans 5 teaches that salvation includes not only faith and blood, but also grace (v 2, 15), hope (v 2, 5), love (v 3), Christ (vs 1), Christ's death (v 6, 8), Christ's resurrection (v 10), righteousness (v 17-18), and obedience (v 19). A careful reading will show that not only must faith and the blood of Christ be understood as complementary, but all the various elements listed above (not to mention additional elements included elsewhere) must also be seen as essential for salvation, as well as intricately intertwined one with another.

In light of this very brief discussion, it would seem absurd to contend that salvation occurs by faith alone. Yet that is what we often encounter. It is stated and repeated so frequently by so many religious teaches, that it is almost as if some think, or believe, that our faith is in faith.

There are numerous fictitious and fanciful stories that advocate the false maxim of "believing in the power of faith." Rather than addressing the biblical relationships that exist between faith, knowledge, evidence, hope and the word of God, secular pundits affirm that faith, rather than being anchored in foundational and propositional evidences and truths, need only be loosely tied to the metaphysical threads (read "existential") of the sheer power of belief. If you only "believed" you could see how "angels" came to the aid of a struggling baseball team, how "Kris Kringle" was "really Santa Claus," or how the farm would be saved from ultimate ruination, foreclosure or some other terrible end.

Yes, we must have faith. We must even have faith, some degree of confidence and/or hope, in our own ability to believe. But believe what? To far too many people, it makes no difference. The power of faith itself, regardless of content and context, is viewed as sufficient to accomplish almost anything — even the "impossible." Sad to say, but this quasi-religious, pseudo-spiritual notion of faith is found not only in the film creations of Hollywood; it appears to be at the center of every false religion as well.

A young religious disciple, for example, places his hand over his heart and convincingly affirms that he believes some particular religious leader to be a prophet of God and the book that this prophet wrote to be the word of God. Many religious people speak fervently of "their faith." Sometimes they "convince" others simply by their fervency. Sometimes a legitimate grain of truth provokes a response. But how often are conclusions reached and decisions made based upon an appeal to "just believe?" This over emphasis upon personal, subjective faith has lead many astray.

To be sure, the word of God addresses faith from the perspective of the individual subject, the person who believes. There is clearly a need for our faith to be our own, to be personal (cf. Mark 9:24—24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”; Luke 17:5—5 And the apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith.”).

But unless our personal faith is grounded in “the faith,” it is inadequate to save from sin. We are saved by grace through “the faith” (Ephesians 2:8-9). We are the children of God by “the faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26). It is only when our faith is coherent and consistent with the objective nature of “the faith” (i.e., “the truth,” “the way,” “the gospel”) that there is any ability in our faith to save. It is not, however, because of our own ability to believe, but rather because we are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” (1 Peter 1:5) Without this real, absolute and objective connection to the saving power of God by and through the gospel message (Romans 1:16), our faith is meaningless.

Let’s strive to be people whose faith is not just “personal,” but also a people whose faith is truly founded in God, His Son and His word. Saving faith can be obtained only when we learn God’s word and draw conclusions — thus principles of faith — based on its authority. By constantly examining our faith in light of “the faith” revealed in God’s word, and by putting our faith into practice (James 2:14ff), we can be assured that our faith will be what God wants it to be.

Faith Must Be Connected To The Power of God

Consider this illustration. What if the divine plan to save man was likened to an electrical grid—you know—a power source, with transmission lines, stations and substations, and so forth? What if we could show that each part of that electrical grid corresponded in some way to God’s redemptive purpose and plan?

Some questions are obviously in order here.

Why would we use such a parallel?

What would it mean if we could establish some parallels, or connections, between an electrical power system and God’s scheme of redemption?

How does it affect us? And, perhaps just as important as all these questions is this one: Who cares?

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It’s not enough just to have faith. Though essential, faith must have specific content and it must be demonstrable, or work, through specific actions.

If faith were described as a box, we must respect this concept: the only items in our “faith box” must be put those that are put there by God. God, and only God, has the right to define and describe the contents of our faith box.

If faith is to be described as a way of life—and it is—then we need to understand that the only actions that must be acted out in our life of faith are those prescribed by God.

As well intentioned as we might be, it is not our job to place contents in God’s faith box that do not belong there. Neither should we remove from God’s faith box those items that God has placed there.

In the same way, it is not our job to create a life of faith that includes practices not commanded by God. And finally, we have no scriptural right to require a life of faith that neglects actions that God requires of us.

In summary, only God has the right to determine the content of our faith, and only God has the right to determine how that faith must act.

In order to save, faith must be connected to the power of God.

