

**A Portrait of Faith (Part 1)**  
Romans 4:17-22  
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Several years ago I read an interesting story. That story is captured in the Smithsonian magazine in these words,

It was a quiet, humid Monday morning in Paris on the twenty-first of August 1911. Three men were hurrying out of the Louvre. It was odd, since the museum was closed to visitors on Mondays, and odder still with what one of them had under his jacket.

They were Vincenzo Perugia [*Vincenzo Perugi, I should say*] and three brothers, young Italian handymen. They had come to the Louvre on Sunday afternoon and hidden themselves overnight in a storeroom near the Salon Carré, a gallery stuffed with Renaissance paintings. In the morning, wearing white workmen's smocks, they had gone into the Salon Carré [*the article says*] and seized a small painting off the wall, slipped out of the gallery, down a back stairwell, through a side entrance and on to the streets of Paris.

These four men had stolen the Mona Lisa. At the time of the heist, Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece was far from the most visited item in the museum. Leonardo had painted the portrait around 1507, but it wasn't until the 1860's that art critics began to point out that the Mona Lisa was one of the finest examples of Renaissance painting. However, their judgment hadn't really begun to influence the people at large and so most of the people who came to visit the Louvre those days didn't go to see the Mona Lisa.

The Mona Lisa remained missing for over two years. In December of 1913, after 28 months, Perugia took a train from Florence, where he tried to sell the painting to an art dealer there, who promptly called the police. Perugia was arrested and after a brief trial in Florence, he pleaded guilty, and ended up serving only eight months in jail. While it wasn't popular when it was originally stolen back in the early 1900's, today it is the most popular item in the Louvre. In a single year, every year, eight million tourists line up to see it.

Now, the question for me as I think about that is, why has the portrait of a plain, dare I say even homely, sixteenth century Florentine woman influenced the portraits of every major painter from that time until this? Well, according to the director of the Louvre, the reason is Leonardo's

incomparable artistic mastery. His brushstrokes, if you could look at the brush strokes of Leonardo, and particularly on the Mona Lisa, under magnification you would find that they are the most subtle, most exquisite ever seen. In fact, art books will often enlarge portions of the painting so that you can see the mastery of the brushstrokes.

That's really my plan today, today and next Sunday, and perhaps the following Sunday, as we look at a different kind of portrait altogether than the Mona Lisa, a portrait that's found in Romans 4. It is a portrait of faith. Paul paints, here in Romans 4, a portrait of the faith by which Abraham was justified before God. And I want us to put Paul's masterful portrait under a magnifying glass and I want us to examine its brushstrokes in detail.

Now, just to remind you of the context of this passage, Paul began this letter by laying out the need for the gospel, our personal lack of righteousness; not one of us measures up to God's standards. And when he comes to chapter 3 verse 21 through the end of chapter 3, he then explains the solution, God's solution, the gospel, the good news of how sinful humans like we are can be made right with a just and holy God. He explained justification by faith, which is at the heart of the gospel he preached. That's chapter 3. When he comes to chapter 4, Paul then lays out for us a biblical defense of justification. And he uses Genesis 15:6 to show that the Old Testament teaches exactly the same truth that was at the heart of his gospel, the truth of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

And specifically, he uses the biblical text about Abraham's justification in order to address several key questions about our justification. Specifically, in chapter 4 he addresses three questions. We've already finished the first two questions. The first question, in verses 1 through 8, is on what basis are we justified, or made right with God? On what basis? And Paul's short answer to that is, by God's grace. It is not something we earn. It is a gift that is given. It is a gracious offer of God, not earned and merited, but received. A second question, in verses 9 through 12, is who can be made right with God? Paul's answer, both Jews and Gentiles. This is truly a universal Gospel. It is good for every person on the planet.

The third question that he asks and answers here is by what means are we made right with God? By what means are we justified? And we see Paul's answer to this beginning in verse 13 of chapter 4 and running down through the end of the chapter. And his answer is, by faith and faith alone. The point of this final section of chapter 4, running all the way from verse 13 down through verse 25, is to show that what happened to Abraham proves that the only means for any sinner to be made right with God, is not by law, not by doing something, but rather by faith alone in what God has done in Christ.

