**Faith Accounted for Righteousness**

*Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:22; James 2:23*

**Introduction**

1. **Genesis 15:1-6** – After initially giving Abraham the three-fold promise of **Genesis 12:1-3**, and after the separation from Lot describing his descendants as being as the dust of the earth in **Genesis 13:16**, God again promised Abram in a vision that his descendants would be great – as the stars in the sky.
   1. **(v. 6)** – The scripture record’s Abram’s belief, and the Lord’s accounting such to him as righteousness.
   2. Both Paul (**Romans 4:3, 22; Galatians 3:6**) and James (**James 2:23**) quote **Genesis 15:6** in reference to Abraham in discussions of justification, righteousness, and their connection with faith.
2. What is the pattern of justification by faith revealed in scripture? What is the faith that God counts as righteousness?
3. The Doctrine of Martin Luther
4. The doctrine of salvation by faith alone is heavily influenced by the teaching of Martin Luther (1483-1546).
5. Luther contended that men are saved at the point of faith, and by faith alone, i.e. without further acts of obedience.
   1. In 1521, Luther translated *Erasmus’ Greek New Testament* into German in 11 weeks.
   2. His translation of **Romans 3:28** added the word “alone” to reflect his doctrine:
      1. *“So halten wir nun dafür, daß der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben.”* (Romans 3:28, Luther Bibel 1545 (LUTH1545), *Das Newe Testament Deutzsch*)
      2. Translates to English – “Thus, we now believe that man becomes righteous without the law of works, solely by faith.”
      3. Greek – “Λογιζόμεθα οὖν πίστει δικαιοῦσθαι ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου”
         1. KJV – *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”*
         2. NKJV – *“Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”*
         3. ASV – *“We reckon therefore that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”*
         4. NASB – *“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”*
         5. ESV – *“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.”*
      4. “Alone” is not found in the original language. Luther added to scripture contrary to the warnings of scripture (**cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; Galatians 1:8-9; 1 Peter 4:11**).
   3. His teaching and translation of the Bible were in direct contradiction to **James 2:24** which led him to reject James as an inspired book (such was his main reason):
      1. “In a word St. John’s Gospel and his first epistle, St. Paul’s epistles, especially Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, and St. Peter’s first epistle are the books that show you Christ and teach you all that is necessary and salvatory for you to know, even if you were never to see or hear any other book or doctrine. Therefore St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.” (LW 35:362)
      2. Rejected James as inspired ultimately on account of chapter 2 – faith and works.
   4. While preceding the teaching of the 5 tenets of Calvinism (T.U.L.I.P.) Luther did not maintain the entirety of the idea of the “perseverance of the saints,” but did teach that man could not sin so as to lose his salvation:
      1. “Even if he [the saint] wants to, he cannot lose his salvation, however much he sin, unless he will not believe. For no sin can condemn him save unbelief alone. All other sins—so long as the faith in God’s promise made in baptism returns or remains—all other sins, I say, are immediately blotted out through that same faith, or rather through the truth of God, because He cannot deny Himself.” (*The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*)
      2. Justification by faith for Luther did not include FAITHFULNESS, i.e. fidelity to God through repentance and obedience – continue in sin.
6. Luther’s interpretation of the example of Abraham’s justification by faith was that he was justified (saved) at the point of his initial faith, and by his faith alone. Also, that Abraham stood justified before God throughout his life separate from any obedience/works.
7. The Faith of Abraham
8. Our understanding of Abraham’s faith is important for – **cf. Romans 4:23-25** – Genesis 15:6 was written as a record of God reckoning Abraham’s faith as righteousness so that we could ***“walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had” (Romans 4:12)*** and have our faith counted as righteousness as well.
9. Was his faith which was “accounted to him for righteousness” a reference merely to his initial belief? An examination of his life will show otherwise.
10. Firstly, the faith with which Paul’s Roman epistle is concerned is that which is active in obedience – **cf. Romans 1:5; 16:26** ***(“obedience of faith,”*** NASB); **Romans 10:3, 16-17** (not submitted, not obeyed, not believed, rejected God’s word).
