***God's Promise to Abraham was Secured by Faith
RO39-01***

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We open the Word of God to Romans 4:13-15.

**The Abrahamic Covenant**

We have been looking at the Abrahamic covenant in connection with this portion of Romans. The Abrahamic Covenant is in Genesis 12:1-3. It promised, in effect, to make Abraham and his posterity the possessors of the world. The Abrahamic Covenant and the promise which it contained, included three specific promises. It promised, first of all, a land which is the land of Palestine to be the Jew's homeland forever; it promised a seed – that there would always be a Jewish nation; and, it promised a blessing – personal regeneration.

This Abrahamic covenant with its promise was unconditional. It depended only on the character of God. It depended on whether God was faithful, not whether Abraham was faithful. The promise was extended as a grace gift, consequently, and it could only be received as a gift, which is just by faith. You could not work for it because it was in the nature of a gift. God said that he would extend this particular promise (this blessing) to Abraham only on a gift basis.

Disobedience by Abraham or his descendants would bring God's discipline. That's true. But it would never cancel the promise. It would bring discipline, but it would never cancel the promise. In other words, the promise was unconditional. For that reason, it was based upon faith. It was a grace act to be extended without any conditions that Abraham or his descendants had to fulfill.

In Hebrews 6:13-14, we see that God made this promise very sure by actually taking an oath. He swore to do this. Since, of course, there is no higher authority in the universe by which to take an oath that God Himself, God actually swore this on the basis of His own name. In other words, He made the oath to Himself, in effect. Hebrews 6:13: "For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, He swore by Himself, saying, 'Surely blessing, I will bless you; multiplying, I will multiply you."

**Unconditional**

Hebrews 6:17 says, "Wherein God willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of His council, confirmed it by an oath." So, there's no doubt from the viewpoint of the Word of God that when God made this tremendous promise to Abraham back in Ur of the Chaldees, it was not a promise that was based upon conditions. It was based only upon one thing: Abraham believing God. Once Abraham believed God, the promise was in effect. He had it. Whatever came after that was up to God. It was all dependent upon God's faithfulness. This was a covenant that God made with himself. This was reiterated to Abraham again and again, and made very clear that it is dependent upon God's character, not upon Abraham's performance. It is dependent upon God's faithfulness, not the faithfulness of Abraham's descendants. So, we have this promise structured upon a divine oath, and it's absolutely unconditional.

The purpose of the promise was the establishment of the Kingdom of God in place of the kingdom of man, which had taken over the earth. The kingdom of man is based on the world view of evolutionary humanism; and, the Kingdom of God is based on the world view of theistic creationism. That's God's viewpoint. Evolutionary humanism is Satan's viewpoint.

**Education**

Abraham was raised up to produce this counterculture that we refer to as the Kingdom of God in order to cast off the kingdom of man. This was to be accomplished by Abraham's seed. Now today, human viewpoint is building the kingdom of man, while divine viewpoint is building the Kingdom of God. This is being done through education. Both kingdoms are being built through education. The kingdom of man, based on evolutionary humanism, is being built through the secular schools. The Kingdom of God, with its divine viewpoint based on theistic creationism, is being taught and promoted by Christian schools. So, you have education as the most important factor in our society today.

It is amazing that Christians simply do not seem to understand this – that this is the instrument that Satan is using (the educational system) in order to cover this earth with the viewpoint of the kingdom of man. Therefore, it is a terrible thing for a Christian family to send its children to a secular school system, knowing that that school system is under the domination of Satan in its world view and its sense of values. This is comparable to the Jews, who were under God's tremendous blessing in the land of Palestine; taking their children; and, letting them get on a bus and cross the border in order to attend school over in the pagan lands that surrounded them like Philistia. That would have been absolutely unthinkable. Yet, that's exactly what Christian parent after Christian parent does today with his child.

The full establishment of the Kingdom of God, of course, is going to be in the millennium. That's when the world is going to have its grand opportunity to be completely reeducated to the divine viewpoint world view, whatever their training and education has been up to that time.

