



# #3 “What exactly is ‘faith’ anyway?”

To consider that ‘faith’ is simply trusting the promises of God (from Romans 4:18-25).

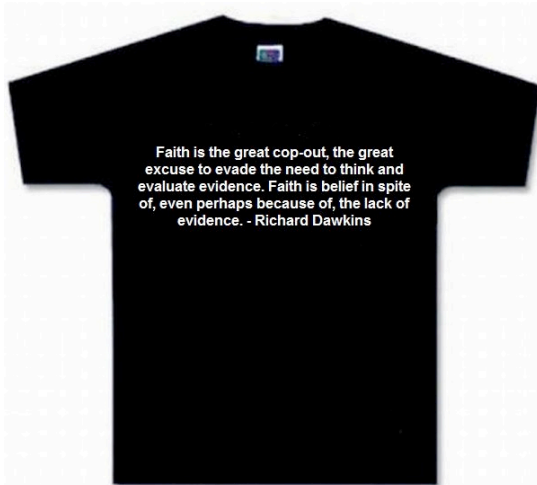
Writes one ‘agnostic’ on the Richard Dawkins website<sup>1</sup>:

## What do Atheists believe in?

Hi everyone. I've only recently called myself an atheist, although I might be more agnostic. A friend of mine, who is Christian, asked me **what I have faith in or believe in as an atheist**. I answered that **I don't believe faith is a necessary source of hope and breeds irrational thinking**. I said I believe in rational thinking and using that to seek truth.

Anyways, I was wondering what you much more experienced atheists would answer to this and if you think my response is justified or not. I am currently a senior at a Christian high school. I've gone to a Christian school all my life but I just could not stomach the ignorance and hypocrisy found among the religion, so I broke away from it. However, I'm not calling myself an atheist out of spite. After years of growing up with the Christian religion and researching many other religions out there, I've come to the natural conclusion that is atheism. Seeking truth is my motivation for becoming an atheist.

And other atheists put on their t-shirts<sup>2</sup>:



<sup>1</sup> <http://richarddawkins.net/discussions/484202-what-do-atheists-have-faith-believe-in>

<sup>2</sup> [www.atheisttshirts.co.uk](http://www.atheisttshirts.co.uk)

Q1. How do agnostics/atheists understand what 'faith' is?

"Romans" is a letter in the latter half of the Bible. It is believed to have been written around 60's AD, by the Apostle Paul, to the young church in Rome (hence the name). Paul wanted to encourage the church by explaining the "gospel" to them. The key sentence of the letter is this: **"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes..." [Romans 1:16]**<sup>3</sup>

The word "gospel" just means good news. The good news is to do with salvation – with being saved from God's anger at humanity. It's a solution that God himself provides in the sacrifice of his son Jesus (see session 1 on Romans 1:18-32, and session 2 on Romans 3:21-26).

It's a solution that requires trust – or 'faith' as a response. Paul next goes on to talk about Abraham, who lived about 1800BC. Paul picked on Abraham as a case study because his is one of the Jewish Patriarchs. Paul wants to show that it's always been about trusting the promises God makes – even before Jesus himself appeared on the scene.

#### **Romans 4:18-25**

**18**Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." **19**Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. **20**Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, **21**being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. **22**This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." **23**The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, **24**but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. **25**He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Note that in session 2 we learnt that the same root word gives rise to the words translated as 'righteousness', 'justified', 'just' and 'justice'. 'Righteousness' was something God provided. In the sacrifice of his Son, atonement or satisfaction was made for the wrongdoing of humanity. Those who trusted in this sacrifice were no longer under God's anger for their wrongdoing.

Q2. When was Abraham declared righteous?

If we go back to the original story....

---

<sup>3</sup> All bible quotations from HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION, Copyright © 2001, 2005 by Biblica ®. All rights reserved worldwide.

**Genesis 15:1-6 – probably written by Moses, around 1300BC (writing about events that occurred around 1800BC)**

**After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram [Abraham's former name] in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."**

**4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.**

**Genesis 17:10-17**

**<sup>15</sup> God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. <sup>16</sup> I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."**

**<sup>17</sup> Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself, "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"**

**Genesis 22:1-2, 9-12, 15-18**

**Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied.**

**<sup>2</sup> Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about. "....**

**<sup>9</sup> When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. <sup>10</sup> Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. <sup>11</sup> But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied. <sup>12</sup> "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son. "....**

**<sup>15</sup> The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time <sup>16</sup> and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, <sup>17</sup> I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, <sup>18</sup> and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."**

Q3. Was Abraham's faith blind or irrational?

Q4. Was Abraham's faith perfect?

Q5. 'The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us...' (Romans 4:23-24). In what sense were they written for us?

Written by Caroline Spencer of City Bible Forum. 2012.

COPYRIGHT City Bible Forum ([www.citybibleforum.org](http://www.citybibleforum.org)) a ministry of Evangelising Commerce Inc (NSW), 2011. This Bible Reading material may be reproduced free-of-charge for non-profit use only by Bible Reading Groups within workplaces as long as this copyright notice appears, and the study is not modified in any way. For any other use, or to modify the material, please contact us to arrange copyright permission, which may involve a small fee to help finance the production of such resources by the staff of City Bible Forum. Contact [info@citybibleforum.org](mailto:info@citybibleforum.org) or tel: (02) 232 8700 or GPO Box 3266, Sydney NSW 2001.