

So, which option would *you* choose?

* Option A: I will pay you \$1,000 a day for life, beginning next year, *if* you never do anything that *violates* the Mosaic Law, and *if* do everything that the Law *requires* you to do.

* Option B: I promise to give you \$1,000 a day for life, beginning next year.

Which option would *you* choose? Let's assume for the sake of argument that I actually have the resources to provide you with what is being offered. That being said, there are some important differences between the two options. First, * Option A is a *payment*, while Option B is a *promise*. Second, Option A is a *payment* based on *your work*, while Option B is a *promise* based on *my word*. Option A is *achieved by your effort*, while Option B is *activated by your faith*.

Is the choice getting any easier? If you're still on the fence about which option to choose, take into account this fact: you are incapable of actually keeping the Law.

Have you decided? Do you want to see if you made the right choice?

[Turn to Romans 4]

As Paul's been stressing in Romans, our greatest problem is our *unrighteousness*, and our greatest need is *righteousness*. And he's been sharing the good news of how sinful people like us can gain righteous standing before God – how we can be justified in His sight. And contrary to what many might think, our justification is not based upon what we do.

That comes as a surprise to many folks, including many Jews reading Paul's letter. Many were depending, not only their spiritual privileges to give them standing with God (privileges such as their genetic link to Abraham, the sign of circumcision, and their having received God's Law), but they were counting on doing of the works required by the Law.

The wisdom of that day suggested that it was Abraham's faithfulness to the Law (even though it would not be given until 4 centuries later) that was the basis of God's promises being given to him. But as Paul pointed out, Abraham was justified by God, not on the basis of works he'd done, but on the basis of his faith. And Paul continues to substantiate and drive home the implications of that truth.

Read v.13

* 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.**

Abraham's **righteousness** came to him **not through the Law**, but **through...faith**. And Paul points out that Abraham's faith in God included his faith in God's **promise** to him and **his descendants**. And the essence of this promise was that Abraham and those like him would be **heirs of the world**. That's how Paul succinctly captures the multifaceted promise to Abraham. Although God doesn't use the phrase "**heir of the world**" in speaking of His promise to Abraham, it aptly capture God's promise which includes Abraham being made a great nation, Abraham being given innumerable descendants, and through him, blessing would come to all nations and families of the earth. Those are aspects of God's promise that are expressed in Genesis 12, 13, 15, 17 and 22. And Abraham and his many descendants will not reap the benefit of that promise though their obedience to the Law, **but through the righteousness of faith**.

Paul then shows why the promise can't be granted through the Law:

Read v.14

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

Paul uses a conditional sentence to make his point. "**If**" (he assumes it's true for the sake of argument)...**if** God's promise to Abraham and his descendants are realized by those who are **of the Law** – by those seeking to be justified by God through the works for the Law – then they will be disappointed because the blessing comes through **the promise**, *not* through **the Law**. And if you are seeking the promises of God through the Law, then **faith** is made **void/empty** [κεκένωται perf pass indic κενόω, *emptied, invalid*] **and the gracious promise of God is nullified** [κατήργηται perf pass indic καταργέω, *abolished, made ineffective, worthless*].

Then Paul shows why the promise can't come through the Law:

Read v.15

* ¹⁵ **for the Law brings about wrath, but [δὲ, *but, then, that is*] where there is no law, there**

also is no violation [παράβασις, *transgression, violation, overstepping*].

Paul doesn't mean there's no sin without the Law (sin existed before the Mosaic Law...just ask Adam and Eve), but he's making the point that the Law, because it points out our transgressions or **violations** of the Law, brings about God's **wrath**, not the fulfillment of God's promise. Since we are incapable of keeping the Law, it is not the means of being justified before God and experiencing the fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. As Paul noted earlier:

Read 3:28

* ²⁸ **For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.**

The Law is like a scale. I can forget that I'm a little on the pudgy side as I go through life, but when get on the scale, I'm clearly confronted by the fact that I'm more than a little pudgy. The scale can't vindicate or justify me, but it sure does condemn me. As Paul said earlier:

Read 3:20

* ²⁰ **because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin.**

The Law is not designed to save us, but to reveal our need.

If we don't get the inheritance through the Law, how do we get it – and why?