    1. The idea of “obedience of faith” in no way contradicts the life of Abraham.
    2. For this reason, Paul uses Abraham’s faith as an example of justification by faith – i.e. faith which obeys.
11. Secondly, Paul’s quote of **Genesis 15:6** was not in reference to Abraham’s initial faith in God, and the first time God put righteousness to Abraham’s account.
    1. **Romans 4:13** – The seed promise was given to Abraham through ***“the righteousness of faith.”***
       1. I.e. the promise wasn’t predicated upon the Law of Moses, but on the faith that Abraham had, which God counted as righteousness.
    2. Promise made – **Genesis 12:1-3** – NOTE: ***“Get out of your country”*** – when God called Abraham out.
       1. **Cf. Acts 7:2-3** – God called, thus made the promise to Abraham, before he was in Haran.
       2. **Cf. Genesis 11:31** – Such was when God made the promise, AND THE PROMISE CAME THROUGH THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF FAITH. (When was Abram’s faith born, we know not.)
       3. **Cf. Hebrews 11:8** – Abraham’s response to the promise and call was another exhibition (THE FIRST RECORDED) of his faith which God accounted to him for righteousness. **(v. 6** – it was faith that was pleasing to God.) OBEDIENCE
12. FAITH ACCOUNTED TO ABRAHAM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS:
    1. Sometime after the initial promise and call – **Genesis 15:1-6** – Lord came to Abram in a vision, and compared his descendants to the stars – ***“HIS FAITH WAS ACCOUNTED FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS”***
       1. NOTE: THIS WAS NOT THE SPECIFIC EVENT THAT PAUL REFERS TO IN ROMANS 4.
       2. HE QUOTES FROM THIS PASSAGE IN CONNECTION TO ANOTHER EVENT.
    2. About 15 yrs later – **Genesis 17:15-22** – God promised that Abraham’s son would come through none other than Sarah.
       1. This is the event which Paul links the phrase of Genesis 15:6 to – **cf. Romans 4:19-22** – Note the age referenced – **Genesis 17:17** – Abraham spoke of his age, as well as Sarah’s.
       2. His faith did not weaken, nor did he waiver – **Romans 4:19-21**
          1. He DID consider – “The best texts omit οὐ *not* before *considered*. According to this the rendering is as Rev., *he* *considered*, etc. *Being* *not* *weak* *or* *weakened:* (Rev.) *is* an accompanying circumstance to *he* *considered*. He considered all these unfavorable circumstances without a weakening of faith.” (Vincent’s Word Studies – Romans 4:19)
             1. “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” (NASB)
          2. But what of this? – **Genesis 17:17** – He laughed.
             1. Sarah would laugh too, but in contrast to Abraham, she was admonished by God – **Genesis 18:10-15**
             2. “From the reverential attitude assumed by Abraham we infer that his laughter sprang from joyful and grateful surprise.” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, Genesis 17:17)
          3. THIS STRENGTH OF FAITH WAS SHOWN BY HIS OBEDIENCE OT GOD’S COMMANDS – **Genesis 17:1-2, 4, 7, 9-10, 14, 23-27** – He obeyed God’s command to be circumcised.
             1. This showed his faith that God’s promise would come.
             2. Circumcision was a sign of the righteousness God accounted to him, BUT ALSO A SIGN THAT THE SEED PROMISE WOULD COME (**cf. Genesis 17:4**).
             3. Would not have been circumcised if he didn’t believe God concerning the promise – HE WAS FULLY CONVINCED – **Romans 4:21**
             4. Thus, it was accounted to him for righteousness – **Romans 4:22**
    3. About 25 yrs later – **Genesis 22:1-19** – God tested Abraham’s faith by commanding him to offer up Isaac.
       1. This is the event to which James alludes when he uses Genesis 15:6 to make his point about faith and works – **James 2:21-24**
