

ROMANS 4:1-12

TWO VOICES FOR FAITH APART FROM WORKS

Abraham - vs. 1-5

The father of the Jews by the flesh, is the ultimate example of the reality that keeping rules, or laws gets you no grace. If Abraham had been justified by his own deeds he could certainly brag to us about his achievements, though he could not direct any boasts toward God.

The Bible actually makes it very clear that it was Abraham's faith that made the difference in justification. "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." Genesis 15:6

Paul employs business ideas to the teaching. In business payment is made to the worker because that is what he is owed, not as a gift. However, in justification of sins, it isn't work that gets the job done, but faith "in him who justifies the ungodly."

David - vs. 6-8

The great king David also speaks of this doctrine in Psalm 32:1-2. In this great Psalm, David seems to obviously disregard human works as a means to righteousness, and instead, dwells on the blessing of atonement, which is strictly and solely in the hands of the Lord.

TWO GROUPS FOR FAITH APART FROM CIRCUMCISION VS. 9-12

Paul asks a probing question. In light of his discussion so far, the original audience may be starting to get the point. Is the blessing of forgiveness of sins just for the Jews (circumcised), or is it also for the gentiles (uncircumcised)? After all, faith is the key.

Paul makes a logical, and yet probably offensive conclusion: Abraham's faith came before he was circumcised. His circumcision had nothing to do with justification but was a direct result of that justification. "He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."

He further concludes that God did this specifically to demonstrate that Abraham, as the father of our faith, is that of the gentiles as well as the Jews.

***** The great dilemma *****

James 2:21-24 - "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" - and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Context is the key to harmony. James is teaching on the importance of living out our faith, while Paul is teaching on how to get that faith.