Now, as he unfolds that answer he does it in several steps. In verse 13 he simply states the truth. In verses 14 to 16 he argues for that truth. In verses 17 through 22 he illustrates the truth. And then in verses 23 to 25 he applies the truth. He says, listen, this wasn't just for Abraham this is for us.

Now, the last time we studied Romans together we saw justification by faith alone stated, in verse 13. Look at verse 13, “For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants,” or his seed, “that he would be heir of the world,” that is, that he would inherit the future kingdom of Messiah, that he would enjoy spiritual blessing, that he would enjoy salvation, “was not through the Law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.” Abraham received God’s promise of justification and an eternal inheritance not by something he did in reference to the law, but by means of believing what God had promised. So he states it in verse 13.

Secondly, we saw that justification by faith alone is argued in verses 14 to 16. Paul lays out his arguments in defense of the statement he’s made and he begins with some negative arguments. First of all, he says, justification cannot be by law because law makes faith unnecessary. Verse 14, “For if those who are of the Law are heirs,” that is, inherit the promise of eternity, the promise of being in Messiah’s kingdom, “then faith is made void.” Why? Well, if you can earn your way then you don’t need to believe a promise God’s made, you just need to work harder.

Secondly, justification cannot be by law because law nullifies God’s promise. Paul goes on in verse 14 to say, “the promise is nullified.” If God’s promise of eternal life, if God’s promise of a right standing before Him, is conditioned on my keeping the law, then His promise is worthless, because I’ll never keep it adequately in order to earn that promise. No one will ever receive the promise, it’s null.

Thirdly, justification cannot be by law because law produces only wrath. Verse 15, “the Law brings about wrath.” You see, you can work as hard as you want to try to keep God’s law, but you will inevitably break it, and when you break it you invite, you excite, you bring about the necessary response of God and His justice, which is just anger against your rebellious sin. So when we break God’s law, we deserve and earn the just wrath of God against our sin. So we can’t be justified by law, it only produces more wrath.

Fourthly, we can’t be justified by law because law only increases our guilt. Verse 15 continues, “but where there is no law, there also is no violation.” He doesn’t mean if you don’t know what the law is you can’t break it, that’s not what he’s saying. He’s saying, it’s not as serious when you don’t know the law and you break it. That’s not nearly as serious as when you know the law and you willfully, rebelliously choose to break it. So, knowing the law actually makes our situation worse because it increases our guilt, because we know and we still do it. So there’s Paul’s negative argument, justification cannot be by law for those reasons.

Now, in verse 16 he presents the positive argument. Justification must be by faith alone, for three reasons. First of all, so that justification can be by grace. Verse 16, “For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace.” Paul is saying, listen, faith and grace fit together, works and grace don’t. In other words, he’s saying this, you can either be saved by God’s grace alone, that is, you get something from God that is completely unearned, unmerited or you can try to be saved by works alone, something that is completely earned and completely

merited, but you can't be saved by some grace and some works, because now you're mixing what you've earned with what you have not earned. They don't fit together. But faith, on the other hand, can co-exist with grace because faith is not earning anything, faith is simply receiving from God what He has graciously promised. So grace and works don't fit together, but grace and faith do fit together. It had to be by faith so that it could be by grace.

Secondly, justification must be by faith alone so that justification can be guaranteed to us. Verse 16, "so that the promise will be guaranteed." You say, how does salvation by faith alone by grace alone guarantee it to us? Because it's all what God does and it doesn't depend on our doing, so it can be guaranteed. Unlike if it was, if we were somehow responsible for accomplishing it.

