

TWO JEWISH EXAMPLES | 4:1-8

Paul speaks of two Jewish examples to prove that faith was at the heart of the two covenants of Israel: the Abrahamic (which promised a land and a people) and the Davidic (which promised a King and a Kingdom).

- Verse 1 –
 - The words **pertaining to the flesh** have to do with the discovery of Abraham, not the fatherhood of Abraham.
 - **found** - The word εὐρίσκω [eurisko] is the root of our word *Eureka!*
- Verse 2 - Paul has already established that Abraham (and the Jews) were justified **by faith** (3:30), so this is purely hypothetical.
- Verse 3 - The content of Genesis 15:1-6 gives the object of Abraham's belief: God and his promise of a great nation. There is nothing to hint that Abraham was placing his faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.
- Verse 5 –
 - Under the Law, the works of the law only had a standing (3:31) when they were done "out of faith."
 - But now, note carefully, that works are completely forbidden.
 - **Faith is counted for righteousness only to him that worketh not.**
 - If one is unwilling to reject all faith in themselves and their work, then God does not justify.
 - Justification is by faith alone, and not a single work is allowed, lest we boast. See 2 Tim 1:9 and Rom. 10:1,3.
 - How does this reconcile with James 2:24?
 - The only way to make reconciliation is to recognize that James writes to **the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad** (James 1:1) and to recognize that James was an apostle to the Jews proclaiming the Kingdom to the Jewish people.
 - James was possibly written before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15). The words to James are applicable directly to those in a "kingdom offer" age.
- Verse 6 –
 - **Even as David** - There is a difference between David and Abraham, and Paul uses both to describe two different situations.
 - Abraham lived before the Law, and was justified completely *without Law*.
 - David lived within the Law, and yet was given imputed righteousness outside the Law, so that *no Law could condemn him*.
 - **Describeth the blessedness of man** - Notice that David did not understand the age of Grace, as revealed to Paul. David simply described the blessedness of such a state.
- Verse 8 – As stated in v. 6, the blessing of David is that God **will not impute sin** regardless of the Law. This is a result of the fact that God had already **imputeth righteousness**. Once righteousness has been imputed, God **will not** allow the Law to condemn. David could be out of fellowship with God, but could not lose his standing with God.

IMPUTED RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM CIRCUMCISION | VV. 9-12

- While circumcision required faith, Paul is talking about **this blessedness** that comes **to him that worketh not** (v. 5). This is different from the faith that worked itself out in circumcision.
- How does Romans 4 not contradict Paul's teaching about the mystery?
 - Paul's argument is that the Abrahamic Covenant (land and nation) was by faith alone.
 - Paul does not say that justification under the Law **was** by faith alone, but that faith was required and foundational.
 - When God says, "bring an animal sacrifice" –faith does so.
 - When God says, "be circumcised" –faith does so
 - When God says, "build an ark" –faith does so

- When God says, “repent and be baptized for the forgiveness of sins” –faith does so.
- In this dispensation, Paul is saying “no one doing works shall be justified.” Faith accepts this, and shuns all works of righteousness.
- Verse 9 – **this blessedness** - That is, the blessedness of imputed righteousness that is unaffected by law.
- Verse 11 –
 - **the sign** - Paul lays the case that justification was *never* by circumcision, but that circumcision was a **sign...a seal of the righteousness of the faith**. The word for **seal** is σφραγίς [sphragis], which is "a token or proof." Abraham had been justified by faith long before circumcision.
 - **that he might be the father...** - Those who are working for their own righteousness are not children of Abraham, regardless of whether they are Jew or Gentile. Abraham is the father of those who believe.

FAITH FOR ALL PEOPLE | VV. 13-25

- Verse 13 - Paul speaks of one particular promise in this passage, not of all promises.
- Verse 14 - It was not the law that made the promise to Abraham valid nor void, Abraham's promise was always one of faith. The Law came 430 years after the promise, and cannot make "null and void" the previous contract. If a promise can't be trusted, it isn't a promise.
- Verse 15 – **the law worketh wrath** - This is the same argument as 3:20, and repeated many times in Scripture (Rom 5:20, 7:13, Col 2:14, Gal 3:10, 1 Cor 15:56, 2 Cor 3:7, 9). With all these negative words about the Law, why do churches continue to try to put men under the Law?
- Verse 16 –
 - **therefore it is of faith** - That is, the promise that Abraham would be the father of all nations is **of faith**.
 - **might be sure** - If the promise was of anything other than **of faith**, then how could anyone be sure of it?
 - If the promise had ONE TINY WORK we could never be sure of salvation.
 - Suppose, for example, that the Law said "to be justified, you must lift your little finger three times a day." What would happen? First, we would make endless regulations on finger lifting (which finger, how high, what should the position of the hand be, what time, etc.). Second, we would make "finger-lifting courts" to judge our own worthiness. Third, we would boast (I've never missed a day), and then what would happen to the paralyzed? What about the one who is in a coma? What about an emergency that took you from finger-lifting duties?
- Verse 17 – **the father of all nations** - Likewise, children of faith are said to be the children of Sarah in Gal. 4:31.
- Verse 18 – **beveled in hope** - What did Abraham believe? Was his belief in the death/burial/resurrection of Jesus? NO! It was "belief in hope." (See also v. 20-21) . Faith is simply taking God at His word. Faith is when God offers, you open your hand and receive.
- Verse 19 – **the deadness of Sarah's womb** - God rejected Ishmael, because he was of man's works, not God's grace. Which is more fruitful...children of works or children of grace? Then why do so many preachers press for works of the law rather than works of grace? So many believe that the Law will produce greater works than grace, and they are not only wrong, but ignoring a key truth of Paul's writings.
- Verse 20 - This is a word of praise to Abraham, but is not a requirement for "saving" faith. It is not faith that justifies, but the *object of faith*. Both weak faith and strong faith will sit in the proverbial "chair" which often serves as an illustration of faith. It is the "chair" that supports, not the faith.
- Verse 23 - see Rom. 15:4
- Verse 24 - The content of Abraham's faith and the content of ours is different. It is not "faith" that saves, it is the object of faith. Abraham did not have the Gospel, but we do. Notice that resurrection is fundamentally important to salvation. It would be clear heresy to deny the physical resurrection of Jesus Christ. Note also that liberal Christianity believes that "He lives" only spiritually. Catholic doctrine focuses on the "perpetual sacrifice" and not the resurrection.