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INTRODUCTION

1. Righteousness (being declared righteous) comes only through faith by grace (3:21-31). Boasting is excluded. All is grounded in sovereign grace. Let this stand as a dictum of Scripture.

2. Two examples of this God-righteousness, apart from works, are given by Paul, Abraham, and David. The latter is provided to show that fearful sin does not alter God's declaration of righteousness (cf. 2 Sam. 11, 12; Psa. 32; 51; vv. 6-8).

3. After the excursus about David, Paul continues to discuss Abraham throughout the chapter.

1. QUESTION v. 9

An affirmative reply is implied for the question raised. Are both Jews and Gentiles included in the blessing stated (vv. 6-8)? After all, it was only proved that righteousness through faith was in the case of Abraham, the father of the Jews (vv. 1-5).

2. ANSWER v. 10.

The question does not raise the issue of the condition on which Abraham was justified (declared righteous). That has already been established--faith (vv. 1-5). Scripture provides the answer. Abraham and Ishmael were circumcised on one and the same day (cf. Gen. 17:23, 24). Hence, it was 14 years after his declaration of righteousness (Gen. 15:6). The symbol of God's covenant with Abraham, regarding his nationality, is not to be confused with the reality of his righteousness declared (cf. Gen. 15: and 17). Notice the importance of time here and elsewhere in Scripture (cf. Lk 10:25; 18:18; Acts 16:30).

3. PROOF v. 11a

Another question is actually raised--what was the advantage of circumcision (cf. 3:1)? Since it did not save, what was its office? Circumcision was a sign, a seal, an attestation of the validity of Abraham's faith--righteousness declared in uncircumcision. A rite never bestows anything in any dispensation. A seal is worthless apart from the document or matter it attests, Jews tore the seal from the covenant (Abrahamic) and vainly boasted of its meaningless imprint. Christendom has virtually done the same with baptism and the Lord's Supper.

NOTE: Abraham was declared righteous from a pagan-demon-

worshipping society (cf. Josh. 24:2, 3, 14; Gen. 31:30ff; Isa. 51:1, 2). He received righteousness by sovereign grace. God justifies the ungodly.

*He saw me ruined in the fall
And loved me notwithstanding all.
He saved me from my lost estate,
His loving Kindness, O how great.*

4. PURPOSE vv. 11b-12

Here is a striking turning of the tables on Jewish exclusiveness. What Abraham experienced was in order that he might be the father of believers--circumcised ones (Jews) and uncircumcised ones (Gentiles). All (Jews and Gentiles) are declared righteous through faith. Circumcision or uncircumcision is not an issue with righteousness declared. It relates to nationalities, but not salvation! Thus, God's gracious thought to save the world antedates His thought of Israel. Abraham was circumcised that he might become the first of a circumcised people. He was, therefore, father of both Jew and Gentile. Paul carefully excludes unbelieving circumcised from salvation--they do not walk in Abraham's steps of faith, steps Abraham took while still uncircumcised.

NOTE: Abraham took steps of faith which ultimately allowed him to believe unto righteousness (Gen. 15:6). Consider:

1. Abraham had a vision of the God of glory (not the glory of God) (Acts 7:2). This is a specific step. Seeing Him one will see himself as sinful (cf. Isa. 6).
2. After the vision Abraham was called upon to respond with submission and obedience (Acts 7:3). This is a command of separation (cf. Gal. 1:4). These steps preceded that step of faith when righteousness was declared for Abraham (Gen. 15:6).

CONCLUSION

Rites of whatever sort will never save. Being saved, we glorify God through obedience to His Word (including those ordinances He has established). Oh, to magnify the Lord our Redeemer.