       2. WORKS MADE HIS FAITH “PERFECT” – COMPLETE.
       3. This action of offering Isaac “FULFILLED” the words of Genesis 15:6
          1. Fulfilled – *plēroō*; from 4134; to make replete, i.e. (literally) to cram (a net), level up (a hollow), or (figuratively) to furnish (or imbue, diffuse, influence), satisfy, execute (an office), finish (a period or task), verify (or coincide with a prediction). (Strong)
          2. “bring something to completion, finish something already begun” (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich; 677)
          3. “That is, the fair and full meaning of the language of Scripture was expressed by this act, showing in the highest sense that his faith was genuine; or the declaration that he truly believed, was confirmed or established by this act.” (Albert Barnes’ Notes on the Bible, James 2:23)
          4. WAS A TEST FROM GOD – **Genesis 22:1-2**
          5. SHOWED IMMENSE FAITH – **Hebrews 11:17-19**
             1. Had been circumcised showing faith in God’s promises.
             2. “HAD RECEIVED THE PROMISES” – promised son Isaac.
             3. TRUSTED GOD COULD AND WOULD STILL FULFILL THOSE PROMISES.
          6. CONFIRMED HIS FAITH – OR MADE HIS FAITH PERFECT – **Genesis 22:10-12** – BY OBEDIENCE.
13. The Writing of Paul and James Concerning Works
14. Paul – Works of the Law
    1. Theme – **Romans 1:16-17** – justification by faith as disclosed in the gospel.
       1. This is especially set in contrast to the attempts the Jews made at justification through the Old Law.
       2. **Romans 3:21-22** – revealed apart from the Law – righteousness of God THROUGH FAITH.
       3. **Romans 3:27-28** – the establishment of justification by faith excludes all boasting.
          1. If you have to trust in another’s blood to make you righteous because you have sinned, then no room for boasting.
    2. Works of **Romans 4** concern those of the perfect keeping of the Old Law:
       1. **(vv. 1-4)** – Nothing to boast about because he wasn’t perfect. Justified as a matter of God’s grace, but THROUGH FAITH.
       2. **(vv. 5-8)** – The very language shows the works considered are those of the Law that are kept perfectly:
          1. **(v. 5)** – work/ungodly – sin, not perfect work – justified by God through belief.
          2. (**v. 6)** – righteousness accounted apart from perfect works.
          3. **(vv. 7-8)** – lawless deeds/sins – i.e. in breaking Old Law.
          4. **Cf. Romans 8:3-4** – Law could not make one righteous because man sins – must not sin to be righteous under the Old Law.
       3. **(vv. 9-12)** – Righteousness apart from the Law as illustrated in Abraham’s justification before circumcision.
    3. Paul does not speak of works period, but the works of the Old Law, namely, keeping them perfectly – NOT ONE CAN DO SO, THUS, NO JUSTFICATION BY SUCH WORKS.
15. James – Works of Faith
    1. Theme – practical Christianity – referred to by some as “the New Testament book of Proverbs – **James 1:22** – be doers of the word.
       1. NOTE: This doing has no hint of MERIT whatsoever.
       2. **James 1:21** – in need of laying aside sinful works (no meritorious works) and receive the word (by doing it) because you need to be saved.
    2. Works of **James 2** concern those which come through FAITHFUL SUBMISSION (obedience) to God’s will:
       1. **NOTE: 2:1, 8-9** – don’t show partiality, such does not fulfill the command to love neighbor as self.
       2. **(vv. 14-17)** – in context of loving neighbor – saying without doing (working) doesn’t accomplish anything.
       3. **(vv. 18-20)** – faith must be SHOWN, not simply stated.
          1. Faith in what/who? – Obviously God – **(v. 23)** – “BELIEVED GOD”
          2. Show me you believe in God – how? – by doing what He says. (NOTE: **(v. 19)** – Demons believe in God, but aren’t obedient to Him)
       4. Examples:
          1. **(vv. 20-24)** – Abraham.
          2. **(v. 25)** – Rahab
       5. CONCLUSION – **(v. 26)**
16. The faith which James speaks of that must be shown by works of obedience is the same faith of which Paul speaks.
17. Faith Accounted for Righteousness
18. The Principle – The Just Shall Live by Faith
    1. **Romans 1:17** – quote from Habakkuk 2:4 – Biblical principle from the beginning.
