

Faith and the Gospel
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Justification is not a word that is used very often in day-to-day vernacular, but it is one with which we all should be familiar. Wayne Jackson defined the word as “the divine process by which God acquits the sinner and reckons him as righteous.”¹ Thus, to be justified is to be “just-if-ied” never sinned. This is the theme of the apostle Paul’s extraordinary letter to the Romans. The first chapter of Romans reveals the sins of the gentiles. They rejected God, so God rejected them (Rom. 1:18-32). But, they were not alone. In chapter two, Paul deals with the sins of the Jews. They stood in judgment of the gentiles, passing sentence upon them. But, in doing so they condemned themselves “for you who judge practice the same things” (Rom. 2:1). Thus, the sad conclusion of chapter three—“For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). All people have the same problem—sin—and all people need the same solution—salvation. All are in need of justification. How then can such be attained? The answer is found in the purpose statement for the book, Romans 1:16-17.

The gospel is the good news of salvation through Jesus the Christ. Paul identifies that sublime message as the exclusive means of salvation for mankind. Why is that the case? Because within the gospel message is “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.” That is to say that God’s means of making men right with Him (righteous) is revealed in the gospel, the system of faith that produces faith in those who hear. Paul will comment on this further in Romans chapter 10. Verse 16 of this tenth chapter is one of the most tragic passages of scripture—“But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed our report?” That passage is followed by one of the most joyous verses of scripture—“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). When we combine the thoughts of Romans 1:16-17 and Romans 10:17 what we learn is that the gospel is designed to produce faith, but not just any kind of faith, it produces a saving faith—an obedient faith.

Paul is clear in Romans 5:1 that justification is by faith. Romans 3:20-22 says that justification cannot come by simple law keeping but instead, “even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ...” What does this mean? Is he talking about the doctrine of salvation by faith in Jesus alone that is so prevalent in the religious world today, or is he talking about something else? The answer is found in Romans 4 in the example of Abraham. Scripture says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (Rom. 4:3). “Faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness” (Rom. 4:9) “and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had... that he might be the father of all those who believe... (Rom. 4:11; c.f. Gal. 3:29). Abraham’s faith contained three essential elements: acceptance, trust, and obedience.² In Genesis 12:1-5 God commanded Abraham to take his family and leave his homeland; to go to a land that God would show him. In so doing, God promised that He would bless him, and all the families of the earth through him. The fact that “Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him” (Gen. 12:4) reveals three things. First,

¹ Wayne Jackson, *Bible Words and Theological Terms Made Easy* (Stockton, CA: Courier Publications, 2002), 99.

² Dan Winkler, *Just-if-ied Never Sinned: A Study of Romans* (Tuscaloosa, AL: Winkler Publications, 2005), 21-28

Abraham accepted that what God said was true. Second, he trusted God to fulfill His promises. Third, he obeyed the command of God. Had any one of these three elements been absent in Abraham, his faith would not have been acceptable.

His faith is further illustrated in Genesis 22 when God commanded him to offer Isaac upon the altar. The Hebrews writer said that Abraham did so “concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Heb. 11:19). To illustrate the strength of Abraham’s faith in Jehovah consider this question: How many recorded resurrections do we have in Genesis before Genesis 22? James refers to this very account to illustrate the truth that “faith without works is dead” (Jas. 2:20).

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which says, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God (Jas. 2:21-23)

It is true that justification is by faith, but it is not just any kind of faith—it is an obedient faith. Abraham stands as a perfect example because he heard what God commanded and he obeyed. You and I must heed his example, for Romans 4:12 says that he is the father of circumcision to those “who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham.” Like Abraham, you and I have the opportunity, yea responsibility, to listen to what God has to say. The difference is that God does not speak to us directly, as He did to Abraham. Instead, He speaks to us through His word, the gospel. That message is God’s power save because its proclamation is designed to produce obedient faith in those who hear. Like Abraham, we must accept that what God says is true, trust God to fulfill His promises, and obey His will.

Note also how Paul begins and ends this great letter. Romans 1:5 says “through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name.” The idea is that Paul received from the Lord the gracious gift of apostleship for the purpose of producing an obedient faith throughout the world. Romans 16:26 echoes the sentiment, stating the gospel is “now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith.” What was the purpose of Paul’s ministry? The production of obedient faith in people, through the proclamation of the gospel. Should that not be every Christian’s purpose? Romans 10:14 asks, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” Our obligation is not only to come to an obedient faith ourselves, but also to spread the message of Christ throughout the world. Are we fulfilling our obligation? On the congregational level, are we dedicating the time and energy to evangelizing the communities in which we live? On an individual level, are we studying God’s word, praying for opportunities to tell others about the gospel, and taking advantage of them when they appear? As we prepare to welcome in a new year, let us be mindful of the need every person has for salvation, and be determined to do whatever we can to see that it is met.