

The Apostle Paul has shown us that all mankind is guilty before God. Nature, our conscience, and the law of God convict us of our rebellion against our Creator. We deserve the wrath of God. Because many of the people Paul was addressing were Jews, he emphasized the impossibility of obeying all of God's laws (3:20). He points out that failing in just one makes us just as guilty as if we'd failed them all.

Thankfully, he went on to show us that there is hope. The accounts of both Abraham and David show us that the way to be forgiven, to be acceptable to God, is through faith alone. Abraham believed God's promises and was counted as righteous. David confessed his sin and threw himself on the mercy of God and was forgiven. These two most important of men to the Jews were made right with God by faith alone. In our passage today, Paul is going to expand on this truth and show how it applies to us.

Regarding this promise that Abraham believed, Paul continues, *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.* Romans 4:13 (ESV) The great promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was that they would be the fathers of nations and that their descendants would be as numerous as the stars (Genesis 17:4-6). The Jews took this quite literally, and in a sense it was fulfilled (Deuteronomy 1:10). But the Jews knew that the literal things of God have a spiritual side to them. That is something we need to learn. Paul points out in Galatians three that the promise to inherit the land was to Abraham's offspring (singular). That is to say it was predicting the Messiah who would rule the nations (Galatians 3:16). That promise was received long before the laws of Moses were written (Galatians 3:17-18). It wasn't because he obeyed the laws of God. Jacob was quite a con man (Genesis 27:19). Isaac played favorites (Genesis 25:28). Abraham lied several times putting his wife at risk (Genesis 12:13).

So why did they receive these promises and a relationship with God? It was simply a matter of placing their faith in God and entrusting themselves to Him. That is how they were counted as righteous. They did not fully understand that Jesus would come and satisfy the justice of God making it possible. They simply believed God would do what they couldn't. They didn't trust in themselves but in God to do what they knew they couldn't do.

14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. Romans 4:14 (ESV) Paul is telling us that if the patriarchs or anyone else are heirs of the Messiah by keeping the law, faith is meaningless. You just need to obey the rules. That doesn't take faith. There is no place for faith in a religion of works.

Commented [notes1]: Romans 3:20 (ESV)

²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Commented [notes2]: Genesis 17:4-6 (ESV)

⁴ Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.

⁵ 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.

⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.

Commented [notes3]: Deuteronomy 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ The LORD your God has multiplied you, and behold, you are today as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Commented [notes4]: Galatians 3:16 (ESV)

¹⁶ 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.

Commented [notes5]: Galatians 3:17-18 (ESV)

¹⁷ This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.

Commented [notes6]: Genesis 27:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Jacob said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn. I have done as you told me; now sit up and eat of my game, that your soul may bless me."

Commented [notes7]: Genesis 25:28 (ESV)

²⁸ Isaac loved Esau because he ate of his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 12:13 (ESV)

¹³ Say you are my sister, that it may go well with me because of you, and that my life may be spared for your sake."

You could say they place faith in their works, which is self –trust. That is not Biblical faith which is placed in the unseen (Hebrews 11:1).

If by will power alone you can be righteous, why is there any need for a promise? There is no need for a Messiah. Like most of the world's religions, you just find the formula and work it. Unfortunately that is how many Christians operate. They are always looking for the formula. They are looking for a new list of do's and/or don'ts to be righteous, or to just being better than most. Then what good is the promise of a Messiah? Who needs Him if you just need a formula?

Even those who recognize Jesus as the Messiah and say they trust Him for their salvation return to a list of actions to be done to consider themselves a real Christian. It is much easier to just say Christians don't do xyz or that we must do abc rather than to say you need to develop a personal relationship with the living Lord who guides you daily. Works religion voids the need for a Savior. It is denying the need for faith.

We wonder why this is such an inclination of man, but the Bible clearly tells us. Our tendency is to trust in our self (Psalm 10:4; 118:8). Our pride says we can do it. We don't want to be directed by anyone but our own will. It's humbling to admit you can't do anything and anything good is all from God. That admission only brings God glory and that is exactly how it should be (Psalm 57:5). For every thousand show boaters that can't wait to tell you about their gift and all their righteous works, there are one or two faithful, silent servants of the living God that no one knows about. God is accomplishing great and lasting things through them. But no one will know about the greatness of their humble submission until the crowns are passed out in heaven. They trust the LORD for their salvation and for His leading into service and the power to do what He calls them to do. They are people of faith. They want their reward in heaven (Matthew 6:2).