Thirdly, justification must be by faith alone so that justification can be for everyone. Verse 16, "the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law," that is, believing Jews, "but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham," that's believing Gentiles, "who is the father of us all," both believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Verse 17, "(as it is written, 'A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS I HAVE MADE YOU')". It is interesting, Paul there connects the promise that there would be many nations come out of Abraham, not only with his physical descendants, you understand that out of Abraham have come a number of physical people groups, obviously the Jews, the Arab nations through Ishmael, you have Edom, so a number of physical nations have descended from Abraham. But here, Paul connects this promise with Abraham's spiritual descendants, both Jews and Gentiles. The promise, a father of many nations, we're the fulfillment of that. We sit on the other side of the world in another nation and we are the spiritual descendants of Abraham. We're part of the fulfillment of that promise.

Now, that's a review of what we've already seen in this passage. But today, as Paul continues to answer the question, by what means are we justified, I want us to see justification by faith alone illustrated, illustrated. We see this in the middle of verse 17 down through verse 22. Now, I don't ordinarily start a section in the middle of a sentence as I'm going to do today, but Paul clearly, I think you'll see over the next couple weeks, changes his direction a bit mid-sentence here and so I'm going to do that in this case. So, let's pick up our reading in verse 16. He says, Abraham is the spiritual father of all of us who come to believe,

(as it is written, "A FATHER MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE." 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; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.  
Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now, in those verses Paul uses Abraham's faith as a portrait, a living illustration of justifying faith, that is, the kind of faith that justifies. Remember, Paul is still developing his key text, introduced to us back in chapter 4 verse 3, a quotation from Genesis 15:6, "For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.'" Now, immediately, if you realize that the mains of justification, the means of being right with God is faith, the next question you should have is, well, how can I exhibit that kind of faith? What does that kind of faith look like? Paul anticipates that question and he answers it here. In fact, that's the point of this section I just read to you.

Go down to verse 22, "Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." You see, Paul is making a point that it was through the kind of faith he's just described in the previous verses that God justified Abraham. Now, this is an amazing passage of Scripture, because if you're not a Christian these verses will show you what saving faith looks like. They will illustrate how you can believe in a way that brings justification from God, that will make you right with God. It illustrates how you can believe the gospel. But Romans wasn't written primarily to unbelievers, it was written primarily to believers like us, sitting in first century churches in Rome. So what is the benefit then, what are the reasons for us who are already believers, to study this passage together about Abraham's faith? Why should we take the time?

Well, there are several really important reasons. Number one, it will help us comprehend the magnitude of what God has done for us in Christ. If you're sitting here this morning and you have exercised the kind of faith Abraham has exercised, that was a gift to you, just like it was to Abraham. Ephesians 2:8-9,

For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.

And so, it will help you come to grips with what God has done for you in looking at the very faith he's given you. Secondly, it'll help us know better how to present the concept of faith to unbelievers.

Thirdly, it will help us examine ourselves to see if our faith is true saving faith. There are a lot of imitations out there and here we see from God's perspective what real justifying faith looks like. Fourthly, it'll help us understand what faith is and how it works. You see, faith doesn't stop being important the moment after you believe in Christ the first time. Second Corinthians 5:7 says, we live by faith. You've got to learn how to exercise faith in an ongoing way like Abraham did. You have to grow in that spiritual virtue that the writer of Hebrews said, "without which it is impossible to please God, for he that comes to God must believe that He is and that He's a rewarder of those who seek Him."

So, what exactly does saving faith look like? Well, in this seminal text Paul identifies for us several key qualities of true saving faith. I will tell you that I really believe with all my heart that this is the best explanation and illustration of the kind of faith that justifies, in the entire Scripture. And I think you'll agree with me by the time we're done, over the next couple of weeks. This is a portrait of Abraham's faith, but it is so much more. Paul uses the portrait of Abraham's faith to illustrate for us what justifying faith looks like. So, this is a pattern, a pattern of saving faith. Let's look at it together then.

The first quality of true saving faith is that saving faith is biblical faith. Saving faith is biblical faith. Now, let me just warn you, we're going to get no further than that point today, because this is crucial, this is foundational. In chapter 4 of Romans Paul uses the verb believe six times and he uses the noun faith ten times. Now, in English we know those two words are related, but they're not from the same family. In Greek, they are. In Greek, the noun faith is *pistis* and the verb believe is *pisteuo*; *pistis*, *pisteuo*. They are from the same family of words. This is biblical faith.

