

Exegetical Notes - Romans 4:1-15

“Abraham, Saved By Faith”

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Romans 4:1-15

Verses 1-3

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

- Paul’s contention is that people are justified by God through grace and that they received God’s grace through faith in God. In this chapter, he proves that it has always been so. He says that even Abraham, the first of the Jewish Fathers was justified in the same way as are we.
- He quotes Genesis 15:6 as his textual proof of the premise. There, the Bible states clearly that Abraham’s righteousness was a gift from God, and that it was because he believed in God that God called him righteous.

Verses 4-8

Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those

***whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.***

⁸ Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord will never count against them.

- Paul says that if you work to get something, even righteousness, what you get is what you worked for, your wages. It is not, therefore, a gift. So, you get what you deserve and what your employer is obligated to pay you for the work you did.

- If righteousness came through works God would be obligated to the worker and not the worker to God. Therefore, since God owes no man anything but gives to all men freely, righteousness cannot come by works. It is an act of God's grace. When this principle is understood one realizes that the only thing a person can do is trust God to save him/her through faith in Jesus Christ. Their faith becomes their righteousness, for God then credits them as righteousness.
- He quotes Psalm 32:1-2 to show that David understood this principle.

Verses 9-12

Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

- Paul then asked if only Jews, the circumcised, can be made righteous in God's sight or is God's grace reserved only for the Jew.
- He shows that Abraham is credited as righteous by God before he was circumcised. The story of Abraham's being declared righteous by God through faith in God is found in Genesis 15. The story of his circumcision is found in Genesis 17. So, Abraham was declared righteous by God before he became a Jew.
- Abraham is then the father of all who are justified by faith in God, Jew and non-Jew alike.

Verses 13-15

It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

- Righteousness comes through God's grace and is received by faith in God.

- All those who trust God and not their own works are God's children and heirs to all that God has promised his children.
- If the keeping of the law determined who were the heirs to God's promises, no one would receive anything but God's wrath because none of us keeps the law perfectly. All have sinned and fallen short.
- However, we do not abandon the moral law of God as given in the Bible. If we did, sin would run rampant among us and destroy our world as it is doing. See Romans 1.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Abraham, Saved By Faith*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Interim Senior/Lead Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)