

Romans 4:1-12

Romans 4:1-12 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? (2) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. (3) For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” (4) Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. (5) But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, (6) just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: (7) “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; (8) blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin.” (9) Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. (10) How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised. (11) And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, (12) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.

Questions On The Text

What does Paul say that Abraham discovered?

Verse 1-3: Abraham, who was the ancestor of the Jews according to the flesh, discovered that justification did not come through works, but through faith. Justification is to be declared righteous before God, uncondemned and guiltless.

Abraham received this justification by faith and not on the basis of his works. If he had received it on the basis of his works, Abraham would have had something to boast about. Instead, his faith was counted as righteousness for him.

What is the difference between grace and works?

Verse 4: Grace can never be received on the basis of a person’s works. If a person works, then they receive wages because they have earned their way. On this basis, the employer is a debtor to the worker and owes him his pay.

In contrast to this, grace has been defined as the unmerited favour of God. It is a gift given in recognition of the fact that the person receiving it is in an otherwise hopeless position and is unable ever to earn the righteousness that they need in order to be accepted by God.

What happens to the person who puts their trust in God?

Verse 5-8: When a person recognises their own inability to earn the favour of God through their works, and instead puts their faith in God, their faith is counted as righteousness. In this system, the system of grace, the person being justified must first recognise that God justifies the ungodly and that they are therefore ungodly.

David, in Psalm 32:1-2, confirms Paul’s position. The Psalm recognises the need for forgiveness, the need for God not to count our sins against us. David calls this gift a blessing.

What is the significance of Abraham's receiving justification while uncircumcised?

Verses 9-10: Abraham was considered to be righteous by God even while he was uncircumcised. That being the case, he was not justified by his circumcision, and therefore not justified by works. Paul's argument then, is that the blessing of being considered righteous by God is available to the uncircumcised Gentiles as well as to the circumcised Jews. Whether Jew or Gentile, justification is received by faith and not by works.

Then what is the significance of circumcision?

Verses 11-12: Circumcision was a sign. In this act of obedience, it confirmed the righteousness which Abraham had already received by faith before he was circumcised. In this way, Abraham became the father of all who believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, so that the gift of righteousness might be available to all who believe.

Further Questions For Discussion:

What does it mean to you to be declared righteous before God, uncondemned and guiltless?

Why was Abraham unable to receive justification on the basis of his works?

Explain the difference between grace and works as systems of being justified before God.

To receive the justification of faith, why is it first necessary to recognise your own ungodliness?

What is the significance of Abraham's being justified before God prior to circumcision?