Now, where did this word group come from? Well, if you've been a part of our church any time at all, you've heard me talk about the Septuagint. What was the Septuagint? Well, 100 or 200 years before Christ, the people of Israel had lost, for the most part, the ability to speak Hebrew. Only the scholars could speak and read Hebrew, the language of the Old Testament Scriptures, Hebrew and Aramaic. And so, most of the people could speak Greek; it was the English of the day because of the influence of Alexander the Great. And so, 100, 200 years before Christ, the scholars translated the Hebrew Scriptures, which the average person couldn't read, into Greek, the language they could read. That was the Septuagint, is what it was called. It was the Bible of Jesus and the apostles primarily, because most of the people, again, couldn't speak Hebrew, so when they quote the Scriptures, they most often quote from the Septuagint. If you go back to Genesis 15:6 in the Septuagint, you will find this, "Abraham believed," *pisteuo*, "God and it was credited to him for righteousness."

So that word and its related words become the expression throughout the Old Testament of genuine faith, and that family of words is adopted under the inspiration of the Spirit by the New Testament writers to speak of saving faith. So understand this, this is the only kind of faith Paul is describing in Romans 4. So before we can look at his illustration, we need to first step back and make sure we define what faith is biblically. Because whatever *pistis* is, it is the only true kind of saving faith that is, in Scripture, defined, described, illustrated in Scripture.

Now, this is a vitally important point, because if your faith is anything but true biblical faith, you are not a Christian, and as you sit here this morning you are still in your sins, and you still, to use Jesus' expression at the end of John 3, sit or abide under, "the wrath of God," today. So nothing could be more important than this.

You see, many in our world claim to have faith. You'll even hear them talk about, you know, people who don't even believe there is a god, will say to somebody who's going through a hard time, you know, you just need to have faith. What do they mean by that? They mean, you just need to think positive thoughts, you need to come to the completely unfounded confidence that if you think positively, everything will just work out fine. That's clearly not biblical faith.

But here's a shocker to most Christians. Most Christians do not understand that not every kind of faith that is connected to Christianity is true saving faith. Do you understand that? Not every kind of faith that is connected to the Christian faith is true saving faith. In fact, there are several kinds of non-saving faith connected to Christianity, let me give them to you. Number one, natural faith. This is the kind of every day faith that we exercise when we sit in a chair and believe that it is going to hold us up or we get on an airplane and believe it's going to actually take off and get us to our destination.

Now, we've all used this as kind of a pedestrian example of faith; it's not faith. That's not faith. That is simply going on the basis of the law of mathematical probabilities. You have seen other people sit in chairs. You have sat in chairs. You have seen other people sit on pews like you're sitting on this morning. You have seen airplanes fly through the sky and not fall. And you've seen most of them get to their destination. And so you make a choice, a decision, calculated on the basis of mathematical probabilities that I've got a decent chance, if I sit on this pew it's going to hold me up. Or, if I get on that plane it's going to get me to my destination. That is not faith. And it's not saving.

Secondly, there's historical faith, historical faith. This is a purely intellectual kind of faith. It accepts the facts of Christianity as history. A lot of people who grow up in countries that are predominantly Christian, as opposed to Muslim or Buddhist, have historical faith. Yeah, I believe that Christ lived and died and rose from the dead, I believe that what He taught was true, I believe that there's a lot of good things there. This is historical faith; this is not saving faith.

Number three, miraculous faith. This describes the faith of those in the times of Christ and the apostles who believed because of miracles, but it wasn't real saving faith, it wasn't changing, regenerating faith. How do I know that? Let me give you an example. John 2:23 says they saw the miracle Jesus performed and they believed in Him, and the very next verse says, "But Jesus didn't entrust Himself to them," because He knew what was in their hearts. He knew they weren't really truly believing in Him. It was a non-saving kind of faith. It was a miraculous faith, based on a miracle. John 6, the feeling of the five thousand, you see that again. It's like, boy, they were thrilled, they saw the miracle, wow, this is great stuff, they want to make Him king. They believed, it just wasn't saving faith. Jesus Himself said this about miracles, right? In Luke 16 He said, listen, if they won't believe Moses and the Prophets, they will not believe – what? – though "someone rises from the dead," though a miracle happens. This isn't saving faith.

