

Romans 4:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

Analysis

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. Paul introduces a critical distinction: human glory (kauchēma, καύχημα) versus divine approval. The conditional "if Abraham were justified by works" is contrary to fact—Paul is stating what is not true to make his point. Were Abraham's right standing based on performance, he could boast in his achievement. But such boasting would only be valid *pros anthrōpous* (πρὸς ἄνθρώπους, "toward men"), not *pros ton theon* (πρὸς τὸν θεόν, "toward God").

This echoes Paul's earlier statement that boasting is excluded (3:27). No human accomplishment—not even Abraham's remarkable obedience—can establish a claim on God. The verb *edikaiōthē* (ἐδικαιώθη, "was justified") points to forensic declaration, not moral transformation. Paul is addressing the basis of right standing, not the nature of faith (which James 2 will address from a different angle). Justification must be God's gracious act, or it becomes a wage earned rather than a gift received.

Historical Context

The honor-shame culture of the Greco-Roman world prized public reputation and achievements worthy of boasting. Jewish identity in Paul's day was deeply tied to Torah observance as a marker distinguishing Israel from the nations. Paul's argument that Abraham had no grounds to boast before God would have been

shocking to Jewish Christians who viewed their patriarch as the supreme example of covenant faithfulness rewarded.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What is the difference between boasting before people and standing before God, and why does this distinction matter for salvation?
2. How does Paul's 'if Abraham were justified by works' argument preemptively answer the objection that faith without works is dead?
3. What 'works' are you tempted to present to God as grounds for acceptance rather than trusting Christ's finished work?

Interlinear Text

εἰ	γὰρ	Ἀβραὰμ	ἐξ	ἔργων	ἐδικαιώθη	ἔχει	καύχημα
if	For	Abraham	by	works	were justified	he hath	whereof to glory
G1487	G1063	G11	G1537	G2041	G1344	G2192	G2745

ἀλλ'	οὐ	πρὸς	τὸν	θεόν
but	not	before	G3588	God
G235	G3756	G4314		G2316

Additional Cross-References

1 Corinthians 1:31 (Glory): That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 11:30 (Glory): If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.

Philippians 3:9 (Righteousness): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

1 Corinthians 9:16 (Glory): For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Ephesians 2:9 (Parallel theme): Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Romans 15:17 (Glory): I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.

1 Corinthians 1:29 (Glory): That no flesh should glory in his presence.

2 Corinthians 5:12 (Glory): For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.

Galatians 3:22 (Parallel theme): But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

1 Corinthians 4:7 (Glory): For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?