THE LIVING FAITH OF ABRAHAM

An In-Depth Exegesis of Romans 4 (KJV) Explaining Faith as an Active, Manifested Reality

Introduction: The Nature of True Saving Faith

In many contemporary theological circles, a deep misunderstanding has settled over the definition of the word 'faith.' For the average reader, faith is often reduced to a static mental assent—the mere intellectual agreement that a set of historical facts is true. In this light, someone might look at the text of the Bible and say, 'I believe that God exists, and I believe that Jesus Christ is His Son,' and assume that this mental categorization is the absolute sum of what the scriptures mean by saving faith. However, the King James Version of the Holy Scriptures paints a starkly different, highly dynamic picture of what true faith actually looks like. True faith is never a passive, dormant state of mind. It is a living, breathing reality that is explicitly displayed, proven, and perfected by its external manifestations—what the Bible calls works of obedience.

To explore this fundamental reality, we must turn our undivided attention to Romans Chapter 4. In this masterful theological discourse, the Apostle Paul utilizes the life of Abraham, the great patriarch, as the ultimate blueprint for understanding how a human being is justified before an Almighty God. When we examine Romans 4 through the pristine lens of the King James Bible, we discover that Abraham's faith was not an invisible, isolated sentiment. Rather, it was a profound, unshakeable confidence in the spoken promises of God that naturally and inevitably produced active, radical steps of obedience. Abraham did not just possess a passive belief; his belief possessed him, dictating his movements, his decisions, and his entire life path.

The Common Misconception: Mental Assent vs. Living Devotion

To fully appreciate Paul's breakdown in Romans 4, we must first break down the common fallacy that simple mental acknowledgement is sufficient. The Apostle James directly attacks this exact misconception in his epistle, famously declaring that even the devils hold to this kind of intellectual belief. In James 2:19, the KJV states:

> *"Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble."*

If faith were nothing more than a mental recognition of God's existence and sovereignty, then the fallen angels would be counted among the righteous, for they know with absolute certainty that God exists and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Yet, their belief does not save them because it lacks the essential element of loving submission and active expression. True biblical faith is not just a conclusion reached

by the human intellect; it is a total surrender of the human will. It is an expression of deep trust that manifests itself in tangible, observable reality.

Romans 4:1-5 — The Foundation of Counted Righteousness

Let us look directly at the beginning of the chapter, where Paul opens the case of Abraham by asking what he had discovered regarding the flesh. Romans 4:1-3 states:

> *"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."*

When Paul writes that Abraham was not justified by works in a way that would allow him to glory before God, he is referring strictly to 'works of the law' performed in human self-sufficiency—meritorious deeds done with the arrogant expectation that God now owes the creature a debt. If a man could earn his way to heaven by flawlessly checking off a list of legal requirements, he could stand before God and boast of his own achievements. But Abraham's justification did not operate on the system of human merit. It operated on the system of faith. The scripture Paul quotes is Genesis 15:6: 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.'

Paul continues this vital distinction in verses 4 and 5:

> *"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."*

The term 'to him that worketh not' does not imply that a true believer sits in absolute physical idleness or lives a life of lawless disobedience. Rather, it means the believer stops trying to work for salvation as a wage. He stops viewing his relationship with God as a commercial transaction where his good deeds buy divine favor. Instead, he casts himself completely upon the mercy of the One who justifies the ungodly. His faith—which is a wholehearted reliance upon God—is counted for righteousness. But how does this faith show itself? It shows itself by stepping out into the unknown at the word of the Lord.