Paul's point is that it is not self-righteous law keepers that are the heirs of the promise to rule the world (Matthew 5:5). It is the only One that kept the Law who will inherit the world. And we are heirs of the promise because we place our faith in Him (Galatians 3:29).

¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. Romans 4:15 (ESV) No one can keep all the laws of God written for the Jewish people of the Old Testament. It demands the wrath of God as justice for those who know the will of God but don't do it (Galatians 3:10). It provides no atonement for willful sins (Hebrews 9:7). If you are trusting in yourself to be good enough to keep the rules of God, you are just inviting His wrath. That is why Jesus said there will be many who list off all the great things they did for God, but He will tell them to depart for He never knew them (Matthew 7:22-23). They trusted in their own abilities and never submitted to a relationship with Jesus as their Lord.

Commented [notes9]: Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)
¹ Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Commented [notes10]: Psalm 10:4 (ESV)
⁴ In the pride of his face the wicked does not seek him; all his thoughts are, "There is no God."

Commented [notes11]: Psalm 118:8 (ESV)
⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.

Commented [notes12]: Psalm 57:5 (ESV)
⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!

Commented [notes13]: Matthew 6:2 (ESV)
² Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 5:5 (ESV)
⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Commented [notes15]: Galatians 3:29 (ESV)
²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Commented [notes16]: Galatians 3:10 (ESV)
¹⁰ For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

Commented [notes17]: Hebrews 9:7 (ESV)
⁷ but into the second only the high priest goes, and he but once a year, and not without taking blood, which he offers for himself and for the unintentional sins of the people.

Commented [notes18]: Matthew 7:22-23 (ESV)
²² On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" ²³ And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

Faith in Christ liberates us from the demands of the law (Galatians 3:19). We died to the law in Christ. It was the law and all its demands that were nailed to the cross in Christ (Colossians 2:14). That is why we are free from transgression regarding all the ceremonial and cultural laws for Israel.

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, Romans 4:16 (ESV) Why must salvation be by faith? It's because the law demands the wrath of God for all who can't keep it, and none can keep it. Salvation must therefore depend of faith. The promise rests on the grace of God. He didn't need to send Jesus. He could have sent us all to hell and His justice would be satisfied. But God is not only just, He is also loving and gracious. The promise is guaranteed for all the children of faith. All who look to God for salvation inherit the promise of Jesus (10:13). It is not for those who attempt to keep the laws God gave to Israel, but it is for all who by faith come to God through Jesus' sacrifice.

Paul has now taken the spiritual interpretation of the Old Testament passage. He is saying the people of faith, Jew or Gentile, are the children of the man of faith, Abraham. They are the nations that the Messiah inherits (Psalm 2:8). Paul sees Abraham as the Father of all Christians, for it is Christians that come to God by faith and not by works, whether they attempt to keep Jewish traditions or not. This is fulfilled today in a world where every nation on the planet has followers of Jesus. Abraham's spiritual descendants are around the world, including you and me.

We believed God sent the Messiah and that He will inherit the world. We believe He paid the price we could not pay for our redemption. We share the faith of Abraham, our father.

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. Romans 4:17 (ESV) Paul is quoting from Genesis 17:5. We see this fulfilled today more than at any time in history. Could Abraham have envisioned his spiritual lineage? God's promises are often bigger than we can imagine. After all, He spoke and the world came into being (Genesis 1:1). A few words, and space with all its galaxies suddenly came into existence. He raises the dead to life. He can suspend the natural process of decay or reverse it. He raised Jesus from three days in the grave (Mark 10:34). If He did all that, He can certainly provide salvation through faith for our sin sick souls.

Now Paul goes into an explanation of the greatness of Abraham's faith as an example for us. *¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."* Romans 4:18 (ESV)

Commented [notes19]: Galatians 3:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary."

Commented [notes20]: Colossians 2:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Commented [notes21]: Romans 10:13 (ESV)

¹³ For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Commented [notes22]: Psalm 2:8 (ESV)

⁸ Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

Commented [notes23]: Genesis 1:1 (ESV)

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Commented [notes24]: Mark 10:34 (ESV)

³⁴ And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise."

Abraham believed the promise regarding the multitude of his descendants. The childless old man believed the Word of God. That is our challenge. God gave Abraham the faith to believe and Abraham exercised that faith. He gives you and me and all people the faith to believe if we will exercise it.