Romans 4:13, that we have been studying, takes up the promise of the Abrahamic covenant to show its grace basis – that Abraham received this promise as a gift. This promise included Abraham's personal salvation, and that's Paul's point. Therefore, Abraham's salvation was received as a gift. It was received by faith. His salvation was part of a package deal. The covenant came on a grace basis by a simple gift that he received by faith. His salvation came the same way.

So, Abraham is saved, Paul is saying, apart from his works. Of course, there is no circumcision involved. All this took place before circumcision was instituted. Certainly the Mosaic Law is not involved. All this was 400 years plus before the Mosaic Law came on the scene.

So, what Paul is doing is that he is using the Abrahamic Covenant as another proof that salvation is by faith alone. He sets up the antithesis between law and promise – that these two things simply are mutually exclusive. If Abraham got the promise by Law, then a person is saved by Law. But if he got the promise by faith, then a person is saved by faith. Whichever way he got the promise is the way he was also saved. His salvation was part of the promise.

In Galatians 3:18, Paul sets up this antithesis when he says, "For if the inheritance (speaking of Abraham becoming an heir of the world – possessor of the earth) be of the Law, it is no more promise. But God gave it to Abraham by promise." Paul says, "If it came by Law, then it could not have been a promise. A promise means a gift. But if it's a promise, then it can't be by any works that Abraham performed.

So, that's the line of reasoning that Paul has here in verse 13-15, and why he takes up this subject of the promise. Abraham was saved by faith apart from his works, with no circumcision and no Mosaic Law involved. And the Jews were very confused about this. That's why he's dealing with this. The Jews have come to the point where they were using circumcision as a means to salvation. They were using the Mosaic Law as a means of salvation. If you kept the rules, and you kept the rituals, that was the medium of justification. The Jews actually did believe this. That's how they functioned. They will depending on this. This is the same thing that you have today in churches who depend on water baptism, the Lord's Supper, or any number of other secondary rituals that they incorporate into the element of salvation. These Jews were actually trusting in their physical relationship to Abraham alone to save them.

So, in Matthew 3:9, they point out to Jesus that they have Abraham as their father. The point was, "If we have Abraham is our father, then we're OK with God." And everything that Jesus said to them was consequently just dismissed. They didn't care what He was saying to them about their sin; about their attitude; and, about the fact that they were trusting in their performance rather than trusting in God's performance to save them.

So, the Jews argued that the Christian principle of justification by faith alone contradicted the Old Testament teaching. Verse 13 on adds to what a Paul has been showing – that salvation by grace was the Old Testament way of being saved. And verse 13 is another proof that Paul presents from Old Testament history to which the Jews themselves were so fond of appealing. It's another evidence here that justification is by faith alone, and that it's not a new way of salvation that Paul has cooked up. It is further proof that Abraham is our spiritual father, and he is the pattern for salvation of Jews and gentiles, which is by faith alone.

So, let's take up verse 13. We've already looked at the first part: "For the promise that he should be the heir of the world (the inheritor of the earth) was not to Abraham." The promise of Genesis 12:1-3 is really being explained here in Romans 4:13. And the promise of Genesis is explained as Abraham becoming the heir (the possessor) of the world, meaning the millennial earth.

**Abraham**

This was to a man called Abraham. The word "Abraham" looks like this: "Abraam" in the Greek, and it has the definite article "the" with it. It is *the* Abraham in the Greek, meaning the specific one who is the father of the Jewish people. It is this particular Abraham that Paul is speaking of. This promise was not to Abraham or to what is called here "his seed." The word "seed" in Greek looks like this: "sperma." "Sperma" means "posterity;" "offspring;" or, "descendants."

**Abraham's Seeds**

Actually, Abraham had three seeds. Let's look at those. First of all, we see in Galatians 3:16 that Jesus Christ is called the seed of Abraham. Paul writes, "Now to Abraham and his seed the promises were made. He said not 'and to seeds,' as of many, but as of one: 'and to your seed, which is Christ.'"

