

### Where then is the boasting?

1. The gospel excludes any boasting about one's own achievement

2. The gospel enables the message of salvation to be the same for the entire world

3. The gospel establishes the Mosaic law by fulfilling it

### Abraham

• The question is: what was Abraham's way of salvation?

• No boasting – even someone as great as Abraham

Paul has presented a basic statement of the gospel<sup>1</sup> and has then explained further (3:22b–26, beginning with 'For' in verse 22b). Now he asks a question ('Where then is the boasting?') and he goes on to show three things that follow from this gospel that he has described.

1. The first consequence of all that he has said is: the gospel totally excludes any form of boasting about one's achievement. <sup>27</sup>*Where is the boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? By the law of works? No, by the law of faith.* Then Paul explains, <sup>28</sup>*For we reckon a person to be justified by faith without the works of the law.*

2. A second consequence of what he has said is: the gospel enables the message of salvation to be the same for the entire world. Paul asks: <sup>29</sup>*Or is God the God of Jews only?* If salvation comes by keeping the Mosaic law, then salvation would only be for Jews. But *Is he not the God of gentiles also?* Paul answers his own question: *Yes, he is the God of gentiles also!* <sup>30</sup>*This is because God is one, and he will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith.* The law upheld a distinction between Jews and gentiles. The law was given to them only. If salvation came through law-keeping the Jews would be in a superior position. But salvation-by-law was never God's intention. For salvation to be for everyone it has to come 'without the law'.

3. A third consequence of Paul's gospel is that it establishes the Mosaic law. <sup>31</sup>*Do we therefore nullify the law through faith? Let it not be! On the contrary we establish the law.* Is Paul nullifying the law through this message about faith? Paul's answer is: the gospel is the fulfilling of the law. Paul is **not** brushing aside the law. Everything he has been saying actually establishes the law. It was what the law was pointing to all the time.

Paul 'establishes the law' by reminding his readers that Genesis is also in 'the law'. Paul goes on to deal with Abraham in Romans 4:1–5, 9–25. Romans chapter 4 is not a new major section.

He introduces Abraham by asking a question, <sup>1</sup>*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?* 'Flesh' in Romans 4:1 has the meaning 'human nature, human descent' (as in Romans 1:3; elsewhere it has other meanings). The question Paul asks is: what was Abraham's way of salvation? How did he get to be righteous before God? Was it his godliness? Or his circumcision? Or what?

Verse 2 has sometimes been taken as if it meant that Abraham could boast, so long as he were not boasting before God. But this would seem to contradict Romans 3:27. God does not want us boasting at all about our achieving salvation by our good work, not to anyone! It is better to take verse 2b as a compressed statement with the sense, 'But this is not possible before God!' Paul says, <sup>2</sup>*For if Abraham were justified by works he had something to boast about. But this is not possible before God!* Could someone as great as Abraham perhaps be in a position to boast? Justification by works always leads to pride. It may be a subtle matter but it is

<sup>1</sup> 3:21-22a

• *It is God who sets the standards*

• *Genesis 15:6 – an authoritative statement*

• *Abraham believed the promise, and God declared him righteous*

**Salvation is a matter of grace**

• *There was only one thing Abraham did. Abraham believed in God!*

• *The same for us – believing in the Lord Jesus Christ*

always there. Paul answers: 'But this is not possible before God!' Even Abraham is not able to boast in his righteousness before God. Those who try to justify themselves have forgotten that it is God who sets the standards. 'If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand?' <sup>1</sup>

Paul goes on to prove his point and answer his own question: <sup>3</sup>*For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness.* He quotes Genesis 15:6. The Old Testament had supreme authority for Paul and his Jewish friends. It clinches the argument. To show how Abraham was saved Paul simply refers his readers to the book of Genesis.

How and when did Abraham get right with God? It was not after his life of obedience. In Genesis 12:3 Abraham is told one of his descendants will bring worldwide blessing. It was repeated in Genesis 15. Abraham is given a tiny glimpse of the coming of Christ. He believed the promise, and God declared him righteous. God treated him as a righteous person. Abraham was saved simply by believing the promise about Jesus! There is only one way of salvation. Abraham was saved in the same way we are saved. He believed God's promise.

**The story of Abraham confirms that salvation is a matter of grace.** Abraham was from a pagan land. The first time we hear of any relationship between God and Abraham, God speaks to him. God comes to him with a word full of promises: 'I will . . . I will . . . I will' <sup>1</sup>. He points Abraham to the number of stars and says, 'So shall your seed be' <sup>2</sup>. Abraham believes God. This is all that is involved. Abraham is not said to be a specially godly person, nor was he circumcised, nor was he at that time a Jew. There was only one thing Abraham did. Abraham believed God! Salvation comes by believing God when he speaks to us about Jesus. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be blessed with the same blessing Abraham had. You will be righteous in God's sight with Christ's righteousness. You will become part of the 'seed of Abraham'. Like Abraham you will be 'reckoned righteous' because you trust God's promises.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm 130:3

<sup>1</sup> Genesis 12:1-3  
<sup>2</sup> Genesis 15:5



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