What hope is there that sin sick you and I will live forever in the presence of our holy, good, glorious God, freed from sin, forever overflowing with inexpressible joy? It is hope in the face of the seemingly hopeless. Exercise the faith you've been given and believe! Believe in the goodness and grace of God. Believe in the atoning death of Jesus and heaven is yours (Acts 16:31)! You can't see it like Abraham couldn't see it, but it is reality. Just as Abraham now has seen from heaven the fulfillment of the promises to him, we will see the promise of heaven. We have the hope that the promise to Abraham of Messiah who would bless the world is our Savior (Genesis 22:18). By faith we are children of the father of those of faith.

¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. Romans 4:19-21 (ESV) The fact that he was nearing 100 and Sarah was past the time of childbearing didn't bother him. He knew God could do anything. **Instead of focusing on the impossible, he focused on the power of God.** That is how our faith grows. We see God faithful in the little details of life and our faith grows for the bigger things. That is how we give glory to God. Believe He will do what He says even when it looks impossible (Hebrews 11:6).

For us who have the promise of being sanctified (Philippians 3:21), we look at our failures and are tempted to doubt God will finish the work He started. Don't do it. Look to His faithfulness. Know He can do anything. Endure by faith. See God at work in the little details and you'll have faith for the larger things. Don't waiver; believe!

Perhaps God has spoken a promise to your heart through His word. Has it been a long time and the promise is yet to come to pass? Hold on like Abraham did. Don't shrink in faith! Grow in faith and give glory to God. God is certainly able to do what He has promised (Hebrews 10:23).

²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. Romans 4:22-24a (ESV) Abraham believed God was faithful. He believed God could do anything. He refused to doubt. He even believed God could raise Isaac from death (Hebrews 11:19). That is why his faith would be counted to him as righteousness. Paul says those words weren't just for Abraham. They are for us too. They show us how God saves us.

Commented [notes25]: Acts 16:31 (ESV)

³¹ And they said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household. E

Commented [notes26]: Genesis 22:18 (ESV)

¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

Commented [notes27]: Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Commented [notes28]: Philippians 3:21 (ESV)

²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Commented [notes29]: Hebrews 10:23 (ESV)

²³ Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.

Commented [notes30]: Hebrews 11:19 (ESV)

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

This may not be how you have understood salvation, but it is the Biblical way. Just to believe in your mind that Jesus' died for you and rose again is less than this faith Abraham expressed. He acted on what he believed. He went forward letting it change the way he looked at his future. He let it change the way he saw life. He continued to walk in a trusting relationship with God. That is the saving faith that Abraham experienced and that which his spiritual children experience.

^{24b} It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Romans 4:24b-25 (ESV) Remember that this word "believe" means to entrust yourself to, or to commit to something. It is not just knowing it in your mind (James 2:19). It results in a change in our life. If we entrust our eternity to God who raised Jesus from death, if He is our Lord, and if we commit ourselves to the fact that it was for our sins that He was crucified, and that His resurrection is the verifying sign that we are indeed justified, then God considers us to have the righteousness of Jesus. We will live daily in the light of what we believe!

Please note that Paul is telling us to believe in God's work for our salvation. That is what Abraham did. Entrust yourself to the work of God. Commit your life to Him. **Your salvation is a matter of committing to what God did for you in Jesus plus nothing (Ephesians 2:8-9).** No work will add to your salvation. No service will secure your place in heaven (Titus 3:5). Your relationship with God and your place in heaven is secured by faith in what God did for you plus nothing! Stop trying to figure out what you need to do for God and just let Him guide you daily. Just love Him because He has loved you first, and let Him change the way you think through the power of His Word.

If you have to force yourself to do some kind of service for God, you aren't letting the life of Jesus flow through you. Don't just act out of duty. Act out of the life of Christ in you (Galatians 2:20). The law and duty will put you under the wrath of God. The one that lives in trusting faith in God has found life everlasting (8:14). These are the children of Abraham who are led by the Spirit of God. Paul has much more to say about this life of faith in the coming chapters.

Questions

- 1 What were some of the promises to Abraham?
- 2 Why did the patriarchs receive the promises?
- 3 What is the result of trying to keep the law?
- 4 How do Christians practice the law?
- 5 Why do some on their good works?
- 6 Why does the law bring wrath?
- 7 Why are we free from Jewish ceremonial and cultural law?
- 8 Why does salvation depend on faith?
- 9 Who are children of Abraham?
- 10 What saved Abraham? You?

Commented [notes31]: James 2:19 (ESV)

¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Commented [notes32]: Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Commented [notes33]: Titus 3:5 (ESV)

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Commented [notes34]: Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Commented [notes35]: Romans 8:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

- 11 What is our hope in a seemingly hopeless situation?
- 12 How can we bring glory to God?