Galatians 3:16 is actually referring back here to Genesis 22:18: "And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice." Genesis 22:18 is referring to the same thing that Galatians 3:16 is speaking of – the seed of Abraham, in terms of the Lord Jesus Christ. It was in Jesus Christ that all the nations of the earth are to be blessed. You remember that we have previously looked where, in another place in Galatians, Paul explained the blessing that was to come upon the nations of the earth through the Abrahamic promise as referring to salvation, which was to be provided through a Savior, which was to come through the line of the Jewish people.

So, Abraham's seed blesses the world as a Savior. That is Jesus Christ. This promise to Abraham is indeed to Jesus Christ, obviously, because it is Christ who is going to be the ruler of the world when the Jews become the leading nation of the world, and they inherit (they in effect take over) the direction of the whole human race on the face of the earth.

Psalm 2:8 therefore says, "Ask of Me, and I shall give you nations (the gentiles) for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." This is speaking specifically here, in Psalm 2, to the Messiah Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Going to the other end of the Bible, in Revelation 11:15, we have again this concept of Jesus Christ as Abraham's seed described here: "And the seventh angel sounded. And there were great voices in heaven saying, 'The kingdom of this world is become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. And He shall remain forever and ever.'" There, Revelation is speaking of the same thing that Psalm 2 spoke of – of Jesus Christ becoming the ruler of the earth.

**Abraham's Spiritual Seed**

So, obviously, when Abraham's seed is referred to, we must, first of all, begin with Christ. He is in view here as Abraham's seed. But that's not all, because Abraham also had, secondly, a spiritual seed, and the spiritual seed is referred to in Genesis 15:5, where we read, "And He brought him forth abroad and said (that is, he took him outside his tent and said), 'Look up at the sky. Now look toward heaven, and count the stars, if you be able to number them.' And He said unto him, 'So shall your seed be.'"

So, here we have another seed (a spiritual seed) that God is speaking of here. What does that refer to? Well, that refers to born-again Jews and gentiles of all dispensations. Going back to Galatians 3:29: "And if you be Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." There is a very clear declaration that if you belong to Jesus Christ, you're part of the seed of Abraham according to the promise given in Genesis 12. Well, obviously you and I, as gentiles, are not part of that physical seed that Abraham was so concerned about. But we are part of a different kind of seed, and that is the spiritual seed.

So, this refers to Jews and gentiles. In other words, when God said, "Abraham, look up at the stars; that's how your seed is going to be," He was referring to Jews and gentiles both as a heavenly people; that is, a spiritual people. And Abraham was going to have that kind of a posterity spiritually.

Now, that seed is obviously involved in ruling the world also, because if there's anything that's in our future, it is certainly that we are going to be administrators in the millennial earth, ruling this world with Jesus Christ.

**Racial Jews**

There's a third seed, and that, of course, is the physical seed of Abraham. That was, as we've indicated, a very great problem for Abraham. In Genesis 13:16, we can read about that: "For all the land which you see – to you I will give it, and to your seed forever." God, in speaking to Abraham, was referring here to the land that went from the Tigris Euphrates Rivers all the way down to the Nile River – a vast area of land which, incidentally, the Jew has never to this day possessed. I want you to realize that. What God promised Abraham, in the way of a possession of land, from the Euphrates on the north to the Nile on the south; and, from the Mediterranean all the way out to the Arabian Desert (a vast territory) – the Jew has never to this day possessed that land. And the day is coming when the physical seed of Abraham will spread from the Euphrates to the Nile, throughout this whole territory that God promised.

Also in Genesis 17:6, we may add to this: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I'll make nations of you, and kings shall come out of you." This is obviously referring to the physical seed of Abraham.

So, this refers here to racial Jews who are descended from Abraham through Isaac and Jacob. Remember that, to be a Jew today, you must not just be a descendant of Abraham. You have to be a descendant of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, because the Arabs are descendants of Abraham, but they do not qualify for this blessing. So today, there are Jews who are physical descendants of Abraham. Some of these are also his spiritual seed. Most of them are simply his physical seed.

