

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

PRAY

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

Paul has already made it clear that circumcision, which came less than 30 years after Abraham was counted righteous, was not the means by which Abraham was counted righteous, how much less does the Law, which came 430 years later?

Now Paul broadens the scope to not only include Abraham’s righteousness, but also **the promise**. Specifically, **that he would be heir of the world**. Who **Abraham** or **his offspring**?

There is some confusion mainly because there is no actual Old Testament text that says what just said. In Genesis, God promised to give Abraham and his offspring a land to inherit, the land of Canaan.

However, Paul is probably not thinking from the predominant Jewish expectation that the promise has to do with the land. Rather, he is likely thinking more broadly of the promise that the offspring of Abraham would be a blessing to the nations and will inherit the world eschatologically.

Paul argues in Galatians 3:16 that **offspring**, which is singular term for a group of people, primarily points to Christ and to the people of Christ (3:29).

“Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ... And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” Galatians 3:16, 29

This promise **did not come through the law**, in which the promise was that we must be righteous by our conduct. Instead, the promise came through the **righteousness of faith**.

Like I said, if circumcision, which happened 14-30 years after Abraham was counted righteous did not effect Abraham’s righteousness, then how could any imagine right standing with God comes through the Law which came 430 years later?

Nevertheless, many did. And despite how tenacious Paul is with this concept of faith-based righteousness, many people still do. Thank you, Paul for not letting this go easily!

¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

Adherents of the law literally reads *those of the law* and refers to circumcised Jews, or ethnic Jews, who depend upon obedience to the works of the law for their right standing with God.

If it is, as the Jews claimed, only those who adhere to the law who would be heirs, there was no point to Abraham’s faith and since the promise came through faith, therefore the **promise is void**.

Why would it be void? Because it would now be based on works rather than faith and the sad cold reality is there is no person who is able to achieve right standing with God by works. It would never be fulfilled. It's as good as dead if it depends upon us.

¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

F.F. Bruce is helpful here when he says, "That is, the law inevitably imposes penalty for failure to keep it. Paul appears to be enunciating a current legal maxim. Like the Roman maxim *nulla poena sine lege*."

I'm no Latin scholar so I had to look this phrase up. It means "no penalty without law." It is a legal principle which states that one cannot be punished for doing something that is not prohibited by law.

We should not be surprised that adherence to the law will fail to result in inheritance of the promises of God. Romans 1:18-3:20 makes this crystal clear.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth...For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." Romans 1:18

The law has one purpose: to convince us how utterly incapable we are of living up to God's perfect standard. The law is not bad. It's beautiful. It shows us the beautiful perfection of God. And it reveals to us that there is a judgment coming our way because we have transgressed against a holy God. We need to do whatever it takes to find rescue.

Paul has already stated that even those who do not have the law are guilty and depraved and deserve God's judgment in Romans 1:18-32. So, Paul is not saying that without the law no one sins. But rather, without the law, we have nothing objective by which to measure our sin.

Romans 5:13 tells us there was sin in the world even before the law. **"...for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law." Romans 5:13**

Romans 2:12-16 also indicates that even those who do not have the written law will face the consequences of their sin. Nevertheless, those who break the commandments of God are guilty of greater transgressions because they do so willingly and knowingly, in an act of willful rebellion against God.

That is why it depends on faith, Paul says in verse 16, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

Paul has more than one purpose in this statement. He aims to both rebuke the Jews who hope in the law to save them and encourage the gentile who hopes only in Christ to save him. You may be feeling pressure to perform, conform, earn your way. But I want to assure you, they are the ones who need to fear God's judgment and wrath, not you.

It **depends on faith** because no matter how much we try to obey the law, we will never earn righteousness. And if it depends on faith, then it is solely of grace! When we really get this, when it really becomes clear that our salvation has nothing to do with our works before Christ, whether good or evil, we will then comprehend how gracious God is in our redemption.

I want you to hear me clearly, I want to offend anyone who is relying on their own good deeds to be right with God so that you can once and for all appreciate just how much grace God has for you.

Now there's another reason it depends on faith – that it may **be guaranteed to all his offspring**. The only way to ensure that all the offspring of Abraham will inherit the promise is that God decides to give it to them irrespective of their ability to earn it. **It must rest on grace**, thus guaranteeing **to all his offspring**.

And to be clear, Paul isn't just talking about the Jews when he says **his offspring** but to everyone who **shares the faith of Abraham**. Whoever believes the Gospel will receive the grace and the promise shown to Abraham.

He is **the father of us all**, namely of all who believe. Specifically, all who believe like Abraham did that God is able to do what He promised to do. All people who believe this way are children of Abraham and Abraham is our father.

Once again we read of **the adherent of the law, literally** *those who are of the law*. Colin Kruse suggests that this “probably denotes the Jewish believer, and Paul is saying that the reason God made the reception of the promised inheritance dependent on being a person of faith like Abraham rather than simply a person of the law is so that the inheritance may be received by gentile believers and not only by Jewish believers.”

Paul undoubtedly has in mind here the great expansion of the Kingdom of God beyond the ethnic descendants of Abraham so that the faith of both Jews and gentiles results in their full inclusion in the promise of God, right standing with Him, and inheritance of the world.