    2. Background of Habakkuk:
       1. **Habakkuk 1:1-4** – conditions in Judah. (still some righteous, but outnumbered and afflicted by the wicked)
       2. **Habakkuk 1:5-11** – what God will do – raise up wicked Chaldeans as punishment and chastening for Judah.
       3. **Habakkuk 1:12-17** – the prophet’s perplexity concerning God’s using the wicked Chaldeans – is Judah not more righteous than them?
       4. **Habakkuk 2:1** – the prophet’s resolve to wait for God’s reply, and the mindset to accept His correction.
       5. **Habakkuk 2:2-4** – God’s reply – IT’S HAPPENING:
          1. Don’t worry about the Chaldeans – yes they are wicked, but will be judged.
          2. CONTINUE TO LIVE BY FAITH – to be just, and continue to be so, especially during this trying time, live by faith. (EXAMPLES DURING BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY: Daniel and friends)
    3. Faith:
       1. Pistis (Greek) – persuasion, i.e. credence. (Strong) Conviction of the truth of anything, belief. (Thayer)
       2. 'ĕmûnâh (Hebrew) – literally firmness. (Strong) Firmness, fidelity, steadfastness, steadiness. (Brown-Driver-Briggs)
          1. More than mere belief, i.e. ascent to facts.
          2. It is FAITHFULNESS – i.e. loyal commitment to God through following His commands.
          3. The NT pistis is used in reference to this idea of faithfulness.
    4. What does such saving, justifying, faith look like?
19. The Faith Accounted for Righteousness:
    1. Humble
       1. Realizes inability to direct self – **Jeremiah 10:23**
       2. Humbly accepts God’s direction – **James 1:21**
          1. Meekness – “It is that temper of spirit in which we accept His dealings with us as good, and therefore without disputing or resisting” (Vine)
          2. **James 4:6, 10** – humble self in sight of Lord.
    2. Trusting
       1. Faith does not always fully grasp God’s plans in the moment. It may not entirely understand, but it trusts because such is coming from God almighty.
       2. Like with God’s instruction toward Habakkuk – **Habakkuk 1:13; 2:1, 4** – trust in His plans.
       3. Abraham did not fully understand why God was asking Him to offer Isaac, and didn’t know how God would fulfill His promises, but he trusted – **Hebrews 11:17-19**
       4. **Psalm 91:1-6** – Trust in the provision and protection of God.
    3. Single-minded
       1. This faith does not seesaw back and forth between resolve to do God’s will.
       2. Not double-minded – **James 1:5-8** – Ask for God’s wisdom, but without doubting.
          1. Not doubt that God will give it to him, but doubt concerning whether to practice the wisdom God is to give.
          2. Wisdom to get through trial – single-minded man resolves to do God’s will no matter what, but double-minded has reservations.
    4. Obedient
       1. Such humility, trust, and single-minded focus to do God’s will must reach the actual doing.
       2. Hearing but not doing does no good – **James 1:22-25** – be doers of the word!
       3. Faith without works is to no profit, and dead – **James 2:14, 17, 20, 24, 26**
    5. Grows Toward Perfection (completion/maturity)
       1. Faith is not stagnate. It moves, and it moves forward.
       2. Exhortation to grow – **2 Peter 1:5-9; 3:18** – Add to your faith, grow.
       3. Christ is the standard – **Ephesians 4:11-13**
    6. Constant
       1. Temptation – **1 Corinthians 10:13** (it is a reality); **1 Thessalonians 5:19-22** (Faith tests, and says no to the evil)
       2. Affliction – **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** – does not lose heart, but works on the inward man, and considers the positive.
       3. Persecution – **Hebrews 10:32-39** – does not draw back because of persecution, but endures.
       4. To the end – **Hebrews 3:12-15** – steadfast to the end.

**Conclusion**

1. God’s plan for man to be righteous before Him is by grace through faith **(cf. Ephesians 2:8).**
2. This justification by faith is not at the point of initial belief, but when that faith is shown by works of obedience.
3. One must continue living faithfully before God in order to continue to be righteous.
4. The faith for which God accounts righteousness is that faith which is shown by humble, constant submission to God’s will.