In Romans 4:13 (getting back to our passage), this word "seed" refers to these first two categories. When he says that this promise is "to Abraham and to his seed," it is in reference to Jesus Christ, and to the spiritual seed (Jews and gentiles) who trust in Christ as Abraham did for personal salvation. Jesus himself will possess the world as its ruler. The believers (Jews and gentiles) will possess the earth as subjects of Jesus Christ, and as His administrators (His co-rulers). So, all who believe the gospel are of Abraham's seed.

This is referred to even a little later here in Romans 4:16, under the words "all of the seed:" "Therefore, it is of faith, that it might be by grace to the end. The promise might be sure to all the seed." "All the seed" refers to this spiritual posterity of Abraham.

So, the promise for Abraham to be possessor of the world, and its ruler, was not to Abraham or to his spiritual seed, and Jesus Christ, through the law." The word "through" is the Greek word "dia," and the meaning is "by means of." And it’s by means of law, which is "nomos." There is no definite article. It is not "*the*" law in the Greek. When you don't have "*the*" law, then it is emphasizing in the Greek language the quality of the thing as such, rather than a specific law. The point here is he's not talking about the Mosaic Law as such.

**The Law Demands Obedience**

Now, the Mosaic Law, of course, is a classic example of commandments, which God has given people to guide them for right living. But he is speaking about a more general category here than just the Mosaic Law. So, he leaves off the definite article. He doesn't call it "*the* law:" just "law;" that is, commandments which demand obedience – commandments from God which demand obedience.

Such obedience to a series of commandments is always an act of human works. The Mosaic Law was such a series of commandments. There were 613 of them. And it was a works way of life. But the promise made to Abraham was not contingent upon keeping any rules. So, the promise to Abraham was not a works program. So, any system of keeping commandments, such as the Mosaic Law and others, was not the means for securing the blessings of the promise made to Abraham, which included his salvation.

**The Purpose of the Mosaic Law**

You can read about that again in Galatians 3:17-22. That Galatians passage makes it very clear that the salvation that came to Abraham, as the result of the promise that God made to him, did not come to him as the result of some works that Abraham performed. Certainly, it could not have come through the Mosaic Law, because that can 430 years after the promise. And when the Mosaic Law did arrive, it did not abrogate the promise to Abraham. The promise just continued on uninterrupted. The Mosaic Law did not in any way affect that. It just gave the Jews some very specific rules for their living. Its purpose was to secure the health of the people, so it gave them certain dietary rules. It was to secure their happiness, so it gave them certain guidelines for human relationships and civil matters. And it was designed to promote their holiness – the relationship with God, so it gave them guidelines for that. But this was all for Jews who are already saved. The Mosaic Law was not for the purpose of bringing the person to salvation. But once you were a born-again Jew, then God said, here are some rules to guide you for your personal health, happiness, and holiness.

Now, the regulations that we have for Christians, under our grace lifestyle, have the same purpose. And there are many regulations – there are many rules that God gives for Christians. The purpose of these, again, is our health; our happiness; and, our holiness.

The point to remember that he is making here is that this which came to Abraham and his seed was not through a works system. It was not through a commandment-keeping system. That's what he means by the word "law." That is because it was a promise. If a thing is a promise, it implies that it's a gift. If a person promises to do something for you, it is because he chooses to do that. That's inherent in a promise. If a person says, "I promise to do this for you," it is because this person has chosen to do something for you. And it's a grace bestowed in the nature of the case.

**Promise**

Now, a promise rests, of course, in the trustworthiness of the one who has made the promise. Your expectation is based upon the faithfulness of the person who makes the promise. Faith is the basis of getting a promise – not pay.