A fourth kind of non-saving faith is temporary faith. This is the kind of faith that is an immediate emotional response to the message of the gospel. Wow, that's wonderful and that's great news, and there's weeping and there's crying, and there's a decision of some kind. Jesus describes these temporary kinds of expressions of faith in the parable of the soils, two of them, you remember? One of them was the rocky soil, the soil that didn't have enough root, it was shallow. And when persecution comes, this person looks like the real deal, but persecution comes and they're gone. You don't see them again.

But Jesus also describes another kind of temporary faith, it's the thorny soil, it's the soil where thorns grow up and gradually choke the life out of the seed. What is that? Well, Jesus described it this way, He said, those thorns are the "worries, riches, and pleasures of this life." All the stuff of this life chokes the life out of that initial emotional response to the gospel. The difference is, in the case of the rocky soil, persecution comes, it happens at once. In the case of the thorny soil, it is a slow imperceptible death of the seed. Here's a person who may still show up at church, may still go through the motions, may still claim to be a Christian, but there's no life. Temporary faith. Those are all kinds of non-saving faith.

There's only one kind of faith that is biblical faith and that is, supernatural. It is a gift of God. It is a work of the Spirit of God in the human heart. And when Paul uses the word believed or faith in this passage he intends that we understand that usage in light of the total context of Romans and of the entirety of the Scripture. So what is the nature of true saving faith as opposed to dead, non-saving faith? Well, in the New Testament the Greek word translated faith and its verb form believe each occur about 240 times, so together almost 500 times.

When you look at those 500 occurrences you discover three key elements of true saving faith, three key elements. Now, what I want you to do, is I want you to examine your own faith this morning as I briefly touch on these three elements and ask yourself, is the faith that I'm exhibiting full biblical faith, are all three of these elements in the faith that I claim, or not? Examine your faith.

Number one, the first element that's always in true saving faith is knowledge. Theologians have attached Latin words to each of these, the Latin word for knowledge, *notitia*. This is the intellectual part of faith and it has to do with the content of what we believe. The only foundation of true saving faith is knowing and understanding the truth about God and Christ and the gospel. Now, the Greek phrase that highlights this element is usually translated in our Bibles "believe that" and then there's some fact that we are to believe, "believe that" something.

Let me give you a couple of examples. John 8:24, Jesus says, "unless you believe that I am," and He uses that Old Testament name of God, "you will die in your sins." There's content to faith; you have to know something. In John 11:42 Jesus says, in His prayer to the Father, He says, I want the people around Me to "believe that You sent Me." John 20:31, John says, the things I've chosen to write I've "written that you may believe that Jesus is the *Christos*, the



Messiah, the Son of God; and that believing you might have life in His name.” Romans 10:9, “believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead.” First Thessalonians 4:14, “we believe that Jesus died and rose again.”

So you see, the first element of faith has to be knowledge. Now, what knowledge do you have to have in order to exercise saving faith? Well, you must know certain truths about God and Christ. Let me just give you a sampling. You must know, for example, that there is one God with whom Jesus shares essential unity. First Corinthians 8:6 says, “there is one God.” John 14:11, Jesus says, ““Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me;”” one God with whom Jesus shares essential unity.

You must believe Jesus’ preexistent deity. John 8:24, I just cited it a moment ago, ““unless you believe that I am,” ““you will die in your sins.”” You must believe His identity as the Son of God. First John 4:15, “Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.” You must believe in his identity as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament. First John 5:1, “Whoever believes that Jesus is the *Christos*,” the Messiah, “has been born of God.” You must believe in His incarnation, that He took on Himself, that the eternal Son of God took on Himself full humanity. First John 4:2, “every spirit that confesses that Jesus Messiah has come in the flesh is from God.” So you have to know certain facts about Jesus and about the nature of God.

