

Romans 4: Abraham's Faith 02-12-07

Romans chapter four is a reference to the life of Abraham. Specifically, it leads back to Genesis 15:1-6, and the moment where God states: Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness. This term is a definition of the word "justification"; it means an accounting of righteousness. Previously, we stated that Jesus was justified before God when tempted by Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-8 with 1 Timothy 3:16). However, because we sin, we cannot be justified by law. This is why Abraham is of such importance; he was justified instead by faith.

There seems to be a contradiction between the use of this event in Romans 4 and the reference to the exact same passage in James 2. In James 2:21-24 James tells us that this is an example of Abraham acting, and how we are not justified by faith only. It seems as though this is a contradiction; James seems to be saying that we are "Justified by Works not Faith", which Paul seems to be saying that we are "Justified by Faith not Works". Is this the case? Is there a contradiction here?

First, we need to understand some facts about the justification of Abraham. Abraham's faith was not "*once and for all*" justification, it was a lifelong record of his believing and acting accordingly. He believed and left his homeland (Gen. 12:1-4). He believed and dwelt in tents (Gen. 13:17-18). He believed and sacrificed (Gen. 15:1-6). He believed and offered his son (Gen. 22). These events span 62 years; Abraham's justification by faith did not just happen once for all, but as James makes the point, it was a constantly required by actions process.

Second, Abraham's faith had specific works. We see this in the bridge between Romans 4 and James 2, Hebrews 11:8-19. What we are meant to see is that it was NOT the works of the Law of Moses that Abraham performed, but instead it was specific works in his life. As well, circumcision was NOT a work of faith, but a sign of the covenant that God made with him (Gen. 17). While Abraham was called to do many things, circumcision was not part of his works of faith.

Third, while we know now that Abraham did many things to obey God, these works did not MERIT his gifts. Instead, his works CERTIFIED his faith. Without his works his faith was invalid. As James says, his faith would be dead.

Ultimately, we need to know that both Paul and James point out that Abraham was justified before God before there was a law of Moses or circumcision; this proves that the Law of Moses is not a means of justification for us. In Romans 2 and 3 we are confirmed that the Law fails to justify those who break it.

Paul and James: Abraham was justified by faith with works, not of his believing by itself, and not the works of the Law of Moses. He did not "earn" his blessings, they were credited to him by his obedient Faith.

In this way Abraham becomes the father of all who believe in God (Galatians 3:7). Moses Law cannot offer justification, and at the same time justification existed before Moses. This is proven in that Abraham was justified by obedient faith. It is not the law but the obedient faith that saves