**Law**

Now, law commands. And when you violate the law (he's going to show in the moment), the result is that you bestir the wrath of God. So, punishment comes on the basis of what you deserve, not on the basis of grace. If God gives you a rule, and then you break that rule, you automatically bestir the wrath of God, and you deliver upon yourself the discipline and judgment of God because of the rule you broke. Up to the time that you didn't have the rule, you didn't have that wrath upon you either, because you were not breaking a deliberate rule. You were a sinner, but your sin was not being compounded by the fact that you knew that you were breaking a rule such that God has said, "Don't do this," or "Do this," and you violate it. When you transgress a specific rule of God that you know, then you compound your sin, and the wrath of God is multiplied many times upon you in judgment.

That's why Jesus said to those Pharisees, "It would have been better for you fellas had you not heard Me and learned the things that I have told you, because now that you know these things, your sin is all the greater." And that's what he meant. It's the same principle that Paul is talking about here. If you are going to listen to instruction in the Word of God, and then you are going to go negative toward it, terrible things are going to happen in your soul. That's all it amounts to. If you're going to learn the Word of God; you're going to learn divine principles; and, you're going to learn doctrinal principles, and then you reject those principles and you harden yourself against them (and that's the word the Scripture uses – it says that the hardness will develop upon the facets of your soul), then terrible things will happen within your soul, and then terrible things will come into your life. That's as inevitable as the fact that night must follow day.

So, if you're going to be negative to the Word of God, it would be much wiser for you to attend, for example, a church where you're not going to hear doctrine explained, and where you're not going to sit in a church service where the actual original Word of God is laid out to you so that you cannot argue with the preacher, but you must argue with God Himself. That's even worse. At least if you are sitting in a church where they never referred to the original language, you can always say, "Well, I just don't know. That's how the preacher says it. That's his opinion. I think I can have a different viewpoint," and you might have some excuse. But if you sit where the language of the Holy Spirit is laid out before you, you have no excuse whatsoever. To reject that is to really ask for the worst kind of judgment in your life, and you'll get it. Just sit around and wait. It's coming.

The promise to Abraham and to his seed was not on this kind of a basis. A promise is a gift. Otherwise, it's not a promise. It's not contingent on human conduct. It was grace all the way with Abraham. And the promise always implies grace giving as a gift, as the law implies works-earning as a reward. The promise was by faith of Abraham.

So, it says, "For this promise to Abraham or to his descendants (and Jesus Christ) that he should be possessor of the world is not through a works system, but." And the word "but" is the Greek word "alla," introducing here a contrast to show how the promise was secured. It was through ("dia"). It was by means of righteousness." This is a word we've had before: "dikaiosune." "Dikaiosune" means a quality of right conduct. Again, there is no "the" in the Greek. It is not "*the* righteousness." It's just "a righteousness" – stressing quality. And here it is the quality of absolute righteousness which Paul has been dealing with: doing right; absolutely; without failure; by divine standards. However, it is a righteousness that has its root in faith ("pistis"), which means "trust." And it's to be understood here as "from faith." This is a righteousness from faith. It is a righteousness which has its roots in faith.

Abraham was justified with absolute righteousness as the result of his faith in God's promise to him. Abraham never was told that he and his seed would realize the promise by keeping commandments, but they were told that they would realize those promises by believing God.

So verse 13 says, "The promise of the Kingdom of God to Abraham, which included his personal salvation, was definitely not by means of any human good works, but by means of his faith in God's Word." The opposite of "not through law" is "through faith." That's Paul's point. Paul is showing the folly of trusting in rules of religion for salvation.

Today, you and I as believers are often outcasts in the world. But in the future, you are going to be in charge of the whole world. You're outcasts because you function on a faith basis. You reject the world's kingdom of man human viewpoint. But in the future, 1 Corinthians 6:2 tells you that you are going to be rulers of this world.

So, Abraham's faith in God's promise was demonstrated by his faithfulness to God when it was seemingly impossible for this to be fulfilled. Why? Because Abraham had just blown out 99 candles on his cake. He was 99 years old, and he still had no son with Sarah. And if he didn't have a son with Sarah, the promise could not be fulfilled.

