

The Obedience of Faith

(from “A Survey of Romans,” John Hepp, Jr.)

1:5. The whole phrase in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 is *eis hupakoēn pisteos*, to [the] obedience of faith (faith in the genitive case). In 1:5 the NIV translates, “to bring about the obedience of faith.” Consider three possible meanings:

1. Obedience **to** faith. Arguments for this meaning can include the use of similar phrases with equivalent Greek syntax elsewhere. For example, 1 Peter 1:22 speaks of “obedience to the truth” and 2 Corinthians 10:5, of “obedience to Christ.” Other passages use the verb *obey* (rather than the noun *obedience*), followed by the dative (rather than the genitive). For example, Romans 10:16 and 2 Thessalonians 1:8 speak of obeying the gospel. Acts 6:7 says that “a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.”

However, opposed to this meaning in Romans is the fact that Paul does not elsewhere speak of *faith* as though it were a command to be obeyed.

2. Obedience **that consists of** faith. Romans 4:4–5 seems to favor this meaning. It emphasizes justification by faith rather than by works: “to the man who **does not work but trusts** God who justifies the wicked, his **faith** is credited as righteousness.” This might be the meaning of obedience in Acts 5:32b: “the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who **obey** him.” Since the Holy Spirit comes to every believer from the first moment of faith (Romans 8:9), not after he has good works, “obey” here may equal “believe.”

However, Romans 1:5 looks at the whole of salvation; 4:4–5 only its beginning. The man justified by faith alone will inevitably begin giving evidence of his new life. In that sense “a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone” (James 2:24). Saving faith produces works; a new creature is transformed. For this reason Jesus warned that the wise man both “hears these words of mine and **puts them into practice**” (Matt. 7:24). This point is assumed in several passages in Romans, such as 6:15–23 (see later). The obedience true of every believer involves more than passive faith. This may be the meaning of Romans 15:18: “the obedience of the Gentiles **by word and deed**” (NASB, taking “word and deed” to refer to the hearers rather than the messenger).

3. Obedience that comes from faith. This is probably the correct meaning. It reflects the same truth as Galatians 5:6: “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.” This response is described in Romans 6: “Don’t you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? But thanks be to God, that though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness” (Rom. 6:16–18; see 15–23). This is not optional; every believer’s obedience has made him a slave to righteousness and to God (v. 22). The results are described in 8:3–4.