



[Genesis 17:1-8](#) gives us the promise in no uncertain terms, as an absolutely settled issue with God, needing only time for its fulfillment. Only after this (in vv. 9-14) do we see God giving Abraham the sign of circumcision.

“For we, by the Spirit, on the principle of faith, await the hope of righteousness” [Galatians 5:5](#).

The *"hope of righteousness"*

1. Does not mean that one hopes to get righteousness.
2. It rather comprises everything that comes into the view of a man who has righteousness and has the Spirit.
3. Such a one has an outlook on the whole scene of divine glory.

Coates

¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

- The promise "*to Abraham, or to his seed, that he should be heir of the world*" was not by law but by righteousness of faith.
- That was the principle on which the inheritance could be possessed.
- Gen. 17:4 "*As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, And you will be the father of a multitude of nations.*
- He was to inherit the world that he and his seed might hold all that God gave to them for His glory and pleasure.

*¹³ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the **righteousness of faith**.*

By the phrase "**righteousness of faith**"

- We are **not** to understand that the faith exercised by the sinner is righteous in quality.
- The promise was made to Abraham **not** upon the basis of any attempted obedience to the law on his part,
- But because of that faith which he exercised, which faith was of such a nature as to cause God to put righteousness down to his account.

Wuest

Why was the promise to Abraham and his descendants not made through a law system?

- How difficult it is to banish the thought of human “merit” in God’s great saints!
- Faith is the ground of God’s blessing.
- Abraham was a blessed man, but he became heir of the world on another principle entirely, **simple faith**.

The bestowal of that which is promised presupposes the continuation of the graciousness of Him who made the promise; and this graciousness becomes equally impossible, as does the believing confidence—if law must be fulfilled to secure it!”

*Hebrews 7:18-19 (NASB) ¹⁸ For, on the one hand, there is a setting aside of a former commandment **because of its weakness and uselessness** ¹⁹ (for the Law made nothing perfect), and on the other hand there is a bringing in of a better hope, through which we draw near to God.*

14 For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

How does law nullify the promises to Abraham?

Faith and law are contradictory principles, Paul shows absolutely diverse means of blessing. Reflect:

1. What it cost God to give Christ.
2. What it cost Christ to put away sin, —our sin, at the cross.
3. What honor God has given Him *“because of the suffering of death.”*
4. What future plans God has arranged through Christ’s having made peace by the blood of His cross, to reconcile **“things upon the earth and things in the heavens, unto Himself.”**

Now, by that uneasiness of conscience on account of which we keep doing “dead works,” we neglect all God is, has done, and desires for us; and substitute our own uncertain, fearful, trifling notions of **“works that shall please God.”** We would make God come to our terms, instead of gladly accepting His great salvation and resting in the finished work of Christ. **Newell**

- Law, Paul explains, given to sinners, simply brings forth God’s wrath, —for sinners in the nature of the case will transgress.
- Law gives **no life** and has **no power** over the flesh. So Paul calls law a **“*ministration of death and condemnation*” (II Cor. 3:7, 9).**

¹⁵ for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

The application is as clear as it is meaningful, and this positively as well as negatively.

- The thing law generally, and in particular, the law of God given by Moses, provokes by its very excellence the hostile self-will of man, and so detects his enmity and works out wrath in result.
- On the other hand, where there is no law, there is no transgression.
- It is not a question of sin here, but of violating positive prescription, which latter of course could not be till the lawgiver uttered the authorizations.
- Then as law existed, it could be transgressed. But it was not yet proclaimed in the time of Abraham, who had that wholly different thing — [the promise](#).

- A sinner, forbidden under penalty, to sin, will only incur the penalty.
- Therefore, to impose law upon a sinner is to bring him under wrath.
- He becomes a transgressor (not merely a sinner: he was that before the law was given: transgression is disobedience to a given law).
- Sin was certainly in the world before, and for sin the Gentiles as well as Jews are under judgment to God;
- But the law put the Jew *demonstratively* under wrath by making him a transgressor.

*¹⁶ For this reason it is **by faith**, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,*

*"Of faith" is *ek pisteōs*, ablative of source, "out of faith as a source."*

That is, the terms laid down by God as to how the inheritance, eternal life, is dispensed by God and appropriated by the sinner, are that the man exercise faith rather than perform works. The channel through which eternal life is given is that of faith, and in that sense the channel becomes the source of the transaction whereby God gives eternal life. And salvation is channeled to the sinner thus in order that it can be by grace.

Wuest

Conclusion

1. That as law would have defeated the promise of God and brought wrath on man, instead of the inheritance.
2. As faith is opposed to works, so is grace to law; while the grace of God who gave the promise makes the only and correspondingly the large door of faith to open for Gentiles no less than Jews.
3. Had law been the principle, Israel who boasted of possessing the law, though blind to their breaches of it and to their own enhanced exposure to wrath, could alone have made an effort, however vainly.
4. But grace goes out to the Gentile no less than to the Jew who could not limit Abraham's fatherhood of "many nations" to his own people.

Not one of the true seed of Abraham is to be excluded, as would be the case if the promise were given on the principle of law; but the principle of faith is the only ground upon which all the seed could be blessed, while at the same time this principle shuts up all to the grace of God as the only spring of blessing.

This is the only way the promise would be absolutely certain to either Jew or Gentile believers. this before Abraham had yet fathered Isaac
Abraham was not weak in faith: he simply accepted the Word of God as true and unbreakable, apart altogether from the consideration of circumstances.

Faith in the living God always involves the repudiation of confidence in flesh.

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Darby

If then this justification was by faith to the exclusion of law, did it set aside the law?

In no way. The law brought the conviction of sin, nay, brought the curse, from which he who was under it had to be delivered; and the justification of such a one, the deliverance of such a one from the curse by such a means as Christ's bearing it, gave the highest possible sanction to the law.

That Christ should bear its curse established the authority of law as nothing else did.

The paying a debt recognizes the debt, and the obligation which made it such, though (and in that in which) it puts an end to it. There is more than this in the law, it is true.

I only use the image to show that putting an end to anything may fully prove the obligation of it.

It was not, if accomplished, God's righteousness, but man's.

But redemption, and grace, and Christ's blood, effectual through faith, recognized the authority of law, and gave its sanction to it, by meeting in another way the sins and condemnation incurred under it.

¹⁷ (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

Here another point of great value is noticed.

- The God whom Abraham believed, quickens the dead and calls things that have no being as though they had.
- This was rendered evident not only by the fact that Sarah bore no child to Abraham, but by their great age when the promise was given.
- They were as good as dead, and a child of theirs had no existence as yet. God whom Abraham believed quickens the dead and calls things that have no being as though they had.

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But what of all this to God?

- Long before the time God spoke, Abraham against hope believed in hope.
- What a pattern of faith!
- On the human side all was hopeless.
- On God's part there was simply His word.
- But Abraham believed, hoped, and was not ashamed.
- God could not fail to make good what He said: "***So shall be thy seed.***"

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Now God's power comes in - not dealing with man according to any good or capacity that is in him, **but God that raises the dead**, and according to this power calls things that are not as though they were.

He can make them to be as He calls them. This applies to Abraham's case, to the Gentiles, and, as to the power in its nature, Christ's resurrection.

This applies to all God has said in His Word to us.