Of all the thoughts introduced here, of paramount importance is the original source and guarantee of faith. Peter, in 1 Peter 1:3-5 states: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

This passage teaches us that God, Christ, mercy, the gospel (what causes us to be begotten again), the new birth (the process of being begotten again), the resurrection of Christ and faith all contribute to our salvation. It also teaches that our salvation is an inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, unfading and reserved in heaven. Furthermore, it tells us that those who are saved are "kept by the power of God through faith." This key phrase — "kept by the power of God through faith" — contains three vital concepts worthy of additional consideration: (1) the power of God, (2) the idea of being kept by the power of God; and (3) the idea of being kept by the power of God through faith.

"power of God"

The phrase "power of God" is significant. It appears at least thirteen times in twelve passages in the new testament, all of which are noted below. As we survey this list, note what these passages say is connected to the power of God:

- the scriptures are the power of God (Matthew 22:29; Mark 12:24)
- Christ reigns at the right hand of the power of God (Luke 22:69)
- Simon the sorcerer bewitched the people of Samaria through his sorceries and caused them to think that he was the power of God (Acts 8:10 - he wasn't, of course)
- the gospel message is the power of God for salvation, for the Jews and for the Greeks, that is for all humanity (Romans 1:16)
- those saved by the gospel recognize that the message of the cross is the power of God (1 Corinthians 1:18)
- Christ is the power (and wisdom) of God (1 Corinthians 1:24)
- our faith is to be in the power of God (1 Corinthians 2:5)
- Christians are to be faithful in sufferings by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness (2 Corinthians 6:7)
- Christ was resurrected, and lives, by the power of God (2 Corinthians 13:4-2 times)
- we are to share with each other in sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God (2 Timothy 1:8)
- and finally, we are kept by the power of God through faith (1 Peter 1:5)

Give special attention to these verses: (1) Matthew 22:29 and Mark 12:24 teach that the scriptures are the power of God; (2) Romans 1:16 and 1 Corinthians 1:18 teach that the gospel message, the message of the cross, is the power of God; (3) 1 Corinthians 2:5 tells us that our faith is to be in the power of God; and (4) 1 Peter 1:5 tells us that we are kept by the power of God through faith.

When we hear the word of God we hear a powerful message from God. When we obey that message we obey a powerful message of God. To remain faithful we must have our faith in the power of God, not just

in the message itself, but also in the very power and person of God. From start to finish we are saved and kept by God's power through our faith.

“kept by the power of God”

To understand that we are “kept” by God's power is critical. The Greek term *phroureo*, here translated as kept, means “to guard, protect by a military guard to protect by guarding, to keep, by watching and guarding to preserve one for the attainment of something” (JHT). The term also appears in 2 Corinthians 11:32, where we read: “In Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me...” The phrase “guarding ... with a garrison” is the translation of this same term (cf. Galatians 3:23; Phil 7:7).

From 1 Peter 1:5 we learn that God is guarding us. He is keeping us and protecting us. It is God that saves — not our faith alone. The primary source and power of our salvation is God.

“kept by the power of God through faith”

Understanding how we are “kept” is also of paramount interest. 1 Peter 1:5 says that we are kept by the power of God through faith.

God's power is the immediate means of salvation; our faith is the intermediate means (cf. RWP, *op cit*). Compare it to a power generation and distribution system. God is the ultimate source of power or energy, just like a nuclear or hydro-electric power plant is the source of power in an electrical grid. The power is generated at a plant and then transmitted via substations, transformers and power lines to the point where it reaches our homes. From the utility poles outside our homes, power lines run through meters into our electrical service boxes. From there electrical wires run to every outlet and switch in our home. When we flip a switch or plug in an appliance, the electricity originating at the power plant and transmitted to our home causes our appliances and lights to function.

In much the same way, we are saved by the power of God through faith. Faith is the means by which we access the grace of God (Romans 5:1-2). Faith connects us to the power of God.

To say, as some do, that we are saved by faith only, the sheer ability to believe anything, even the right thing/s—just because we believe, or to say that we are saved by faith alone (as if the mere act of having mental assent to any idea is all we need)—is just like saying our light switches and outlets in our homes are the most crucial part of a power generation and distribution system, or worse yet, like saying that the switches and outlets are the source of power themselves. To be sure—those switches and outlets are necessary. Without them we would be power-less. To over emphasize their role in the electrical grid, however, is to distort how the system works.

In like manner, we must realize that our faith contributes to our salvation, but it does not save by itself. Our faith only works because it is connected to the real source of power—God.

Only when we understand that our faith must be connected to God's infinite power—according to His rules—will we begin to have the faith that God wants us to have. Just as there are rules and principles that must be followed in connecting service to an electrical grid, there are rules and principles that must be followed in order to connect to God's power of salvation.