Read v.16

* ¹⁶ **For this reason *it is* by faith [and then he gives the reason], 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,**

The reason *it* [the promised inheritance that goes to those who are justified before God]...the reason *it is* by faith (and not by means of the Law) is because it's only available **in accordance with grace**, since we're incapable of keeping the Law. Offering it by **grace** is the only way it can be **guaranteed to all the descendants** of Abraham, since no one is capable of earning it! And **the descendants** of Abraham who inherit it are his *spiritual descendants* (in the sense of sharing his **faith** in God, whether they happen to be * Jews (**those who are of the Law** who have such faith), or * Gentiles who are *not* of the Law

but **who are of the faith of Abraham**. And **faith** carries with it no sense of merit, since it's simply a response to the gracious promise of God. And Abraham is the spiritual **father of us all** – of **all** who share his faith in God, whether Jew or Gentile.

Then Paul quotes Genesis 17:5 from the LXX to support his claim that God's promise is not just to Jews but Gentiles as well:

Read v.17a

* ¹⁷ **(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS [not just the Jewish nation] HAVE I MADE YOU")**

The rest of v.17 is a little awkward, spawning various interpretations:

Read v.17b

* ¹⁷ **... in the presence of [κατέναντι, prep, *opposite, in the presence of, before*] Him whom he believed, *even God*, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.**

This phrase might link back to the reference to either **Abraham** or his **descendants** in the previous verse, affirming his or their status before God. In any case, Paul's intention is to call attention to the quality of faith on the part of Abraham that led to God's promise to be realized through him. Abraham believed that * **God** is the God **who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.**

In light of what Paul's about to say in the verses that follow, his description of God as He **who gives life to the dead** likely refers to God's ability to give life to Abraham's body, dead in the sense of being unable to produce children (in v,19 we'll see Paul refer to Abraham's body as being "as good as dead" due to his advanced age).

He also describes God as one who **calls into being that which does not exist**. I think in the context, Paul likely has in mind God's ability to fulfill His promise to Abraham of making him a great nation which would be a blessing to all other nations, when as yet he had not a single child through Sarah. He called into existence a promised nation that did not yet exist. Abraham had the kind of faith that came to believe that God could do even that. He believed that whatever God promised, He would deliver.

Paul continues:

Read v.18

* ¹⁸ **In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."**

Paul quotes Genesis 15:5 in the LXX, which speak of his descendants which would come *not* through Eliezer (his son through Hagar), but through a son to be born of Sarah. Even though humanly speaking it seemed impossible, Paul says that **in hope against hope, he believed**. When human hope fades, divine hope shines. Abraham believed in God's promises because he believed God to be trustworthy, dependable, and faithful.

Read v.19

* ¹⁹ **Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;**

Abraham was a century old and Sarah 90 years old, making them both **dead** in the procreative sense. Yet faced with those obstacles, Abraham did not become **weak in faith**.

Read v.20

* ²⁰ **yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.**

Thought Abraham's faith was not perfect, it was still trending in the right direction. It led to him to **give glory to God** – which stands in contrast to humanity's failure as a whole, as pointed out by Paul back in Romans 1:

Read Romans 1:21a

* ²¹ **For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks...**

But Abraham honored God and gave glory to God through his faith. The decisive factor was not so much *what it was that God promised*, but that it was *God* who promised it. That's the kind of faith Abraham had – faith in the person of God, therefore resulting in faith in the promises of God. That's why Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 once again:

Read v.22

* ²² **Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.**

Abraham's faith in God and His promise was the basis of his being credited with righteousness before God. And now Paul wants to apply that

same principle of justification by faith to his current audience *then*– and to us *today* – because our justification before God is also based on faith.

Read vs.23,24

* ²³ **Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, ²⁴ but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

The declaration of Abraham's faith being **credited to him** as righteousness, was not just for his sake, **but for our sake also**. It's to show us that if we follow in Abraham's footsteps (or perhaps we should say, *faith-steps*), we too **will be credited** with righteousness and justified before God through our faith in God and His promise. We too will experience forgiveness and right standing before God. And the fact that it is received by faith, not by our works, substantiates Paul's emphasis that it's all by God's grace.

Read 3:24

* ²⁴ **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;**

Read 4:16a

¹⁶ **For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace...**

And in the next chapter, we see that divine **grace** will be highlighted even more.

Like Abraham, our faith must be placed in God. But God has given us more revelation than he gave to Abraham. God has revealed to us through His Son and the New Testament, that our faith is to be exercised, not just in the God who promises, but the God who makes those promises possible through the person and work of Jesus. So our faith is not just in God the Father and His promise, but in Jesus.

