

## Romans #15

*"Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness ..."* (Rom. 4:3). Three times this passage from Genesis 15:6 is quoted in the New Testament: here, Galatians 3:6; James 2:23. Paul's quotation of it was designed to show that Abraham was not justified by works (Rom. 4:2). Jews of Paul's day rested their hopes upon Abraham but at the same time insisted that all Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law. The logical consequence of their reasoning would have excluded Abraham from justification. Yet, justified he was and that before either circumcision or the law was given!

Paul's words from Romans 4:4 are often misunderstood. *"Now to him that worketh the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is reckoned for righteousness."* Proponents of the doctrine "salvation by faith only" have Paul saying, "To him that obeyeth, his reward is not reckoned as of grace, but as of debt, but to him that obeyeth not but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly." The truth is that while Paul is making a contrast, the contrast is not between obedience and disobedience but rather between justification by the law of Moses and by faith in Jesus Christ. Jews insisted that there was no justification to any apart from the law and Paul used Abraham to show them the error in their arguments. Abraham was justified and before the law was given. If Abraham could be justified apart from the law, others could as well! The context shows that those who "work" were those who viewed the justification of any as resting upon being circumcised and keeping the law of Moses; those who "worketh not" were those who were justified by the righteousness by faith revealed in the gospel (Rom. 1:16-17). The following passages tell us clearly: *"For not through the law was the promise to Abraham and to his seed that he should be heir of the world, but through the righteousness of faith"* (Rom. 4:13).

Faith only? Millions think so. But, look at him of whom it is said, *"And Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness."* Did God justify Abraham before he obeyed him? One who is familiar with Abraham's life knows that these words were spoken long after Abraham had left Ur and Haran upon God's promise to make of him a great nation and to bless all nations through his seed. Abraham had been obedient to God for many years when these words were spoken of him. James shows that obedience is part of true faith when he cited Abraham's offering of Isaac and then commented, *"Thou seest that faith wrought with*

*his works and by works was faith made perfect; and the scripture was fulfilled which saith, and Abraham believed God and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness” (Jam. 2:21-23).* The truth is Abraham’s obedience demonstrated faith just as disobedience demonstrates the lack of it. When Moses was provoked to speak unadvisedly with his tongue at the waters of Meribah and said, *“Hear now ye rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”* God closed the door to Canaan to him. God said, *“Because ye believed not in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them”* (Num. 20:12). Moses’ lack of faith was identified with his disobedience. James spoke truly, *“Show me that faith apart from thy works and I by my works will show thee my faith”* (Jam. 2:18). Abraham showed his faith by his works, just as Moses showed his lack of faith by his works!

The fearful jailer said to Paul, *“Sirs, what must I do to be saved”* and Paul responded, *“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved ...”* (Acts 16:30f). Paul then spoke the word of God unto him (that he might believe, Rom. 10:17), and the jailer washed their stripes and was baptized. Then, and not before, was it said of the jailer, *“And he brought them up into his house, and set food before them, and rejoiced greatly, with all his house, having believed in God”* (Acts 16:34). The jailer was not saved by faith only, but by a faith which by its obedience to God’s instructions, demonstrated that the jailer had believed. It is just such a faith which saved today and the kind of faith the Roman writer had in mind when he wrote, *“And Abraham believed not and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness.”* Jesus said, *“He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved”* (Mk. 16:16). Do you believe Jesus? Have you demonstrated that you believe his words by being baptized, as He has commanded, for the remission of your sins?

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