The Harmony of Paul and James: Genesis 15 and Genesis 22

A frequent point of confusion for the average reader is the apparent tension between the Apostle Paul in Romans 4 and the Apostle James in James Chapter 2. While Paul declares that Abraham was justified by faith without works, James explicitly says in James 2:21-24:

> *"Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only."*

Is there a contradiction here? Absolutely not. They are looking at two different dimensions of the very same reality. Paul is looking at the chronological root of Abraham's justification (Genesis 15), where Abraham trusted God's promise regarding his future offspring before he had done any specific ritual or legal work. James is looking at the visible fruit of Abraham's justification decades later (Genesis 22), when Abraham was commanded to offer up his son Isaac on Mount Moriah. James explains that the work of offering up Isaac 'fulfilled' the earlier scripture that said Abraham believed God. In other words, the radical action of obedience on the mountain was the visible proof, the manifestation, and the perfection of the faith that was already counted to him for righteousness years before.

Faith and works are completely inseparable, like fire and heat. You cannot have a fire that produces absolutely no heat; if there is no heat, the fire is an illusion. Similarly, you cannot have biblical faith that produces no visible works of obedience. If a person claims to have faith but lacks the corresponding actions, that faith is dead, being alone. Abraham's faith 'wrought with his works,' meaning his inner conviction and his outward actions worked in perfect, flawless tandem. His works were the physical expression of his invisible belief.

Romans 4:6-12 — David's Witness and the Timing of Circumcision

Paul brings in another great old testament witness, King David, to show that this principle of imputed righteousness apart from human legal merit is consistent throughout God's dealings with humanity. Romans 4:6-8 states:

> *"Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."*

David, who knew the heavy burden of sin and the exquisite joy of total forgiveness, did not celebrate the man who successfully kept every detail of the law by his own strength. Instead, he celebrated the man whose sins are covered by the sovereign grace of God through faith. This imputation of righteousness is a legal declaration where God credits the perfect righteousness of Christ to the believer's account.

Paul then asks a profound logical question regarding the timing of Abraham's justification to prove that outward religious rituals are not the source of salvation, but rather the signs of an existing faith. Romans 4:9-11 tells us:

> *"Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcision: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also;"*

When God declared Abraham righteous in Genesis 15, Abraham was still an uncircumcised Gentile in his physical body. The ritual of circumcision was not commanded until Genesis 17, roughly fourteen years

later. Therefore, circumcision did not save Abraham. Instead, it was a 'sign' and a 'seal' of the righteousness that he already possessed by faith while he was still uncircumcised. This means that Abraham is the spiritual father of all true believers, whether they are physically circumcised Jews or uncircumcised Gentiles.

Paul concludes this section in verse 12 by defining who the true children of Abraham are:

> *"And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised."*

Notice the incredibly vivid language used here by the Holy Spirit: we must 'walk in the steps of that faith.' Walking requires physical movement, deliberate direction, and active effort. Faith is described as a path of steps that must be retraced by those who claim to be Abraham's children. If your faith does not cause you to 'walk,' it is not the faith of Abraham. Abraham's faith caused him to leave his homeland, pack up his entire family, journey to a strange land he had never seen, and trust God for an impossible child. His faith had steps, and those steps were his works.

Romans 4:13-17 — The Promise vs. The Law

Paul shifts his focus to the relationship between the divine promise and the human legal system. Romans 4:13-15 declares:

> *"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression."*

The promise that Abraham would be the heir of the world was given hundreds of years before Moses ever received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. If the inheritance were dependent on perfectly keeping the Mosaic Law, then no human being would ever inherit it, because the law exposes our weakness and 'worketh wrath' by condemning our failures. If salvation came through the law, faith would be made utterly void, and the absolute promise of God would be rendered completely ineffective.

Therefore, God designed the plan of redemption to rest entirely upon the foundation of faith, ensuring that it would be guaranteed by His sovereign grace to all generations. Romans 4:16-17 states:

> *"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were."*

Abraham believed in a God who 'quickeneth the dead'—One who brings resurrection life out of absolute death, and who speaks of future realities that do not yet exist as if they are already accomplished. This

requires a faith that goes far beyond simple mental assent. It requires an absolute, unshakeable trust that alters how a person views reality itself. When God told Abram that his name was now Abraham ('father of a multitude'), he did not have a single child with his wife Sarah. Yet, he began to call himself by that new name, openly manifesting his absolute confidence in the word of God before the eyes of a mocking world.