Notice how Paul characterizes the faith of believers today:

Read vs.24b

* ²⁴ **...as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

Earlier he spoke Abraham's faith in God in these terms:

Read v.17b

* ¹⁷ **... whom he believed...gives life to the dead...**

Abraham exercised a similar kind of "resurrection" faith in the sense that we noted

earlier, that God was able to bring procreative life from the procreative deadness of both his body and the womb of Sarah. And that's not even to mention the "resurrection" that the writer of Hebrews points out was evident in his willingness to offer up Isaac, the son of promise, as a sacrifice to the Lord:

Read Hebrews 11:17-19

* ¹⁷ **By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸ it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.**

That's an incredible kind of faith – that's the kind of faith Abraham had. And Christians today, like Abraham then, have a "resurrection" kind of faith as well – because we are, as Paul put it...

Read vs.24b

* ²⁴ **...those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,**

And Paul ends this chapter by pointing out what God accomplished for us through God's Son, **Jesus our Lord:**

Read v.25

* ²⁵ **He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

Jesus was delivered over because of our transgressions. Jesus was delivered over by God the Father because of our transgressions. He was delivered over by the Father.

Remember what Paul wrote earlier?

Read 3:24,25a

* ²⁴ **being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; ²⁵ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith.**

We are justified before God as a gift by God's grace through the price Jesus paid to set us from sin and its penalty of death. That's redemption. The price paid by Jesus was the giving up of His life, spoken of in terms of the shedding of His blood. The result was that His death was a means of propitiation – a means of *satisfying* of the wrath of God – resulting the removal of our guilt.

God, the offended party, acted to satisfy His own wrath so that we can be forgiven and justified in His sight, not through works, but **through faith.**

But that's not all God accomplished through Jesus:

Read v.25

* ²⁵ **He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.**

His resurrection was significant because it was proof of God's acceptance of the sacrifice of Jesus, and it's effectiveness in satisfying God's wrath in our palace. As Thomas Schreiner expresses it (p.244)" *"...his resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured."* And it also assures us Jesus is alive and well, not only actively working in this world, but actively engaged in working *in* and *through* the lives of His followers (as Paul will talk about later on his letter).

So, which option would *you* choose?

* Option A: I will give you salvation – righteous standing before God – *if* you never do anything that *violates* the Mosaic Law, and *if* you do everything that the Law *requires* you to do.

* Option B: I will give you salvation – righteous standing before God.

Which option would *you* choose? There are some important differences between the two options. First, * Option A is really a *payment*, while Option B is a *promise*. Second, Option A is a *payment* based on *your work, on what you do*, while Option B is a *promise* based on *my word*. Option A is *achieved by your effort*, while Option B is *activated by your faith, by your confidence in me and my word*.

If you're still on the fence about which option to choose, take into account this fact: * you are incapable of keeping the Law – you are incapable of doing anything to earn what if being offered. It's only available by faith through grace.

Warren W. Wiersbe (p.526) tells this story about Dr. Harry Ironside:

Dr. Harry Ironside, for eighteen years pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago, told of visiting a Sunday school class while on vacation. The teacher asked, "How were people saved in Old Testament times?"

After a pause, one man replied, "By keeping the law." "That's right," said the teacher.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted: “My Bible says that by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

The teacher was a bit embarrassed, so he said, “Well, does somebody else have an idea?” Another student replied, “They were saved by bringing sacrifices to God.” “Yes, that’s right!” the teacher said, and tried to go on with the lesson.

But Dr. Ironside interrupted, “My Bible says that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sin.”

By this time the unprepared teacher was sure the visitor knew more about the Bible than he did, so he said, “Well you tell us how people were saved in the Old Testament!”

And Dr. Ironside explained that they were saved by faith – the same way people are saved today!

We are saved by God’s grace through faith. And that’s the only way we can receive it. And that’s what Paul’s been driving home. And that’s why salvation is so incredible. That’s why it’s so glorifying to God. That’s why it rules out any boasting on our part. That’s why it changes our lives. That’s why it should inspire in us a passion for God and His Son that a mere sense of duty or obligation cannot.

Lest you think faith does not impact you thinking and your living, consider this scrapbook of some of the highlights of Abraham’s life compiled by the author of Hebrews:

Read Hebrews 11:8-19

* ⁸ By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. ⁹ By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign *land*, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; ¹⁰ for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. ¹¹ By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive, even beyond the proper time of life, since she considered Him faithful who had promised. ¹² Therefore there was born even of one man, and him as good as dead at that, *as many descendants AS THE STARS OF HEAVEN IN NUMBER, AND INNUMERABLE AS THE SAND WHICH IS*

BY THE SEASHORE. ¹³ All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. ¹⁵ And indeed if they had been thinking of that *country* from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better *country*, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them. ¹⁷ By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; ¹⁸ *it was he* to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED." ¹⁹ He considered that God is able to raise *people* even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type.