You must also, however, know the message of the gospel. Jesus, in the first sermon recorded in Mark’s Gospel, Mark 1:14-15 says, “Jesus came preaching the gospel, saying ‘The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” You can’t believe a gospel that you don’t know, so you have to know what the gospel teaches. Paul says the same thing in Romans 10. He says, “How will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?” “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the message about Christ.” You say, well what is the message of the gospel? Turn to 1 Corinthians 15. Here in nutshell form is the gospel, 1 Corinthians 15:1, “I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which you also received,” that’s describing their faith, “in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast to the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain.”

So what did you believe? What’s the gospel? Verse 3,

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that *Christos* [*the Messiah*] died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, [*that is, He really died*] and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scripture, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve, and then to more than five hundred brethren at once,

and so forth. That’s the gospel. Look at verse 11, “Whether then it was I or the other apostles, this is the gospel we preached and this is the gospel you believed.”

So, if I could summarize it then, I could say this, faith includes: a knowledge of your own sinfulness; a knowledge that your sin is under the judgment of God, that's what you need to be saved or rescued from; a knowledge of your utter helplessness except in God; in other words, faith is a repudiation of all other solutions except Christ; a knowledge that through the sinless life and the substitutionary death of Jesus, who suffered the just punishment of God in the place of every sinner who will ever believe and was then raised from the dead. Because of Jesus' work there is complete pardon from sin, there is complete acceptance with God, and there is justification before God. That although every one of us is personally unrighteous, for everyone who repents and believes, God credits Christ's righteousness to us and treats us as if we had lived His perfect life. You must know those basic truths about the Christian faith in order to believe unto salvation.

But knowing the truth about Christ and the gospel doesn't constitute saving faith. Hebrews 4:2 says, speaking of those in the wilderness, they had the good news preached to them, "but the word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard." In other words, you can have a knowledge of the truth and not have true faith. Faith must include this first element, there must be knowledge, but to be saving faith it must also include a second element, assent, or in Latin *ascensus*. This is a response to your knowledge of the facts about Christ and salvation. It is being convinced that the knowledge you have gained from Scripture about Christ is factually true, you assent to its truthfulness. Now, this is important because you can know the truth of Christianity and not believe it's true.

Now, the Greek construction that highlights this element of faith is usually translated believe a person or a proposition. Let me give you some examples. If you look at Romans 4:3, "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD." What does that mean? That means he believed that what God was telling him was true. He believed the promises God was making to him, that those promises were true. It was assent to the truthfulness of those statements. John 5:24, Jesus says, "he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life." In other words, believes the truthfulness of what He's saying through Me. John 8:31, "Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him." Acts 16:34 speaks of the Philippian jailer and says, "having believed God," the gospel he heard from Paul, he believed the truthfulness of it. Titus 3:8, "those who have believed God," that's us, "should be careful to engage in good deeds." We believe the truthfulness of the gospel.

So, knowing the truth and assenting to the truth are essential elements of true saving faith. However, by themselves, those two elements come short of true saving faith. Because even the demons exercise this much faith, it's what James says in James 2:19, "You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." Listen folks, the demons know good theology and they believe it's true. They even have an emotional response to it, they shudder, they tremble at it.

So, to be genuine saving faith there must be knowledge and there must be assent to the truth of that knowledge, but there also must be a third crucial element, and that is trust, or *fiducia*. This is the volitional response to Christ, it's the heart of biblical faith. Folks, this is the difference between saving faith and non-saving faith, the difference between the faith of true believers and the faith of demons.