Romans 4:18-25 — The Living Anatomy of Abraham's Faith

In the final section of the chapter, Paul provides a stunning, highly detailed look at how Abraham's faith actually operated in real-time history when confronted with impossible physical circumstances. Romans 4:18-19 states:

> *"Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:"*

Humanly speaking, there was absolutely no reason for hope. Abraham was a hundred years old, and his body was physically incapable of producing life. Sarah was ninety years old and had been completely barren her entire life; her womb was a place of absolute deadness. A weak, purely intellectual faith would look at these physical realities, conduct a logical risk assessment, and conclude that God's promise was simply impossible. But Abraham's faith was 'not weak.' He fully understood the physical difficulties, yet he refused to let them dictate his belief or his actions.

Paul describes the fierce intensity of Abraham's reliance on God in verses 20-22:

> *"He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."*

To 'stagger' means to waver, hesitate, or stumble back and forth between two opposing opinions. Abraham did not vacillate between belief and unbelief. He stood rock-solid on the naked promise of God. He was 'fully persuaded'—completely convinced without a single lingering doubt—that God possessed the absolute power to perform exactly what He had spoken. This strong faith gave immense glory to God because it treated God's word as more reliable than the physical laws of nature. It was this active, unshakeable posture of trust that was imputed to him for righteousness.

Finally, Paul brings this ancient historical narrative directly into the modern reader's life, demonstrating that this is the exact same pattern required for our personal salvation today. Romans 4:23-25 concludes:

> *"Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."*

The historical account of Abraham was preserved across thousands of years not merely as an interesting biography, but as an eternal template for us. Righteousness will be credited to our account if we possess

the exact same brand of faith—a faith that trusts in the God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dark depths of the grave. Christ was delivered up to death to pay the full, lawful penalty for our offenses, and He was raised back to life to secure our absolute justification before the throne of God. Our faith must be an active embrace of this reality, transforming how we live our daily lives.

Conclusion: The Fruit and Perfection of True Faith

When we take the entirety of Romans 4 and read it in the full context of the Holy Scriptures, the message becomes crystal clear to the average reader: saving faith is an active, dynamic, and visible reality. It can never be reduced to a dry, intellectual checklist or a casual nod toward the heavens. It is a profound, life-altering confidence in the person, character, and words of God that naturally overflows into a life of dedicated, sacrificial obedience.

If we say we believe that God exists and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, we must ask ourselves: Is our belief displayed by our works? Are we walking in the active steps of that faith, just as our father Abraham did? When God commands us to move, do we move? When He calls us to trust Him in the midst of seemingly impossible, dead circumstances, do we stand fully persuaded of His power? True faith is always an active expression of our inner belief. It is the visible manifestation of our love and total surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. Let us cast aside all passive, dead religion, and pursue the living, active, unshakeable faith that is counted for eternal righteousness.

Deep Dive: The Practical Outworking of Faith in Daily Life

To bridge the gap between ancient history and our modern walk, we must closely observe how Abraham's faith manifested long before Romans was penned. When God called him out of Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham did not simply sit in his tent and say, 'I believe God has a land for me.' The writer of the Hebrews records that he went out, not knowing whither he went. This physical departure was the direct fruit of his internal trust. In our lives, if we truly believe that Christ is our Lord, that belief must manifest in our physical choices—how we treat our neighbors, how we steward our finances, and how we uphold the truth of the scriptures in a compromised world.

The Anatomy of Unbelief vs. Fully Persuaded Faith

Unbelief looks at the giant, the storm, and the deadness of the situation, allowing circumstances to minimize the size of God. Fully persuaded faith looks at the absolute greatness of God, allowing His character to minimize the size of the circumstances. Abraham looked at his body and Sarah's womb and saw absolute death, yet he looked at God and saw infinite life. This is the ultimate expression of faith—not a blind denial of reality, but a clear-eyed recognition that God is vastly superior to any earthly reality. When we live with this level of conviction, our works will naturally align with the kingdom of God.