Now, here is a man who was sexually incapacitated. Years and years and years had gone by since he left Ur. It was something like 25 years, and still he had no son with Sarah. Now how in the world were all these promises going to be fulfilled. Did he believe it? You betcha he believed it. He said, "This is going to be fulfilled. How? I don't know. But it's going to be fulfilled." Sarah wasn't so sure. As a matter of fact, when the angel of the Lord (the pre-incarnate Christ) and two other angelic beings in the form of men came to Abraham and said, "This is it: the baby's on the way," Sarah was listening in on their conversation, and she burst out laughing, because she was 90 years old, and she was going to have a baby." And it just struck her as very humorous. Her expectations were apparently not so high. But Abraham never had any doubt: "God is going to do this some way."

God, in order to stress this, and even to make the thing more pointed, said, "From now on, I don't want you to go around signing your checks as Abram. From now on, I want you to sign yourself as Abraham. Your name is now Abraham." And "Abraham," you remember, meant "father of a multitude." Genesis 17:5 gives you the record of that change.

This was downright embarrassing. Here's this 100-year-old man going around with the name "father of a multitude." He is going around in a culture that appreciated male sons very, very much. The pagans, therefore, worshiped the fertility gods. They really worship the fertility gods. And they expressed great gratitude to the fertility gods when they had male children. And here, they who worshiped the fertility gods, were being prospered with sons, but Abraham, who was supposedly the worshiper of the one and only true God in all the universe, and whose name meant "father of a multitude, had no sons. And remember that names were important in that culture. When you took a name like this, people always analyzed what your name meant, because this characterized you. That's how names were given.

You know how the Indians used to give names like Chief Running Deer; Fleet Foot; Chief Sitting Bull; and, Big Mouth. Whatever it was characterized the person. But here in this culture, they would do the same thing. And to call yourself "father of a multitude," and not even have a kid to fulfill that, really must have made Abraham the brunt of a lot of jokes, and a lot of snide remarks among his contemporaries. He who claimed a special relationship to a true God had no son, while the worshipers of the fertility gods had sons galore.

However, the confident human viewpoint of the heathen was to be destroyed in time by the divine viewpoint faith of Abraham with the birth of Isaac and the result of the Jewish people as we know them today as a great nation.

So, this promise to Abraham was not through a works system, but was to him through a righteousness system which comes from faith. That's how he had this promise fulfilled. Let's look at verse 14: "For if they, who of the law be heirs, faith is made void. The cancellation of faith by works is in verses 14-15. Verse 14 says that a works system voids faith. It neutralizes faith: "For" is the word "gar," and it introduces a further explanation of why Abraham could not have been justified by works.

"For if:" Here's one of those "ifs" that we have in the Greek Bible: "eia." This is a first-class condition "if." You'll have to think back to remember what a first class condition "if" is. That's an "if" that assumes a thing to be real, or it is real: "If, and it is." In this case, it assumes a thing to be true for the sake of argument. The first class condition is assuming a case of reality. Here it assumes, for the sake of debate, that the promise to Abraham was secured by some works that Abraham performed.

So, he says, "Let's suppose: if (for the sake of argument), they who are of the law." The word "of: is "ek." This means those who are out from law ("nomos"), and again there is no "the." So again, this is talking about the quality of a works system – they do are from some kind of a works system, like, let's say, the Mosaic Law system. Law here is in the sense of commandments to be obeyed in order to secure divine favor. The word is in contrast to the word "faith," the opposite to law: mutually exclusive ideas. Those who are of the law are offering human good works.

"Suppose that these had become the heirs." That Greek word is "kleronomos." "Kleronomos" refers to Abraham's seed that we spoke of in verse 13. Suppose that these had become the inheritors of the world. What would have happened? Well, it would have done something, first of all, to faith ("pistis"). And this has the definite article "the." It is "*the* faith" in Greek, meaning Abraham's faith: "For if they who are of a works system be the inheritors of the earth, the faith of Abraham is made void." Faith is viewed as securing benefits of this promise: "Is made void" is the word "kenoo." "Kenoo" means "to make up no effect" or "to empty." This is the word that we studied back in Philippians 2 where we have the doctrine called "kenosis," the emptying of Jesus Christ, where He came to this earth in human form; set aside all the outward expression of His deity; and, functioned as a man. He did not set aside His deity. He simply emptied Himself of the evidence visible glory. So, we have the same word (this "kenoo" idea of emptying or to make of no effect).

