



November 19, 2023

***Romans: Rooted in Jesus
Faith, Not Form***

Romans 4:1-12

For Discussion and Reflection

1. The Jewish Christians boasted in their great ancestor, Abraham. They believed that Abraham was a righteous man before God. Paul confronts that belief when he says, "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about." Statements like, "But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD," Genesis 6:8, could lead some to conclude that Noah was treated differently because he was obedient. The reality is that his status was more a statement about God than Noah. The same is true about Abraham. Paul is quick to correct their conclusion, saying, "he has something to boast about, but not before God." Read vs. 5. How does Paul classify Abraham? What is Paul trying to help them see about their great ancestor? How does this undermine their religious system?
2. Paul uses two words in the text that help explain each other. First, in vs.2, Paul says that Abraham was "justified," which is the word for "acquittal." Second, he says, Abraham was "counted" which is the typical word for "justified." Counted literally means to have something credited to an account. It's an accounting and legal term. Acquittal is a firm legal word. How do these words shape our understanding of justification, particularly in the context of "righteousness"?
3. I have a great grandmother, great grandma Wolf. She was a godly woman who prayed for my family by name every day. Everyone in the family talked about her godly character and piety before God. If someone called her "ungodly," I might get offended and be defensive. Why does Paul go after Abraham? What is he trying to help the Jewish Christians understand? Romans 3:19,20,23. What does he want them to understand about their religious system and personal belief?
4. Paul also mentions King David. God calls him a man after his own heart, 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22. But everyone knows about David's great sins of adultery and murder. Yet David, in Psalm 32, rejoices in God's forgiveness, atonement (sins covered), and acquittal (not count his sin). What is Paul saying about David's understanding of grace?
5. The Jewish believers were not only pointing to their ancestors but to the religious rite of circumcision, as proof of their righteousness before God. Why do we tend to look to our religious piety (acts of worship and obedience) to feel good about ourselves and find some merit in our lives? Does our personal piety matter? Does salvation by grace through faith make personal obedience and worship irrelevant? Titus 2:11-12.
6. How does Paul argue that circumcision functions for the Jewish believer? Should their faith be in the rite or the thing it symbolizes?
7. Paul mentions that Abraham is the father of all who believe, not just circumcised believers. As we prepare for our study next week, read vs.13. How were the Jewish believers misunderstanding the nature of God's covenant family and the promise made to Abraham?
8. What did you learn today that helps you understand the teaching of justification by grace through faith? What steps can you take to grow in grace?