**Faith in the Book of Romans (*Part 2*)**

*Edited from: Daniel H. King*

[Editor’s Note: The first part of this article was printed in last week’s *Reason for Hope*. If you have not yet read it, please do so before going on with the conclusion of the article since it draws on several principles established in the first part of the article. This article is especially intended to help those in the present auditorium class on ***Romans***, but is of use to all wanting to identify more clearly the saving “faith” addressed by the inspired apostle in this book. Misunderstandings of the kind of “faith” commanded and commended in ***Romans*** have led to errors in the religious world that negate any action of obedience as being essential in our salvation. This article is an excellent dealing with this subject. HRO]

**Faith, Law, and Obedience**

The word faith (Gk. *pistis*) is used with at least five different specific nuances in the New Testament. Interestingly, Paul utilizes the term in each one of these ways in the book of Romans: **(1)** Simple belief or mental acceptance of 'historical facts' (Rom. 10:17; and Heb. 11:1); **(2)** Trust or dependence upon another, i.e. God and His plans and ways (3:25); **(3)** Faithfulness or fidelity to a commitment or promise, either on the part of God (3:3; 10:6) or of man (9:30); **(4)** The body of doctrine which is believed (10:9); and, **(5)** Personal opinion in matters of indifference (14:1, 22). On the other hand, it is essential to recognize that the apostle has a specific idea in mind when he makes the declaration that "a man is justified by faith" (3:28; and 5:1). But how may we ascertain exactly which meaning or meanings he intends for his readers to understand? I would suggest the following considerations.

**First**, from a literary standpoint, two references in the book are of particular import: 1:5 and 16:26. There appears to be little doubt that these two passages were meant to act as “bookends” for the conceptions and doctrines which hinge upon a correct understanding of "faith" in the body of the book: *". . .through whom we received grace and apostleship, unto obedience of faith. . . "* (1:5), and *". . .the mystery. . .is made known unto all the nations unto obedience of faith . . ."* (16:26). There is no question but that the intention of the Holy Spirit for the word *pistis* is "that obedience which is faith" at both of these openings. Here faith equals obedience and vice versa. In 1:8, Paul continues his thought by announcing that the *pistis* of the Romans is known throughout the world. Just as obviously he intends to refer to their adherence to the gospel, i.e., belief, trust, and fidelity. For in 16:19, he declares "your obedience is come abroad unto all men." The two verses are exactly parallel and equivalent! In 1:12, he talks about the encouragement that their mutual faith would offer one another. He has the same idea in mind. Then he introduces his theme in 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; for it is the power of God to everyone that believeth (*to pisteuonti*); to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith: as it is written, but the righteous shall live by faith." Once more, the implication of the Habakkuk quotation (as we earlier pointed out) is that of obedient and steadfast belief and trust. It is everything except passive!

That sets the stage for Paul's discussion of faith in Jesus Christ as a means of justification versus the Jewish attempt at reconciliation through observance of the Mosaic Torah or Law. And a proper evaluation of this discussion is critical for an appreciation of the whole purpose of Romans. To begin with, he uses the term "Law" (*nomos*) with and without a definite article giving it three basic significations: (1) The whole Jewish economy, as contrasted with Christianity. He uses it in this way when contrasting "law" and "grace"; (2) The moral law which any enlightened conscience would recognize, but especially as that moral system has been incorporated into the Mosaic code; and, (3) Most often he has reference to the Jewish Torah itself. Now in the book of Galatians, he seems to condemn especially the ritual element of the Law being bound upon Christians, but in Romans (chapter seven especially) he refers to the "moral" element in the Torah (note his example in verse seven), denying both the ability of man to keep it perfectly and its ability to save. This is quite plainly the major polemic in Romans. Paul does not disparage faithful obedience to God, nor does he diminish the importance of obedience for the Christian life. Instead, he shows the utter impossibility of pleasing God through this system which had demonstrated its bankruptcy in the past and, for that reason, had been removed and thus offered no security even for the Jews (10:1-4) at that point in time.

The absolute necessity of obedience for faith to qualify as "saving faith" is given cogency by Paul's following-up of the faith section of the epistle (3:21-5:2) with the pragmatic and practical section on service (chapter 6). The ideological center falls at 6:16-18:

*"Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves as servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the hearts to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness."*

Here belief and trust have brought about an obedient response to the divine gift of Jesus and the decrees that, when obeyed from the heart, bring one into that state of "freedom from sin" made accessible in the act of baptism (6:3-11). From that day forward, the person who has thus responded in faith must continue to act in faith by being a "servant of righteousness." That was Paul's intention for the Christians at Rome and everywhere, as he intimates also at 15:18: *"For I will not dare to speak of any things save those which Christ wrought through me, for the* ***obedience*** *of the Gentiles . . . ."*

**Conclusion**

Obedient faith is the only faith that has ever justified anyone. The book of Romans offers no salve for the consciences of those who walk in disobedience and no consolation for those who teach the false doctrine of "justification by faith alone." **"Faith"** in that book implies **a living, vibrant and active force in life** which can under no circumstances be identified with passivity.