What it says here is that faith cannot make one an heir of God if human works does it, because faith and works are mutually exclusive. It's in the perfect tense. Faith was made ineffective in the past, and continues ineffective to our day. It is passive. Salvation by works does this to the idea of salvation by faith. It voids it. It is indicative – a statement of fact.

The reason it's made void is that works is doing, and faith is not doing. And you can't mix the two. Faith is not doing; and, works is doing. So, his point is that if Abraham got this by doing something, then he was not saved by faith. A law always centers on man's doing something: his conduct; his actions; or, his behavior. But faith doesn't concern itself with a person's doing. It is only with the authority that he believes.

So, the moment you bring law into the picture, Paul says, you've eliminated anything coming to you as a gift, in the nature of the case. So, anybody who thinks that he is saved by faith in Jesus Christ apart from good works would in fact be lost. Wouldn't that be terrible? And that's what Paul says. Anybody who thinks he's saved just by believing in Christ as Savior has, in effect, been lost. And someday you're going to wake up in hell. You think you're going to heaven, but you're not – if you're not saved by faith, and if it's works that'll get you there.

Furthermore, this promise ("epaggelia") refers to the Abrahamic Covenant. It has the word "the" in the Greek: "*the* promise" – the specific one referred to here in this context: "This promise is made of no effect." Here's a word you want to remember: "katargeo." This is a favorite word with Paul. He uses it many times. "Katargeo" means "to make inoperative;" "to abolish;" or, "to invalidate."

Let me just point out a few of the ways this word is used. In Galatians 3:17, it says that: "The Mosaic Law cannot invalidate the Abrahamic promise."

Galatians 5:4 says that: "Human works renders the death of Jesus Christ inoperative in salvation.

Romans 3:31 says that: "Faith does not invalidate the moral principles of the Mosaic Law."

Romans 7:2 says that: "Death invalidates a wife's previous marriage."

1 Corinthians 13:8 says that: "The gifts of prophecy and of knowledge are abolished by the completion of the New Testament Scripture."

1 Corinthians to 6 says that: "The wisdom of unsaved rulers is made inoperative by God."

1 Corinthians 15:26 says that: "The last enemy of mankind to be abolished is going to be death."

2 Thessalonians 2:8 says that: "The man of sin is made inoperative by the return of Jesus Christ at His Second Coming."

So, what this word is saying is that if the promise to Abraham and his seed was made on the condition that they faithfully obeyed the commandments of God, such as the Mosaic Law, then the promise is invalidated by the simple fact that nobody can keep the commandments completely. And that's his point. If it was a matter of Abraham obeying God, which we know many times he did not, he'd have never had that promise. He'd have never inherited salvation either. The promise simply could not have been realized. Paul has previously shown us that everybody's a sinner, and nobody obeys God's commandments. The perfect tense of this word indicates that the promise was invalidated in the past whenever a works requirement was brought in. Then it continues being invalidated. It never works again. It's passive. This was done to promise anytime you bring in works. It's indicative mood – a statement of fact.

So, the works system produces the wrath of God. The point is that faith is eliminated if it's by works, and the promise itself, which could only be realized by faith. All of that is eliminated.

So then he ties it up in verse 15 and says why this is so: "Because the law works wrath. For where no law is, there is no transgression." Here's the introduction in the word "because." This is the Greek word "gar" which is introducing the explanation of what the works system actually does for people. Many Christians today are trying to relate themselves to God on their achievements. Most don't realize that the very works such as water baptism or the Lord's Supper, that they place such confidence in, are the very things that automatically brings down the wrath of God upon them. So, all you legalists pay attention to verse 15. This is for you.