¹⁷ **as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed,**

“No longer shall your name be called Abram, but **your name shall be Abraham**, for I have made you **the father of a multitude of nations.**” Genesis 17:5 This happened when Abraham was 99, just before he was circumcised. In that same chapter, Genesis 17:15-21 God promised that Sarai, whom He renamed Sarah, would have a son “this time next year.”

Thus, Sarah was not yet pregnant. She wouldn't even become pregnant for 3 months yet God spoke in the past tense. **I have made you the father of many nations.**

Talk about already, not yet! God had already made Abraham the father of many nations through a child that had not yet even been conceived.

—**in the presence of the God in whom he believed** actually picks up where verse 16 left off. There's a dash there in verse 16, like a brief explanation of what Paul means by offspring. Now we're back to the statement, **in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring...in the presence of the God in whom he believed...**

The guarantee, the assurance of the promise, is not the strength of Abraham's faith, strong as it was. It was not that Abraham's faith was so strong that it guaranteed this offspring would inherit the promise. Rather, it is the **presence of God, in whom [Abraham] believed**.

“The decisive issue,” in the words of Kent Hughes, “is where we place the faith we have.” He asserts that we all have faith, so that's not the problem. The problem is where we place that faith, or more appropriately in whom.

You and I are not made right by God and guaranteed entrance into His Heavenly kingdom because we have strong faith. But rather because in our weakness, we trust in the work of Christ on the cross on our behalf rather than trusting in ourselves.

Now there's something we need to note here since Paul appealed to Abraham's faith in this discourse on justification. Abraham believed God when there was absolutely zero evidence that

what God promised could actually happen. Saving faith is being absolutely certain that God is able to do what He promised – even when all the evidence suggests otherwise.

Verse 17 Paul continues, this God in whom Abraham believes is He **who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.**

I don't want to steal any of Pastor Matt's thunder for next week but it is clear that neither Abraham's age, nor the barrenness of Sarah's womb were hindrances to Abraham's faith. Abraham believed that God could **give life to the dead** – the dead womb of Sarah.

He again demonstrated this kind of faith when he obeyed the voice of God to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. He was convinced that God would give life to the dead.

“He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.” Hebrews 11:19

The first phrase clearly refers to God's resurrecting power, His power to overcome death by granting life. Paul anticipates the idea at the end of the chapter, where faith is in the God who raised Jesus from the dead verse 24 and 25.

Abraham believed in the resurrecting power of God, something Paul will explicitly appeal to in verses 24-25. It was faith in God's ability to bring the dead to life that was counted to Abraham as righteousness. I think this caused Paul to erupt in benediction and praise. He concluded the sentence with...**who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.**

Our God changes things. He changes infertility into a multitude of nations from which kings will come! From a barren womb to an everlasting lineage!

He **gives life to the dead** in the obvious sense, Jesus Christ who was raised from the dead. He brought Lazarus back to life. He brought the centurion's daughter back to life. Through Peter, He brought Tabitha back to life (Acts 9:36-43).

But what else does He give life to? How about our dead hearts? **“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved...”** Ephesians 2:4-5

That's the already. That is what God has already been doing in the world. Here's the not yet: He will give life to the dead at the resurrection of the dead. **“For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”** 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Do you trust in this God who gives life to the dead?

He is also the God who **calls into existence the things that do not exist.** He makes a way where there is no way. He does far more than we can ask or even imagine. He spoke and the universe, which did not exist, was called into existence. If He calls into existence things that do not yet exist, what is there for you to worry about?

Abraham was told that He would be the father of a multitude of nations and he believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. He believed that God could and would do what He promised even when there was no evidence that such a thing was even remotely possible. Even when two senior adults wanted and tried to have children but could not, God promised, and Abraham believed.

Even when Abraham was told by God to take Isaac up to a mountain and sacrifice his only son, he obeyed because he believed God would do something miraculous.

He believed God and it was that faith that was counted to him as righteousness. And Paul is here saying that it is faith like Abraham's that leads to our inclusion in the covenant promises God made to Abraham by grace.

The bible tells us that the heart of every born-again believer was once stone, cold and dead toward God. Rebellious against Him. The sin nature fully controlling and animating every decision and action, every word and thought. They were once enslaved to sin. Citizens of the kingdom of darkness. Dead in sin.

And God promised that they would become children of God, chosen before the foundations of the world were laid.

Now, there was no possibility of this happening naturally. No evidence that these wretches would ever throw off the chains of entangling sin and turn to the Father in repentance. There was no hint that they would cease relying upon their own righteousness and beg God for His Son's.

There was not the slightest inkling that this person would swear allegiance to the holy One, Jesus Christ our Lord, abandoning their highest allegiance – themselves.

No, there was nothing good existing in the heart of born-again believers until they were born-again by the Holy Spirit. But He who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist, called each one of us to new life in Christ. He spoke a word and our dead hearts were brought to life.

He called into existence what did not exist in us, namely a heart of flesh that replaced our heart of stone; goodness where there was only darkness; submission to God where there was only rebellion; and hope where there was no hope.

He called us into adoption as children. He welcomes us as citizens of His kingdom.

He gave to us His righteousness.

What is the Lord asking you to trust Him with? How are you being invited to share the faith of our Father Abraham? Believing that the Lord is able to call into existence what does not exist. To give life to the dead.