A couple of Greek constructions highlight this idea. In a few cases, it's believe in or on. Romans 10:11, "“WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.”" But the most common expression that is used in the Greek text, unfortunately it doesn't always show up in English, in fact it rarely does, literally says this, believe into. It's usually translated believe in, but let me give you a couple of examples just so you can see it. Philippians 1:29, Paul says, "to you it was granted for Christ's sake, to believe into Him." First John 5:13, "These things I have written to you who believe into the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

You say, what does that mean, to believe into? Believing into pictures my trust going out and taking hold of the object of my confidence. It is that I believe so much in the trustworthiness of that person, that I abandon myself to that truth or to that person. Sinclair Ferguson describes it this way, he says, "Such trust is always a costly thing because it involves us surrendering our lives to Christ. That is why in the synoptic gospels Jesus does not speak simply of faith, He speaks about carrying the cross. He does this to emphasize what faith involves. It means the practical recognition that Jesus is the Lord of our lives. It means forsaking everything else for His sake. This is why Jesus focused so many of His calls to salvation on this third element. Take Luke 9:23, "“If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow Me.”" That's trust.

Paul emphasized this third element as well, you remember, in Romans 10:9-10, "if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." It is believing the truth of Christ and the truthfulness of Christ, in who He is, enough that you submit yourself to Him. Submission to Christ's lordship is an intrinsic part of saving faith; you must confess Jesus as Lord. It's more than a knowledge of the facts of the gospel. It's more than a mental assent to their truthfulness. That's no better than the faith of demons. Saving faith involves the total commitment of oneself to Jesus Christ. For faith to be saving faith it must be this kind of faith and have all three elements in it.

James Montgomery Boice used to illustrate the relationship of these three elements using dating and marriage. When you're dating someone, you begin by accumulating knowledge about that person. In the early days of dating that's what you're doing, you're trying to learn something about who they are and what they like and what they dislike and what their plans are and what their aspirations are, what their motivations are, their goals in life, and that's just gathering knowledge. But at some point, if you continue to date them, the knowledge that you have of that

person turns into an emotional response, you like them, you're attracted to them, you begin to seriously consider making a long-term commitment. But real commitment to the relationship doesn't come until when? Until you stand on a platform like this one and in the presence of God and witnesses, you say, I do, I will. Faith includes all of those elements as well.

Let me just say that real faith includes not merely a knowledge of Christ, and not merely an attraction to Christ and an affirmation that what He teaches and says is true and attractive, it involves the commitment of the will to say I do. There are a lot of professing Christians who are still dating Jesus Christ and there are others who are permanently engaged. That's not saving faith. Your faith is not saving faith until you're willing to come to the third element of trust and bank everything on Jesus Christ, abandon everything to Him, when you're willing to say I will follow you. That's saving faith. And anything short is not.

You can see all three of these elements, by the way, in Abraham's faith. Abraham obviously knew the promises of God, God told him. He affirmed them as true, we saw it in chapter 4 verse 3, "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD," he believed the truthfulness of them, but you can see the third element of faith in Abraham's faith as well. In Hebrews 11:8, listen, "By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed." There's the third element of faith. He believed enough to follow, to pack up his goods and leave his country and go where God had called him to go.

If you want to be declared right with God as Abraham was, then your faith is going to have to be like his. It's going to have to be a true biblical faith that includes all three of these elements. Let me ask you, as you sit here this morning, do you know the basic facts of the Christian faith? I expect you do. You certainly do after this morning, I've recited them to you. Do you believe they're true? Congratulations, you have the faith of demons. For it to be genuine saving faith, it has to take the next step, the third element of faith has to be there, trust, you must come to Jesus Christ and confess Him as Lord. You must stop dating Christ or being engaged to Him permanently, you must commit to Him for time and eternity, and anything short of that is not true saving faith. Saving faith is a biblical faith. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Your word. Thank You for how clearly it speaks to such important issues. O God, I pray for those of us here this morning who have exercised true faith in keeping with what we've learned this morning from Your word. Encourage their hearts Lord, strengthen that faith, may they leave here encouraged by the fact that they have exercised biblical faith.

But Father, I pray for those here this morning who have exercised something less than true saving faith, one of the non-saving kinds of faith. Father, may this be the day when they stop dating Jesus and they commit to Him for life and eternity. Lord, save them I pray. In Jesus' name, amen.