What he says is: "Because the law system." This time it is "*the* law." It has the definite article "*the* law," but it is referring not to the Mosaic Law as such here, but to what has been referred to in this context – the whole idea of a salvation-by-works system. This is the specific system which was in view here. If this kind of a system is operational, and if this kind of a system works, what it works, he says is "the wrath of God." And the word "wrath" is this Greek word "orge." "Orge" is a settled mental attitude of indignation. What it refers to is the anger of God when His holiness is violated by breaking of one of His commandments. It's not just a passing flare up. It's a settled wrath that God has against the sinner who has broken His commandments, and has not paid for that failure.

So, trying to secure salvation by a works system only secures the wrath of God. Why? Because nobody can keep the commandments of God. Whatever they are, we break them sooner or later. And wrath, therefore, he's trying to point out, is the opposite of blessing. God didn't promise Abraham wrath. He promised him blessing. So, obviously he could not have received blessing if it depended on what Abraham did.

The reason that this is such a problem is because breaking a commandment is the breaking of a "parabasis." A "parabasis" means "a going aside" or "overstepping." It may be illustrated by a path that you're supposed to walk through a garden. You don't walk on the path. You step across it, and you walk outside of the pathway. Now you have been guilty of a "parabasis." And that is a description for a certain kind of sin – a breaking of a specific commandment. That is the idea here – that when you know the commandment of God, and then you violate it, which you will, because your old sin nature cannot keep from violating the commandments of God, then you have automatically brought upon yourself the wrath of God.

So, the Mosaic Law didn't help people. Once they got the Mosaic Law, they brought the wrath of God down upon them even more than before, because now they were guilty of a specific breaking of a law.

If there were no speed limits on the highways, and you were driving at 110 miles an hour down the highway, that would be a simple thing to do because of various reasons. But you couldn't say that it was a transgression. Because there was no law that told you how fast to go, it was not a transgression. But once they put up the speed limit, and you go over that speed limit, now your sin has been compounded by the fact that you have the transgression. You're not only doing a wrong thing, but you're doing a deliberately wrong thing. That is what happens when you put up commandments.

So, Paul is saying, "You people are really, really weird by admiring the fact that you've got commandments to keep, and thinking that this is going to make it between you and God, because the commandments you have are the very things that are going to see that you go to hell. If you didn't have the commandments, at least your sin would not be as great. But now you have definite standards. You have the will of God definitely spelled out. Therefore, your situation is all the worse.

So, the point here is that the promise to Abraham could never have been fulfilled if it depended upon Abraham securing the favor of God by his commandment-keeping. The promise has to go with faith to be fulfilled. The work of law-keeping automatically invalidates the Abrahamic promise. It draws down divine wrath – not divine favor.

So, in effect, God the Father is saying, "Look to My Son, Jesus Christ." Well, what do you and I do? We say, "Look instead to my goodness and to my works." And that's the problem. God the Father says, "Look to My Son, Jesus Christ, for the problems of your sin." But we (who want a works system) turn around and say, "Look to my goodness. Look to my achievement."

So, all of Abraham's dealings, this passage is teaching us, with God were by faith, and that's how ours have to be. Paul's point is that anyone holding a biblical view of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross for sin, but then adding one human work, has undone the whole thing. Have you got that? Anybody who holds a biblical view of Christ and His death on the cross for our sins, and then you throw in a work, you've cast yourself into hell. That's strong medicine. But I can tell you, as a general principle, on the basis of the Scripture, that if you throw in a human work, no matter how orthodox; no matter how right; no matter how true; and, no matter how accurate your view of Christ and His work on the cross is, Paul says that you will bring down the wrath of God, because you are trusting in a human work, and a human work brings nothing but God's wrath.

Christianity Today is filled with church members who are orthodox about Jesus Christ, but who, in some way, are trusting in some work of their own. Such people are lost people, and they are the ones that Matthew 7:21-23 describe. God forbid that any of us should so foolishly deal with God as to find ourselves in that group.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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